The Year of Europe: Crucial Elections Across Europe in 2017

I n 2017, highly important elections will be held in various states across Europe. Parliamentary elections will take place in the Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic, while in France, both presidential and parliamentary elections will be held. These elections carry special importance also because they are to take place in Europe's "key states" in a period when both various states individually and the European Union as a whole is faced with several challenge. Owing to this, we have named the project "The Year of Europe", which signals our intention of synthetizing the utmost challenges and their possible solutions in the interest of creating a "stronger Europe".

In the framework of the project, the project team analyzed various challenges at European and national level that will provide major subjects of debate in member states' elections (economic policy, social relations, irregular migration, debate on the future of the EU).

Within analysis work, a major consideration would be our intention to shed light upon "images of Europe" rivalling each other on the continent and display the possibilities of synthetizing differing interests and perspectives at member-state and regional level along the most important crisis phenomena.

Our aim is to present the possibilities of emerging stronger from crises affecting Europe and create a "stronger Europe" within the realigning world.

In this respect, the project is forward-looking in that it would venture beyond the descriptive presentation of current processes and call attention to promoting joint action and future considerations.

This publication is the first in this year, focusing the post-election analysis of the Dutch and French election results.
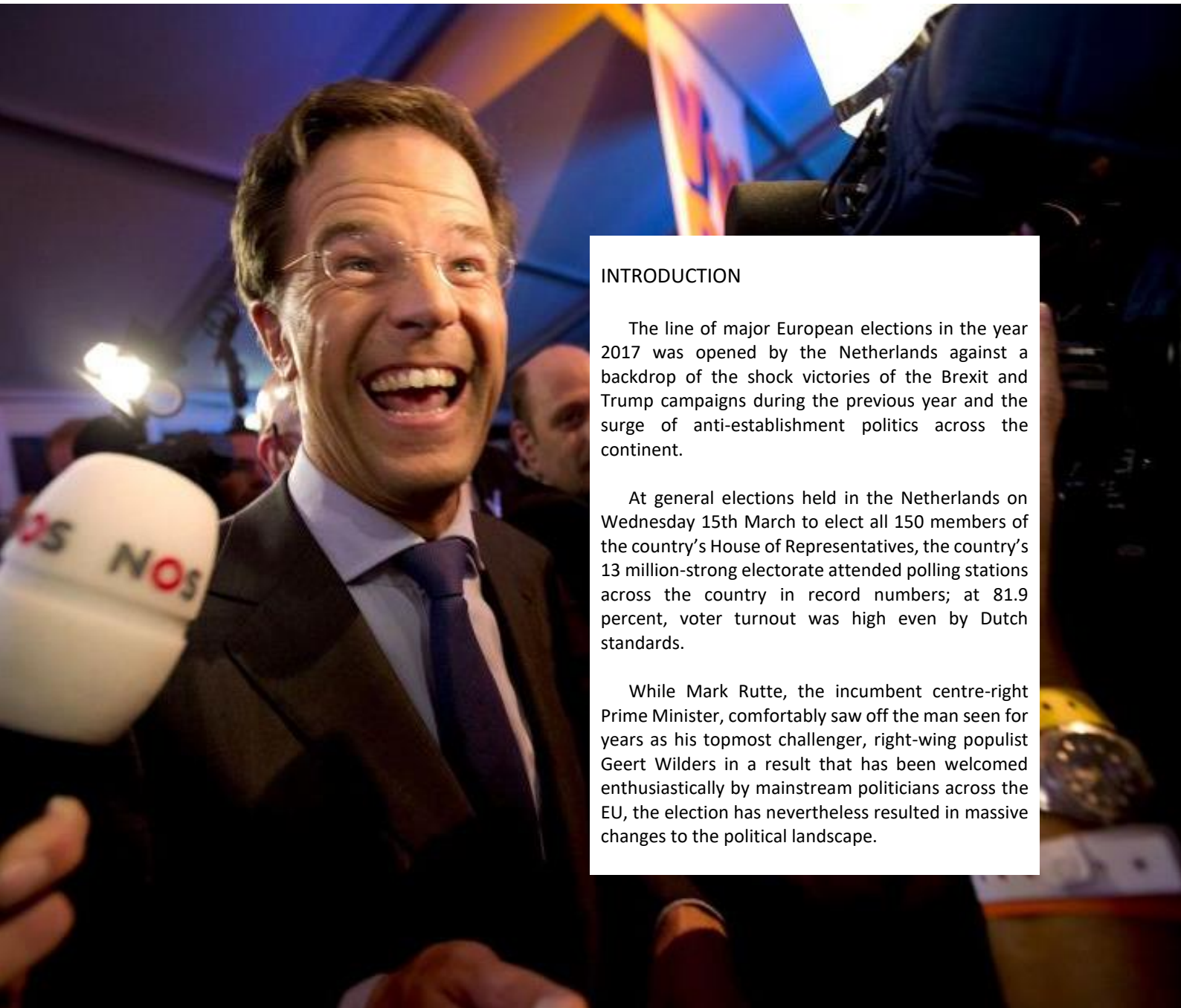
Content

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General election in the Netherlands (post-election analysis)

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INTRODUCTION

The line of major European elections in the year 2017 was opened by the Netherlands against a backdrop of the shock victories of the Brexit and Trump campaigns during the previous year and the surge of anti-establishment politics across the continent.

At general elections held in the Netherlands on Wednesday 15th March to elect all 150 members of the country's House of Representatives, the country's 13 million-strong electorate attended polling stations across the country in record numbers; at 81.9 percent, voter turnout was high even by Dutch standards.

While Mark Rutte, the incumbent centre-right Prime Minister, comfortably saw off the man seen for years as his topmost challenger, right-wing populist Geert Wilders in a result that has been welcomed enthusiastically by mainstream politicians across the EU, the election has nevertheless resulted in massive changes to the political landscape.

Results of the Dutch election

The centre-right, liberal-conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), headed by Mr. Rutte, came first with 21 percent of the vote, well ahead of its runner-up contender, the Eurosceptic and anti-immigration Freedom Party (PVV) led by Geert Wilders.

Several other parties not participating in the second Rutte cabinet made gains largely at the cost of the junior coalition partner Labour Party (PvdA), which finished in seventh place losing 29 out of its previous 38 lawmakers. Despite having to surrender eight parliamentary seats, Mr. Rutte's party remains the largest group in the highly fragmented Parliament in which no less than thirteen parties are now represented. As traditional catch-all parties continue to lose support across Europe, voters are increasingly divided along community identity instead of class divisions; instead of Mr. Wilders's party, this has in fact mostly benefited the multiculturalist, pro-European GreenLeft (which now has 14 representatives having gained 10 seats), the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the progressive Democrats 66 (D66), which have won six and seven extra seats respectively and each ended up with 19 seats in Parliament.

Other groups gaining parliamentary representation out of the record 28 parties participating in elections included the left-wing populist Socialist Party (SP, 14 mandates), the Christian Union (CU, 6 mandates), the Party for the Animals (PvdD, 5 mandates), the pensioners' interest party 50PLUS (4 mandates), the Turkish minority Denk and the orthodox Protestant Reformed Political Party (SGP) (3 mandates each), and finally, the conservative, Eurosceptic Forum for Democracy (FVD, 2 mandates).
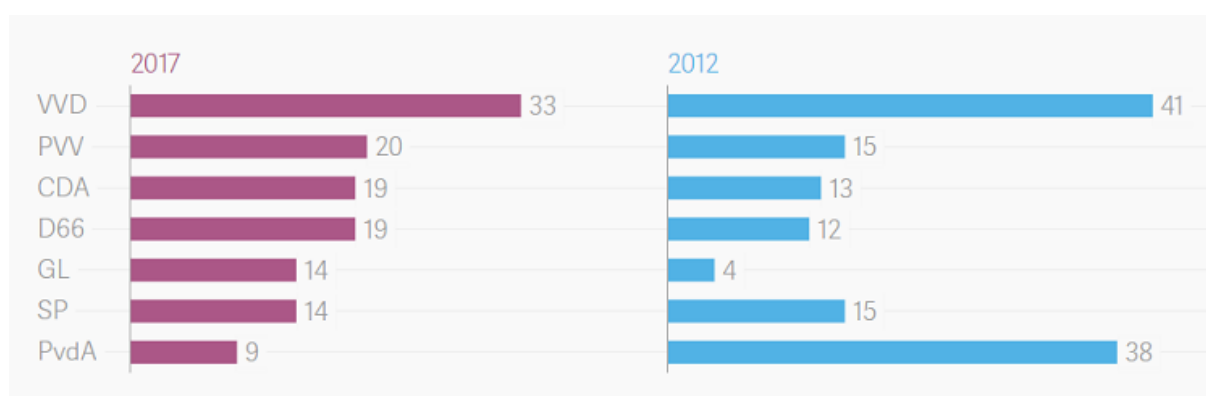
Seats won in Dutch elections by party, 2017 and 2012 (excluding new parties; source: theatlas.com).

The role of the Second Chamber and the election of MPs

While role of the indirectly elected First Chamber or Senate in the political process is largely symbolic, the Second Chamber (Tweede Kamer) is the definitive theatre of political action and decision-making in the country, where decisions decisive for the country's political future are made.

Members of the lower house of Parliament are elected by proportionate representation. Unlike most European democracies, the Netherlands have neither electoral districts nor an election threshold in the classical sense of the term. Instead, a party enters the House of Representatives by receiving enough votes to gain at least a single seat in Parliament. During elections, each voter selects a person, meaning that lawmakers are, in theory, elected on personal basis. In practice, the vote goes to a list handed in by a party wishing to participate at elec-

-tions prior to voting. Because most party candidates are unfamiliar to the public, in most cases people vote for the first person on the list of their party of choice using a red pencil (electronic voting has been banned since 2007). In all cases, the candidate at the top of the list is the leader of the party, who in general receives the vast majority of all votes cast for the party. The total number of votes cast for all candidates of one list determines the number of seats the given party receives.

Despite being organised by party, MPs in the Second Chamber sit on personal title and may therefore decide to leave their party and continue as independents. Notably, this rule enabled the rise of

Geert Wilders, originally an MP for the centre-right VVD party, who became independent in 2004 and returned to Parliament with a group in 2006.

This was the first election called due to the completion of the previous cabinet's term since 2002. Elections in 2012 had resulted in the establishment of a ruling coalition between Prime Minister Mark Rutte's conservative-liberal People's Party of Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the centre-left Labour Party (PvdA). Because the two parties failed to secure a majority in the Senate, the second Rutte cabinet relied on support from the liberal Democrats 66 (D66), as well as the minor Christian Union (CU) and the Reformed Political Party (SGP).

Right-wing populist leader Geert Wilders and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte (source: The Seattle Times).

The significance of the election and events influencing the outcome

The vote had been widely billed as a litmus test for the rise of anti-elitist populism in Europe following a sequence of elections last year that reshaped the political landscape last year, most notably the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, Donald Trump's election as President of the United States, presidential elections in Austria and the Italian constitutional referendum, resulting in the resignation of the centre-left Renzi cabinet.

Even more significantly, the election was seen as a reflection of the strength of anti-establishment populism ahead of elections in France and Germany, the two political and economic powerhouses of the post-Brexit European Union, both scheduled to take place in 2017. In particular, the chief question ahead of elections was the composition of the coalition tasked with running the country for the next four years and whether the Party

for Freedom, the nationalist and anti-immigration party headed by Geert Wilders, could manage to force its way into coalition talks despite all other major parties declining to rely on Mr. Wilders's support to form a future government. Therefore, the election attracted far greater attention from the global media than in the case of most Dutch parliamentary elections in previous decades.

The results were supposedly also heavily influenced by the diplomatic incident between the Netherlands and Turkey, which took place within a week prior to Dutch elections. The incident between the two countries was triggered by the campaign ahead of Turkey's April constitutional referendum on laying the foundations of a presidential system in the country. This saw Turkish politicians attempting to hold political rallies on Dutch territory to campaign for a 'yes' vote among the country's Turkish community. Because such campaign activity is incompatible with Dutch law, the Netherlands barred the Turkish foreign minister's aircraft from landing and expelled another Turkish minister from the country. Subsequently, Prime Minister Rutte strongly condemned President Erdoğan for his remarks calling the Dutch "fascists" and demanded an apology from

the Turkish leadership. The Prime Minister's reaction to the incident was well received among the country's electorate, with a national poll finding that 86 percent of the population supported the government's actions and 91 percent blamed Turkey for diplomatic tensions following the incident. This doubtless increased support for the incumbent Prime Minister and his party in the days prior to the election, while 40 percent of the electorate will still undecided on their party of choice.

Another factor that could have contributed to Wilders's poorer-than-expected performance was the PVV leader's relative absence from the campaign trail following an alleged security breach three weeks ahead of elections and his refusal to participate in the first two of the four televised election debates. In a "poll of polls" two weeks before the parliamentary elections, the party had already slipped to second place, narrowly behind Rutte's VVD. In early April, the country's intelligence service AIVD claimed in an annual report that Russia attempted to influence the election by spreading fake news, although the organization's head conceded that Moscow did not succeed in "substantially influencing" the election process.

PVV: Stable presence, influential messages

The PVV's campaign messages were centred upon the notion of "de-Islamization"" and calling for control over national borders to reduce the influx of immigrants and asylum-seekers, particularly from Muslim-majority countries.

The two Eurosceptic parties – the PVV and the newly established Forum for Democracy (FVD) have a total of 22 seats, less than the 24 they won in 2010 or the 26 seats gained by another populist politician, Pim Fortuyn, in 2002. These fairly stable numbers reflect steady support within Dutch society for populist, anti-Islam politics. While the Freedom Party gained impetus after the election of US President Donald Trump and even assumed the lead in public opinion polls between September 2016 and February 2017 – at this time, surveys suggested that the party was supported by one-fifths or one quarter of the Dutch electorate –, its genuine chances of becoming a partner in a governing coalition were very slim to non-existent from the outset. While the party managed to increase its number of mandates by a quarter, from 15 to 20, Geert Wilders's party failed

to make a breakthrough despite rising concerns concerning migration and the Brexit effect. This is not least a result of the structural limits of the PVV, which is officially registered as an association. The group also lacks substantial presence in local governments and a living party structure.

Much significant than these superficial developments is that the PVV shaped the agenda of the entire campaign on its own; in addition to conservative opponents, even centre-right parties voiced far more resolute messages on issues such as immigration policies. A good example for this are the whole-page newspaper advertisement published by Prime Minister Rutte prior to the election, in which he warned that "something is wrong with our country" and the "silent majority" will no longer tolerate the presence of migrants who reject social integration and abuse the welfare system and liberties. During the campaign, policy issues were confined to the background by questions of national and even religious identity, which has definitely been a remarkable development in a country known for its liberal traditions.

The demise of the centre-left and the emergence of identity politics

Perhaps the most conspicuous consequence of the election was the almost complete annihilation of the centre-left Labour Party (PvdA), the junior coalition member of the second Rutte cabinet and a pillar of the post-Second World War Dutch political system. Popular support for the PvdA fell into decline in the years after the 2012, with polls suggesting that its voter base had plummeted to as low as 5 percent one year prior to elections.

Mark Rutte hails rejection of "wrong sort of populism" in victory over Wilders (source: ITV.com)

The party's collapse, which in many ways echoes the demise of the French Socialist Party and other traditional centre-left parties across the government, is a combined result of a variety of factors ranging from the second Rutte cabinet's liberal policy programme and the resulting greater economic insecurity (in particular, the expansion of the number of those on short-term or flexible contracts) through the party's identity crisis (historically popular among various minorities, these have begun finding their own separate voices in the increasingly fragmented political arena) to the increasing appeal of more radical left-wing ideas and anti-politics-as- usual public figures as opposed to senior Labour politicians closely associated with Rutte's pro-market policies.

This massive loss of support has resulted in the party's voters flocking partly to other left-wing and liberal parties (support for both GroenLinks and D66 is centred in larger cities with a university) and partly (especially in the former Labour heartlands of large cities and depopulating industrial areas in the north of the country) to Wilders's PVV. Overall, support for

the party declined from 24.8 percent of the vote and 38 MPs to just 5.7 percent and 9 MPs in less than five years. Tellingly, the Turkish-Dutch DENK party, founded two years ago by two former PvdA MPs, outperformed Labour in two of the country's major cities, Amsterdam and the Hague.

A possible interpretation is that middle-class Dutch voters experiencing the benefits of the coalition government's record, such as the country's recovery from the 2009 financial crisis, low unemployment and a solid state budget, actually opted for political stability by continuing to back the VVD or swinging towards the CDA in support of a centre-right (VVD-CDA-dominated) coalition rather than VVD-PvdA coalition. To the contrary, austerity has resulted in the decline of public sector jobs and reduced funding for social care services, both of which heavily affected the traditional left-wing electorate.
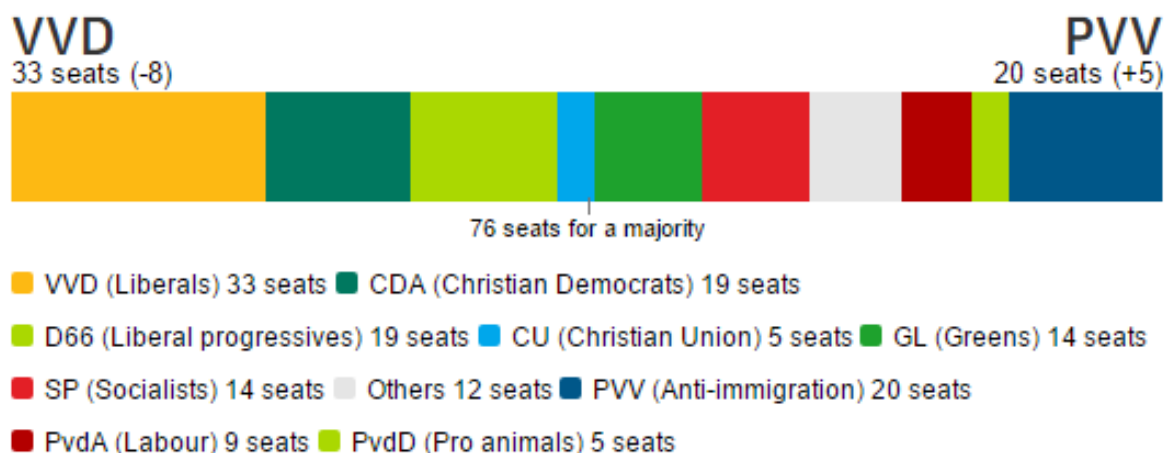
Results of 2017 parliamentary elections in the Netherlands (parliamentary seats; source: guardian.co.uk).

Coalition-building: an increasingly difficult task

Since World War II, Dutch governments have taken an average of 72 days to be formed; the record is nearly seven months in 1977. Because in a parliament with 13 parties now represented in the lower house, traditional big tent parties no longer exist, meaning that coalition-building with four or more participating parties takes an increasingly long period. As the VVD would not be content with a fragile minority government, and at least four parties are now required form a majority government, the new cabinet is unlikely to be in place until July at the earliest.

Talks between VVD and three other parties have ended without success. The Green Left refused to break a promise on immigration (source: dw.com).

Mr. Rutte's party is currently in talks with the CDA, D66 and the GreenLeft, the rising left-wing star fighting for the environment, greater income equality and what it calls a more humane refugee policy. This four-party coalition would guarantee the government a stable, 85-seat parliamentary majority.

However, the GreenLeft is in a difficult situation because both entering a coalition with right-wing parties and staying in opposition could result in the group losing its current momentum and quickly fading away into obscurity. If talks with the GreenLeft fail to result in a coalition with them included, negotiations are likely to begin with the minor Christian Union (CU) or even the Party for the Animals (PvdD), each commanding five seats. Their entry into the cabinet would provide the government with a tiny but much-needed majority. Talks with the left-wing populist Socialist Party (SP), which repeatedly stated
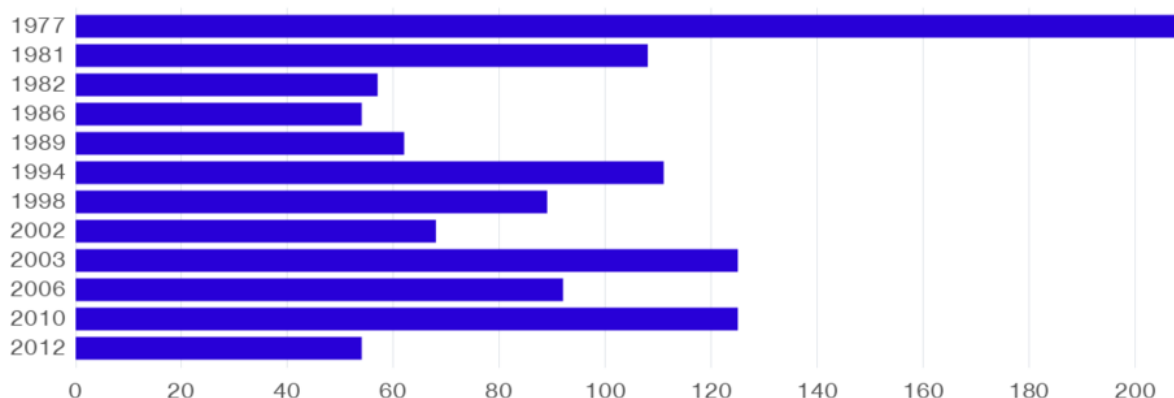
that it will not govern with the VVD during the campaign, also remain an unlikely possibility.

As all of the above parties have stated that they would not enter a coalition with the PVV, Mr. Wilders's party has no option but to watch from the sideline as more mainstream parties seek to form a government. This, however, does not mean that his voters will not be heard; if the VVD is seeking to avoid the fate of the PvdA, it must provide meaningful and swift responses to the concerns of Eurosceptic voters, a group that is likely to become more even more demanding and outspoken should the failings of the Brussels and domestic elites not be addressed.

Number of days to form a government after general elections since the post-WWII peak of 208 days in 1977 (source: bloomberg.com).

The rise of protest parties across Europe

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the migration crisis started, anti-elite protest parties across the political spectrum have gained in popularity in European countries.

This is particularly true for anti-immigration political forces that, according to opinion poll results from the past year, have either stabilized their positions or become even stronger in a number of countries including Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden.

If leftist protest parties are included, protest parties in EU member states have almost 60 million sympathizers, making up one fifth of European voters. Moreover, this figure is 6 million higher than it was in March 2015, prior to the migration crisis. In comparison, this is more than the total population of Slovakia.

Reasons for the rise of protest parties

There are two main reasons for the rise of protest parties. First, the financial crisis with its long-lasting effects had not even been resolved yet when the EU was already facing the migration crisis. Second, the views of traditional western elite parties, in power in most of Europe, have partly moved further away from societal expectations. This latter can be most clearly observed with regards to migration. Political leaders tended to approach the issue ideologically, while ordinary citizens often wanted a reduction in, or the ending of the migratory pressure.

The popularity of protest parties in Europe was given a boost by the global financial crisis starting in 2008, and the massive European migration crisis that became increasingly visible in late 2014 and early 2015. Political power relations were dramatically transformed due to the weakening of existential security, compounded by the corruption scandals of traditional elite parties, by the increasingly evident deficiencies in the cultural integration of immigrants who had arrived decades earlier, and by the increasingly obvious connection between immigration and terrorism. The relative importance of these factors varied by country.

In **Spain**, anti-establishment parties grew popular mostly due to the relations to austerity measures, government corruption, Catalonian separatism and the EU, while in the **Netherlands** it was mass immigration and a strong stance on issues related to national identity that led to the increase in the Party for Freedom's popularity. It is probably **France** where the combined effect of different factors is the most complex. In France, the economic, political, societal and cultural aspects of the crisis led to an increase in popularity of both right- and left-wing anti-establishment candidates.

Beyond opinion poll data, election results are also showing the rise of protest parties. The Finns Party in **Finland** and the Slovak National Party in **Slovakia** are now a part of the government; in France, the National Front candidate got into the second round of the presidential elections; and the Party for Freedom also did well at the elections in the Netherlands.

Brexit, a sign of anti-elite revolt. Supporters of leaving the EU celebrate at a party hosted by Leave.EU in central London (source: AP).

In addition, now even the **Polish** parliament has a protest party. The **German** state elections also showed an increase in popularity for the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in 2016, although AfD seems to have lost this momentum by 2017. Political relations in European countries have been by now clearly transformed by the economic-financial hardships most clearly seen in southern Europe and by the societal tension caused by the continent-wide migration crisis.

For European politics, the question of whether the traditional political elite is capable of changing is of key importance. If it is not, protest parties may become even stronger in the national elections of the coming years, which would jeopardise the positions of traditional political forces.

In order to avoid this threat, traditional political parties should, in a manner similar to that of the Hungarian government, conduct reality-based politics and use realpolitik when handling, for example, the migration crisis. Leaders in Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Germany and France have already changed their countries' immigration policies. Issues on the political agenda have changed significantly lately. These developments may slow down the momentum of anti-elite parties.

The diversity of anti-establishment and anti-elite parties

We define protest parties as anti-establishment, anti-elite parties that are clearly distinguishable from traditional parties that form the basis of political establishment in the given country (established after World War II in western Europe and after the fall of communism in central-eastern Europe).

The protest groups then have political demands, communication and appearance that differ significantly from those of the traditional, decades-old parties. Protest parties typically identify themselves not in opposition to a party or a group but to the whole political establishment. These parties typically either fully reject or heavily criticize in their rhetoric the political structure and traditional political institutions. Protest parties are thus characterized by an opposition to the existing political system and social agenda. This often goes hand in hand with a questioning of the legal system and a hope to get a kind of counter-culture into power. In some cases, this might further be accompanied by efforts to change state borders, by separatist goals (for example, this is the case with Italy's Northern League).

Protest parties include radical left-wing and right-wing parties as well as populist formations that are difficult to categorize by political ideology. Right-wing protest parties typically have anti-immigration and Eurosceptic attitudes, while left-wing protest parties typically include, in addition to some communist groups, newly formed radical leftist and anti-capitalist parties. The third group usually comprises groups organized around a single issue or few interconnected issues, satisfying narrow interests as well as joke parties.

There are significant differences between western, southern and central-eastern European protest parties. With the exception of Spain and Portugal, nearly all important member states have, often in their national parliaments, Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, right-wing populist or extreme right groups. Several countries, including Italy, Spain, Poland and Romania have hard-to-categorize anti-elite parties that are sometimes viewed as left-wing and sometimes as right-wing. Instead of ideological commitment, these movements target voters who are less susceptible to extremism but highly disillusioned by politics. In addition, also primarily in western and southern Europe, radical left-wing groups of different shades (New Left, green-left, left-wing populist, communist) are also present. Minor

The far-right Sweden Democrats are topping the polls (source: Anders Wiklund).

far-right parties, previously known for their anti-Semitic gestures, have also fundamentally changed their rhetoric following the mostly Muslim migratory pressure and the terror threat. Today these parties also try to take advantage of the general aversion to mass immigration.

In addition to the internal political processes, the European Union's deepening institutional and leadership crises have also contributed to the rise of protest parties and their reaching indirect or direct decision-making positions. The traditional European political elite party failed not only to tackle but even to identify and present in a voter-friendly manner the increasingly intensifying, EU-level economic and social crisis phenomena, including the unsustainability of the single currency in the current framework, and the demographic problems of the continent. The traditional left, with its roots in social-democracy in the west and in post-communism in the east, has lost touch with its former mass base all over Europe.

Instead of representing the retreating industrial proletariat, the traditional left has hoped to survive by fusing different minority groups' interests. However, its liberal economic policies have alienated the remnants of its former voter base. In parallel, the identity and view of society of parties with Christian democratic roots have, particularly in western Europe, weakened. In central-eastern Europe, the lack of historical continuity means that these parties are much less socially embedded to begin with. The traditional ideological divide between the left and right has faded, voters are less able to identify with the overly rational technocratic attitudes that have

come to dominate politics. The ensuing vacuum has been taken advantage of by movement-like formations, often with a vague ideological background and organized around divisive issues. This has led to a toppling of decades-old party power balances in Europe.

These parties and movements characteristically rely less on their presence in the parliament and government and more on thematizing public discourse by forming the agenda and utilizing the new communication channels.

The leftist coalition Unidos Podemos has ended the two party system tradition in Spain (source: Reuters).

Fundamental changes in public discourse and the rise of protest parties across Europe

Both the Dutch elections and the campaigns of the French presidential candidates as well as the starting German election campaigns have focused mainly on migration and multiculturalism, but anti-elite issues are gaining ground in other places, too. In addition to the standard, politically correct policymaking, anti-elite politics has been given space in these western-European countries, and these parties have been gaining in popularity.

At the same time, the growing importance of these anti-elite parties is already showing in the fact that political public discourse is no longer mostly thematized by traditional political elites, but these anti-elite groups are putting issues that people are truly engaged in, on the public agenda. Accordingly, the usual economic and social issues have been eclipsed by issues such as immigration, the difficulties of integrating migrants and questions of EU membership.

Of the 2016 elections with a significance for our region, it is worth looking at the Slovak parliamentary elections in March, the Spanish parliamentary elections in June, the Croatian parliamentary elections in September and the Romanian parliamentary elections in December. Additionally, the British referendum on leaving the EU and the Italian constitutional referendum leading to the fall of the centre-left government in December are also highly important for the continent. Of the elections listed, in Slovakia, Spain and Romania the campaigns were highly influenced by protest parties defining themselves in opposition to the whole political establishment. In the UK and in Italy, these forces had a decisive effect on the referendum results.
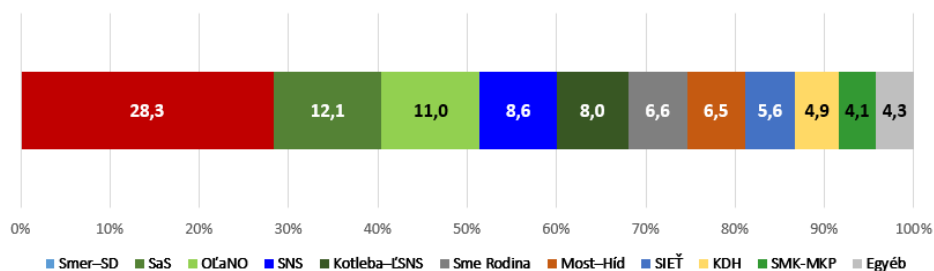
At the same time, these parties and movements rely less on their presence in the parliament and government and more on thematizing public discourse by forming the agenda and utilizing new communication channels. The parliamentary presence is often almost of secondary importance for these parties that often lack a real organizational background and nationwide coverage.

So, for instance, the populist right-wing and the populist left-wing parties of Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, respectively, both had a real chance of getting into the second round in the French presidential elections, have no or minimal representation in the French National Assembly and the Senate. This is unlikely to change despite the popularity of the candidates due to the peculiarities of the French electoral system. The hundred years-old, proportional election system has led to a similar situation in the Netherlands. Geert Wilders' Eurosceptic formation, which almost single-handedly thematized the campaign for the March elections and which brought the issues of immigration and national identity in the limelight does have some proportional representation in the Senate, in the House of Representatives and in the provincial governments. Yet it is formally an association with no membership or well-known politicians forming a leadership board. The formation is formally outside of the Dutch party system.

In **Slovakia**, where the party system is just as fragmented as in the Netherlands, the extreme right People's Party Our Slovakia (8.0 percent), and the right-wing populist We Are Family (6.6 percent) got stronger and were elected to the parliament.

This has had a significant effect on the election campaign, dominated by the migration crisis. At the same time, the extreme right-wing Slovak National Party also got into the parliament again and is now part of the governing coalition. Slovak political life has thus become multifaceted, and Prime Minister Robert Fico's immigration and social policies, among other things, have been indirectly significantly 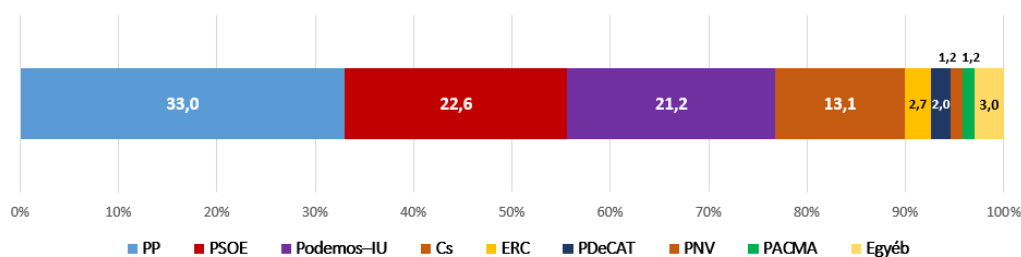influenced by anti-immigration, anti-Muslim parties that question the country's membership in western alliances. The results showed that not only discredited leftist parties, but traditional, conservative civic parties are also threatened by the rise of protest groups. Two Christian democratically-oriented former Slovak ruling parties, the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union and the Christian Democratic Movement failed to cross the parliamentary threshold.

| 28,3 | 12,1 | 11,0 | 8,6 | 8,0 | 6,6 | 6,5 | 5,6 | 4,9 | 4,1 | 4,3 |

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Smer–SD   ■ SaS   ■ OĽaNO   ■ SNS   ■ Kotleba–ĽSNS   ■ Sme Rodina   ■ Most–Híd   ■ SIEŤ   ■ KDH   ■ SMK–MKP   ■ Egyéb

Results of the Slovak parliamentary elections, 5 March 2016

In **Spain**, general elections in June were called because the elections in December 2015 led to the most fragmented Congress of Deputies, followed by a failure of coalition negotiations that went on for months. The elections brought a long-lasting end to the People's Party/Socialist Party bipartisan rule that had existed for the 40 years of Spanish democracy.

The radical leftist Unidos Podemos won 24.5 percent of the votes, and the centrist-liberal Ciudadanos got 13.9 percent. This means that the Spanish political spectrum has become divided four ways. At the same time, Unidos Podemos was unable to take the second strongest position from its rival left-centrist, mainstream social democrats.

| 33,0 | 22,6 | 21,2 | 13,1 | 2,7 | 2,0 | 1,2 | 1,2 | 3,0 |

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ PP   ■ PSOE   ■ Podemos–IU   ■ Cs   ■ ERC   ■ PDeCAT   ■ PNV   ■ PACMA   ■ Egyéb

Results of the Spanish parliamentary elections 26 June 2016

In **Romania**, legislative elections in December brought the rise of the Save Romania Union, which, having been formed only a few months earlier as an ideology-independent group organized around issues, became the third largest party. The group primarily relied on urban intellectuals and was founded in opposition to traditional parties, which keep breaking up, coming together again and showing up in different electoral alliances. The Save Romania Union mostly builds on the public's aversion to corruption and the dissatisfaction with the poor state of institutional systems and infrastructure. It got 8.92 percent of the votes at the elections.

At the same time, Romania continues to lack a well-supported extreme right-wing party; radical voices have been, more or less successfully, incorporated by traditional system parties. (The nationalist United Romania Party, founded in 2014, got 2.95 percent of the votes and failed to cross the parliamentary threshold.)

Finally, two referendum must be discussed: the **Brexit** referendum in June that shook up the whole European political elite, and the constitutional referendum in **Italy** in December. Both referendum – the unexpected victory of Leave supporters in Britain

and the much stronger than expected rejection of the Prime Minister's constitutional reform in Italy – led to the resignation of the respective governments. This clearly shows that, particularly in high majority voting systems or in systems that are based on individually won seats, protest parties and movements with minimal or no parliamentary representation can still strongly influence the political agenda. In Britain, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) was the only party that sent an unambiguous pro-leave message to voters during the campaign, while the ruling Tories and the Labour party were both divided. UKIP have online three single representatives in the House of Commons. In Italy, the referendum confirmed that the ruling centre-left party is most likely to be challenged at the 2018 elections by the Five Star Movement, a party that aims to unite right- and left-wing protest voters but that, exactly for this reason, is ideologically divided.

To sum up the conclusions that can be drawn from the 2016 elections in the four countries, it is clear that protest parties, that define themselves in opposition to the whole political establishment, registered significant gains. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico stayed in power, but his party, considerably weakened, was forced to enter a coalition. Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's party had to form a minority government, while in Romania, a new, outsider force appeared after a long time, in a rather closed party system. The Austrian presidential election, and the British and the Italian referendum provided a clear view, without the distorting effects of voting systems, of the general mood in the western member states of the EU: roughly half of their citizens continue to accept, or at least for a lack of a better alternative, tolerate the European elite's status quo, including on migration policies, while the other half of the citizens radically oppose it.

The Netherlands: growing anti-elite sentiments, increasing fragmentation

The Netherlands holds general elections every four years; the system is based on proportionate representation. The Dutch party system used to reflect Dutch history and gave a clear picture of the political disagreements that exist in modern industrial societies.

The traditional parliamentary parties were founded in the second half of the 19th century. After World War II, consociational democracy was created. An important feature of the Dutch party system after 1945 was the rapid growth in the number of parties. Traditional Dutch parties were based on divisions between Catholic, Protestant and secular social groups. The role of religion in policy formulation is shown by the fact that in Europe, the Netherlands has the highest number of parties aiming to represent Christian values in politics.

In the five decades following 1945, Dutch politics was characterized by diverse coalitions. After World War II, eight centre-right/leftist coalition governments were formed, with the participation of Catholic, Reformed Church and socialist parties. This can be partly explained by the loss of importance of 19th century party-forming conflicts, including religious differences, and by the consensus of creating a welfare state, entailing joint action from the parties.

The party structure changed in the 1970s. As a result of the rising living standards which followed the welfare reforms, and the secularization and urbanization, religious divisions lost their importance and the time had come for religious parties to change their profiles. The loss of importance of religion and the fragmented nature of the conservative side as opposed to the leftist Labour party caused a dual crisis, which finally brought about a renewal of the Dutch party system.

In the past 15 years, Dutch political culture has experienced several shocks. The appearance of the anti-Muslim Party for Freedom led by Geert Wilders has significantly altered the Dutch party system. Moreover, the Muslim appear to form a separate pillar in Dutch society. This situation is further complicated by the fact that while the religious divide is becoming less and less important in the majority society, Muslims seem to find their identity in their religion. This causes severe social conflicts.

Following the 2012 early elections, the governing coalition led by Mark Rutte has created a period of relative political stability after a decade (2002-2012) when not a single government was able to complete its full term. The Labour Party and the conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy ended

neck to neck at the 2012 elections. The two parties formed a coalition government and had absolute majority in the Dutch parliament. The Christian Democratic Appeal, which was previously a junior coalition partner to the People's Party, did not participate in the new governing coalition that came into power in 2012. The Party for Freedom, founded by Geert Wilders in 2006, supported, from the outside, the minority government led by Rutte in 2010-2012, but from 2012 it was in opposition.

The year 2015 brought a breakthrough for the Party for Freedom. The party successfully controlled Dutch political discourse during the migration crisis, and this led to a substantial increase in its popularity. While the campaign for the 2012 early elections was dominated by economic issues such as pension regulation that are typical in Europe, the 2017 campaign focused almost exclusively on issues the extreme right put on the agenda. The growing electoral discontent was successfully snapped up by the Party for Freedom. By late 2015, polls showed that the party would earn a fourth of the parliamentary seats. Then the migration crisis eased up, the traditional political parties also started responding to the new societal challenges, and the Party for Freedom's growth in popularity stalled.

The PVV campaign faced several challenges. For instance, he was charged of hate speech during the campaign and four months before the election he was found guilty by an Amsterdam court. Further, in February 2017 Wilders had to suspend his campaign for a while due to a scandal concerning his personal safety. A diplomatic conflict that erupted between Turkey and the Netherlands in the weeks leading up

to the elections also played into the hands of the ruling party and was used by prime minister Mark Rutte in his campaign.

The Party for Freedom lost its momentum that had been propelling it forward since late 2015, and did worse than expected at the elections on 15 March 2017. Yet its results were better than in 2012. This must be taken as a warning sign for the Dutch political elite, since in addition to the Party for Freedom, leftist anti-elite groups also became stronger. Although Mark Rutte's party won the elections, it lost a fifth of its seats, and its coalition partner, the social democrats lost three quarters of their seats. Before the elections, right- and left-wing anti-elite parties had held one fourth of the parliamentary seats. After the elections, they have almost 40 percent of seats.

In addition to the Party for Freedom that, led by Geert Wilders, won five extra seats, it was green leftists and other alternative left-wing and right-wing groups that profited from the loss of votes for the liberal and social democratic coalition. In light of the Dutch-Turkish conflict that grew intense in the campaign finish, it is interesting to note that the Dutch-Turkish Denk party also won three parliamentary seats. The Netherlands may face severe problems caused by Islam and by new kinds of political challenges; the increasingly rapid fragmentation of the party system may easily make the country impossible to govern. Although the strengthening of anti-elite groups led to a ruling coalition of right-wing liberals, social-democrats, left-wing liberals and liberal conservatives, this may be a short-term victory for Rutte. In the long run, the Party for Freedom may benefit from this process.
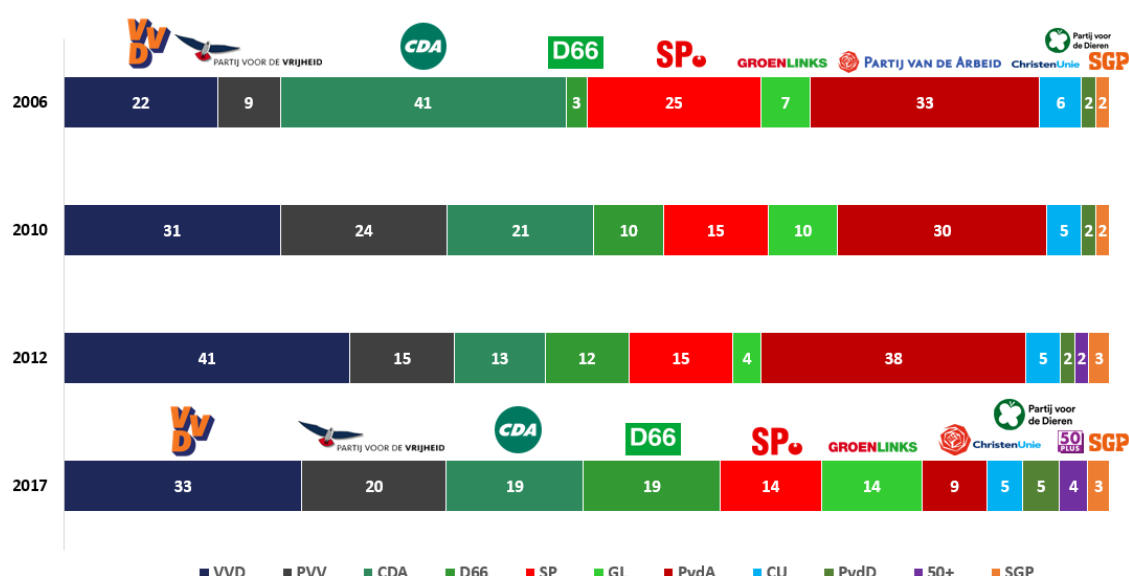
Election results in the Netherlands (number of seats)

National Front stronger than ever

In France, extreme right-wing parties comprise the post-1945 protest movements of the lower middle class, such as anti-tax parties. These include the National Front of the 1980s and 1990s, first characterized by poujadism, later by Jean-Marie Le Pen. The extreme right reappeared in the 1980s, and it gained in strength in the early 1990s, when the National Front won more than 15 percent of votes.

It is widely accepted that the reasons for the rise of the National Front include the growing aversion to immigration, to European integration and globalization, to high tax levels and the increasing state bureaucracy. Even economic growth did not universally help every citizen. Certain social groups faced the risk of unemployment right at the period of economic growth. While two thirds of society were becoming richer, one third moved to a relatively poorer position.

It is often racism that provides the ideological background for xenophobia, but the official ideology of the modern far right is closer to ethnopluralism: it claims that mixing cultures is harmful for all cultures. Anti-Semitism, once so important, has lost its significance and now only characterizes few extreme right parties. Worries about national sovereignty and culture are often coupled with anti-U.S. and anti-EU sentiments. The occasional support for third world autocracies, such as Le Pen's speaking up for Iraq, is primarily a means to protest the world order run by the United States.

The social composition of National Front's voter base is highly complex, but its biggest group was, already in the second half of the 1980s, the working class. The National Front has a smaller supporter base among workers than the French Communist party, but its blue-collar voter base is bigger than that of the Socialist Party. The majority of far right voters are only loosely connected to the party; this explains the instability of most of the extreme right parties' voter base. The typical far right voter has been disappointed by democratic institutions and is not likely to join any civic group. A further typical characteristic of this voter base is that it mostly consists of men and the education level is below average.

The National Front is ridding itself of anti-Semitism and racism; Marine Le Pen is drawing the party to the right from the far right, and is turning the radical-extremist National Front into an anti-globalist, sovereignist and populist party. In addition to the strategic construction of the party, the focus is on unemployment, the state of the economy, de-industrialization, and problems related to immigration and integration.

National Front's rise was clearly visible even before the refugee crisis, mostly fuelled by economic problems, as the French GDP has yet to bounce back from the financial crisis. Unemployment has not been reduced and the economy has not returned to stable positive growth. In tandem with the poor results, the popularity index of François Hollande has kept breaking negative records. Marine Le Pen has made a number of economic promises that were appealing in particular to poorer groups and the working class. For example, she would raise minimum wage by 200 euros; she would help small enterprises, she would impose duties on imports. The National Front has become a party for the working class with 50 percent popularity in this group.

French voters are preoccupied with the same issues as the Americans: growing criminality and urban violence. In France, these problems are often viewed as belonging to the „outskirts," because these shabby neighbourhoods with often large immigrant populations are located in old working class quarters at the edges of towns. These fears are connected to the success and the permanent presence, since 1983, of the radical right. The electoral significance of the National Front, an anti-immigrant, heavily nationalist party has been undermining the stable positions of right-wing parties closer to the centre, and the whole electoral camp is displaying anti-immigrant sentiments. Although the party has never come into power nationally, it has a strong and growing influence on forming the political agenda.

Voters are worried about the unemployment rate, which is twice as high as that in the U.S. Worries about unemployment in France are connected to fears of consequences of the European Monetary Union. Finally, voters are troubled by political corruption that seems to be present on every level. There has barely been a month in the past decade when a politician was not accused of corruption; charges and conviction, imprisonments are also frequent.

Methodology: defining protest parties

Protest parties are anti-establishment, anti-elite parties that are clearly distinguishable from a country's traditional parties.

These protest groups have political demands, communication and appearance that differ significantly from those of the traditional, decades-old parties. They typically identify themselves not in opposition to a party or a group but to the whole political establishment. These parties typically reject the political structure of their countries and traditional political institutions. Protest parties are thus characterized by an opposition to the existing political system and social organization or social agenda. This often goes hand in hand with a questioning of the legal system and a hope to get a kind of counter-culture into power. In some cases, this might even be accompanied by efforts to change state borders, by separatist goals (for example, this is the case with Italy's Northern League).

Protest parties include radical left-wing and right-wing parties as well as populist formations. Right-wing protest parties typically have anti-immigration and Eurosceptic attitudes, while left-wing protest parties typically include, in addition to some communist groups, newly formed radical leftist and anti-capitalist parties. The third group usually consists of groups organized around a single issue or few interconnected issues for narrow interests, as well as joke parties.

Parties that are in power or participate in a governing coalition are not considered to be protest parties. Protest parties' popularity was calculated by using available poll data in the relevant country. The total number of voters in the countries and in the European Union as a whole means the total number of voters who participated in the latest election in member states. Protest party support rate was calculated in relation to this value. List of the most important protest parties:

- **Austria |** Freedom Party (anti-immigration, populist)
- **Belgium |** Flemish Interest (right-wing populist, Eurosceptic, separatist)
- **Bulgaria |** Bulgarian National Movement (nationalist, Eurosceptic); National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (nationalist, Eurosceptic); Ataka (nationalist, anti-globalist, pro-Russian)
- **Cyprus |** Citizens' Alliance (leftist populist, anti-austerity party); Solidarity Movement (Greek nationalist, Eurosceptic); National Popular Front (ultranationalist, anti-Turkish, Eurosceptic)

- **Czech Republic |** Dawn (right-wing populist, nationalist, anti-immigration party); Pirate Party (globalist, liberal); Freedom and Direct Democracy (Eurosceptic, anti-immigration, right-wing populist)
- **Denmark |** Danish People's Party (anti-immigration, populist party); Red-Green Alliance (anti-capitalist, Eurosceptic, radical left-wing party)
- **Estonia |** Conservative People's Party of Estonia (nationalist, Eurosceptic party)
- **France |** National Front (anti-immigration, national radical party); Left Front (far left party)
- **Greece |** Independent Greeks (Eurosceptic, national conservative party); Golden Dawn (far right, neo-Nazi party); Communist Party of Greece – KKE (communist)
- **The Netherlands |** Party for Freedom (populist, anti-immigration, Eurosceptic party)
- **Croatia |** Human Shield (Eurosceptic, anti-elite, anti-globalist, protectionist party)
- **Ireland |** Anti-Austerity Alliance – People Before Profit (far left, anti-capitalist, Trotskyist party)
- **Poland |** Kukiz'15 (anti-elite, Eurosceptic, populist group, officially not registered as a party); Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic – Liberty and Hope (far right, libertarian, Eurosceptic party)
- **Latvia |** For Latvia from the Heart (far right, nationalist)
- **Lithuania |** Order and Justice (right-wing populist, Eurosceptic party)
- **Luxembourg |** The Left (anti-capitalist, Eurosceptic)
- **Hungary |** Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary (radical right-wing); Politics Can Be Different (anti-capitalist, green-left party); Momentum Movement (anti-establishment, liberal group); Two-tailed Dog Party (anti-establishment joke party)
- **United Kingdom |** United Kingdom Independence Party (Eurosceptic, anti-immigration party)
- **Germany |** Alternative for Germany (Eurosceptic, national conservative, anti-immigration party); The Left (left-wing populist party)
- **Italy |** Five Star Movement (anti-establishment, populist party); Northern League (anti-immigration, far right, populist party); Brothers of Italy (nationalist, Eurosceptic, right-wing populist party)
- **Portugal |** Unitary Democratic Coalition (communist-green party alliance); Left Block (anti-capitalist, Eurosceptic, radical left party)
- **Romania |** United Romania Party – Greater Romania Party (far right, nationalist party); Save Romania Union (anti-elite group not connected to any ideology)
- **Spain |** Podemos (left-wing populist party); United Left (far left party with communist roots); Basque Country United (Basque nationalist, separatist party); Republican Left of Catalonia – Catalonia Yes – ERC-CAT Sí (separatist, left-wing nationalist party)
- **Sweden |** Sweden Democrats (right-wing populist, Eurosceptic, anti-immigration party); Feminist Initiative (radical feminist party)
- **Slovakia |** Our Slovakia People's Party (far right, anti-immigration and anti-globalist party); We Are Family (anti-establishment, anti-immigration, populist party)

Lessons from the 2017 French Presidential election

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INTRODUCTION

On 23rd of April, 46.6 million French voters and 1.3 million living elsewhere in the world were being called to vote in the first round of the presidential election. The two candidates who came out ahead Emmanuel Macron (24.1 percent) and Marine Le Pen (21.3 percent) faced each other in a second round on 7th May. The turnout was 78.69 percent.

The presidential election will be followed on 11th and 18th June by general elections that will lead to the renewal of the 577 members' seats in the National Assembly, the lower chamber of Parliament.

No one doubts that the French are capable of finding a new European path, which they have never really left but for which they no longer have a view of the horizon. If France is more active in Europe, the French will find reasons to be satisfied and for acceptance.

The French Political System

France is a semi-presidential regime. Since 1962 the President of the French Republic has been elected by direct universal suffrage according to a majority two round vote. If none of the candidates wins the absolute majority of the vote in the first round, a second round is organized two weeks later.

Any candidate running for the supreme office must imperatively be aged 23 at least and present at least 500 signatures of elected representatives (MPs, MEPs; regional councillors, mayors) from at least 30 departments or overseas communities without one tenth of them being representatives of the same territory. Since this year the name of the representatives who have given their name to a candidate is published by the Constitutional Council.

Head of the army, the President of the French Republic holds the executive power. He appoints the Prime Minister and terminates his function on the presentation by the latter of his resignation from government. The head of State promulgates the laws on the proposal of the government or by both chambers of parliament. He can also submit a bill or a treaty ratification to referendum. After consultation with the Prime Minister and the leaders of both chambers the President of the Republic can also pronounce the dissolution of the National Assembly, the lower chamber of Parliament.

Sponsorship (parrainages)
- 1958 – 50 sponsorships, from the members of the Electoral College.
- 1962 – At least 100 sponsorships by citizens with an electoral mandate like the "grand electors" in the Senatorial elections.
- Since 1976 – At least 500 sponsorships in his name on the part of at least 30 departments or overseas communities, without one tenth of these 500 signatures (i. e. 50) being from the same department or territory (capping).

Since 2012 – what changes?
- The sponsorships must be communicated to the Constitutional Council exclusively via the post and no longer by courier;
- The property declaration grouping together all of each candidates' "assets" will be published by the High Authority for Transparency of Public Life.

For MPs sponsoring a candidate:
Their names as well as that of the candidate being sponsored are published – these names are published twice a week – on Tuesdays and Fridays as the sponsorships come in and are the focus of final publication by the Constitutional Council.
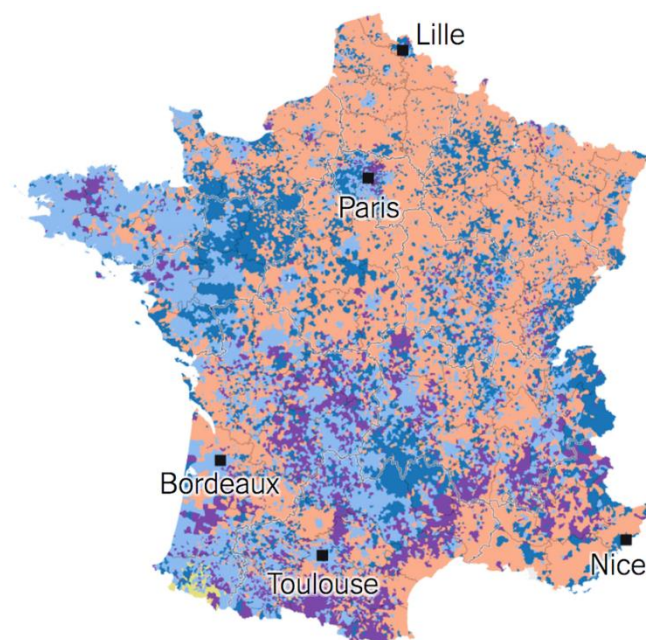
Macron ✓
24.0%

Le Pen ✓
21.3%

Fillon
20.0%

Mélenchon
19.6%

Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen advanced in France's presidential election (source: nytimes.com).

A very uncertain election

The election that has taken place in an international context marked by the Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump on 8th November last in the American presidential election means that everything is now possible and more uncertain than ever before. Indeed, 4 candidates arrived quite neck-to-neck on 23rd April. Less than 5 points separate the first Emmanuel macron (24.01 percent) and the fourth Jean-Luc Mélenchon (19.58 percent).

For a long time, the main issue at stake in this presidential election was the following: who will challenge Marine Le Pen in the second round? In fact if Marine Le Pen was qualified for the 2nd round she was not ahead. Macron was with 24.01 percent. The two challengers are opposite: Marine le Pen is advocating national withdrawal, the rejection of Europe and immigration, is standing as the defender of openness, Macron is a supporter of the EU and a reformer who will take France into the 21st century. The rift between the open/closed societies (cities/countryside, educated/none educated, rich/poor, globalized/non globalized, employed/unemployed, European/non-European, etc.) seems to be taking over from the left/right vote.

French presidential election candidates before the debate (source: Patrick Kovarik/AFP).

Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen are thriving on the crisis ongoing in the partisan system, on the weakening and discredit which the politicians from the two "main" parties are suffering, i. e. the Socialist Party (PS) in office for the past five years in France and the Republicans (LR), who might not feature in the second round of the presidential election, which would certainly lead to a major reshuffle in the French political landscape.

The eleven candidates

On 18th of March, the Constitutional Council published a list of eleven people, who were officially running in the election.

- Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (France, Arise): 56 years old, unfortunate candidate in the 2012 presidential election, eurosceptic and anti-liberal.
- Marine Le Pen (National Front): 48 years old, leader of the populist far-right since 2011, unfortunate candidate in the 2012 presidential election.
- Emmanuel Macron: 39 years old, former Secretary General of the Elysée under François Hollande (2012-2014) and former Minister for the Economy (2014-2016).
- Benoît Hamon (Socialist): 49 years old, former delegate Minister for Social Economy and Solidarity and Consumer Affairs (2012-2014), later National Education, Higher Education and Research (April-August 2014).
- Nathalie Arthaud: 47 years old economics teacher, defends the overthrow of capitalism.

- Philippe Poutou: 50 years old, he is fighting for the prohibition of dismissals and an increase in the minimum salary.
- Jean Lassalle: a 61-year-old MP, stands to be the defender of rurality.
- Jacques Cheminade: 75 years old, he is fighting to counter the "dictatorship of finance and American imperialism".
- Jean Lassalle: a 61-year-old MP, stands to be the defender of rurality.
- Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Left Front): 65 years old, MEP, unfortunate candidate in the 2012 presidential election.
- François Asselineau: 59 years old, extremely hostile to "American imperialism", he is fighting for France's exit of the EU and NATO.
- François Fillon (Republican): 63 years old, former Prime Minister under Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012). Background by questions of national and even religious identity, which has definitely been a remarkable development in a country known for its liberal traditions.

The campaign full of surprises

The presidential election on 23rd April and 7th May is already unique since it goes against all of the rules in this type of exercise.

Firstly, the relinquishment of the outgoing President of the Republic, François Hollande (Socialist Party, PS) on 1st December to stand for a second mandate. "I am doing this and take full responsibility, but also I am appealing for a collective leap of conscience which involves all of the progressives who must come together in these circumstances since what is at stake is not one person, it is the future of the country," declared the head of State in his speech delivered to the nation. This withdrawal is the first under the Fifth French Republic. The head of State, who has an extremely low popularity rate in the polls (4 percent according to a survey undertaken by Ipsos-Cevipof), partly linked his political fate after his five-year mandate to the results he achieved in terms of unemployment. This has not declined over the last five years as much as he had hoped it would (9.30 percent unemployed in the second quarter of 2012 amongst the working population and 9.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2016).

François Hollande has also possibly learnt the lesson of other seasoned politicians, who were ejected during the right and centre-right primary – the second unique event – his predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy (LR) in the first round of voting (20.67 percent of the vote) and Alain Juppé (LR) in the second (33.51 percent of the vote). Some weeks later it was the turn of former Prime Minister Manuel Valls (PS) to suffer the same fate in the primary on the left (41.31 percent of the vote in the second round).

Indeed, on the right and the left, each camp organized a primary to appoint their candidate in the presidential election. However, unlike events in 2011, during the primary on the left when voters chose "the candidate of consensus" as François Hollande was then called, in each of the camps this year the primary gave victory to candidates that were strongly influence either by the right (François Fillon) or the left (Benoît Hamon), more than the line of their respective political party. This is the third unusual element in this campaign.

As a result (fourth factor) this situation has been to the advantage of Emmanuel Macron who declares that he is neither left or right-wing and that he stands under the colours of the movement "En marche" which he created on 6th April 2016. He is a candidate who has never been elected, and has been joined by

Bayrou became one of the most important supporter for Emmanuel Macron (source: Reuters)

François Bayrou (Democratic Movement), positioning himself in the centre, who decided not to stand in the election. Macron is attracting supporters of the Socialists and the Republicans who have been disappointed by their camp.

Hence several ministers of the outgoing government (for example, Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian) have chosen to support rather than to campaign for Benoît Hamon, whom they criticize for his rebellious, if not hostile attitude to those in office during the five-year mandate of François Hollande, and his programme which is too far to the left than that of the Socialist Party. Manuel Valls himself declared on 19th March that he was not supporting the official candidate of his political party. The former Prime Minister denounces the "ambient cynicism in which everything and its contrary is being promised, in which blank cheques are being signed."

On the right some of those close to the Republicans have stepped back from the victory of the primary in their camp, François Fillon, but for other reasons. Indeed, and this is the fifth unique element in this campaign; on 14th March, the official Republican candidate was under investigation and charged with embezzling public funds, for aiding and abetting the embezzlement of public funds, for aiding and abetting the misuse of company assets and the breach of his declarative obligations (taxes), which is a first under the Fifth Republic. He is accused of having paid his wife, Penelope and his two children for supposedly fictitious jobs as parliamentary assistants. His wife was also paid by the "Revue des deux mondes" for work that is also said to have been fictitious. Two days later, François Fillon was challenged for having accepted gifts of luxury suits totalling several tens of thousands euros on the part of a lawyer.

After having declared that only if he was charged would he step down from the presidential race, the right-wing candidate finally chose to offer himself up to universal suffrage. "The closer we get to the presidential election the more scandalous it would be to deprive the right and the centre of a candidate (...). My decision is clear: I am running and I shall go to victory," he indicated on 18th February last. The Republican candidate claims he is the victim of a frame-up, a conspiracy, launched by the highest office of State, of a "black cabinet driven by the outgoing President of the Republic, François Hollande," he said on 23rd March last.

But François Fillon is not the only candidate to be experiencing legal problems. Marine Le Pen is also being accused by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) for having paid two people (one of her co-workers and body guards) for fictitious jobs as parliamentary assistants between 2010 and 2016. Protected by her parliamentary immunity as an MEP she has refused to answer any court summons. The court turned to the European Parliament to ask for the lifting of her parliamentary immunity.

Moreover, and sixth element, there was a great number of undecided until the very end. Brice Teinturier (Survey Company Ipsos) said in an interview on France Inter on 11th April that around 35 percent of the electorate said they still might change their mind. During the previous presidential election, just two weeks prior to the vote, the percentage of undecided was closer to 25-28 percent.

Finally, the 7th element in the presidential campaign of 2017 was that it was marked by three TV debates between the candidates before the first round. The 1st debate on 20th March included the 5 candidates

Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron prepare the debate before the 2nd round (source: Reuters).

who according to the polls were the leading personalities (François Fillon, Benoît Hamon, Marine Le Pen, Emmanuel Macron and Jean-Luc Mélenchon). The second debate on 4th April brought all 11 candidates. The third programme on 20th April witnessed the succession of the candidates who had "15 minutes to convince". The campaign was therefore the first to have witnessed TV debates between the candidates prior to the first round. Normally the TV debate takes place between rounds, between the two candidates vying with each other in the second round. This situation has been so since 1974 when there was a debate between Giscard d'Estaing and Mitterrand. It has always taken place since then except between the two rounds in 2002 because Jacques Chirac refused to debate with Jean-Marie Le Pen. "Given the intolerance and hate no transaction is possible, debate is not possible. (…) No more than I accepted an alliance with the National Front in the past and this, whatever the price, and I shall not accept debate tomorrow with its representative," said Chirac at the time.

A unique presidential election

Quite rightly this campaign will stand out in history. Because of the primaries, it started several a long time ago. It was a novelty, even though the candidates had always been obliged in the past to polish and refine their profiles after many years of preparation.

It was upset by "the scandals", and until recently judicial intervention has been changing its course, since the National Front candidate is to be called to court at the beginning of May to explain the employment of her parliamentary assistants.

Again, because of the primaries, the candidates believed that they had to put forward precise programmes to the extent of pointillism, multiplying the promises being made. The "décodeurs" of the newspaper, Le Monde, noted 3 200 addressing 80 different themes! It looks more like a government programme.

79 percent of the French say they are interested in the presidential election, grant great importance to the candidates' personality. His ambition and inspiration counts more than his technical ability.

They want to "have a clear vision of the direction they are to take" and are ready to support the person who "enlightens" them about a future that is now uncertain. This is when the role and place that France will have in the world become almost compelling in their choice. And ofcourse Europe is part of this.

For many years French political life has pushed Europe out of national, self-centred debates. This time the electoral campaign has simply addressed Europe via extreme clichés, technical considerations that are not really related to it (a parliament, or a budget for the euro area), in all, just hypotheses, never as a consubstantial part of the national policies of France – and never as one of France's major commitments that strengthen and therefore engage it. Europe is discussed between the French; but in fact we just discuss France.

The extremists say we must leave the EU and the eurozone to recover our supposedly lost sovereignty. What would we do alone in the world financial jungle? This argument is largely outdated and the French don't adhere to this stale simplistic argument. According to those interviewed, 72 percent want to keep the euro, the interest of which they have evidently understood[1] .Regarding the main issues of concern, they also believe that they have to be addressed within a European context i. e. with our neighbours and allies: 65 percent regarding defence, 60 percent foreign policy, and 56 percent security. Hence, how should we analyse the systematically negative attitude that emerges each time we address EU-issues? How should we interpret the French disaffection for Europe? A reality? A fad? A stance? The instinct of survival of a political class that is not really in touch with the world and which understands little about Europe?

There seem to be several reasons to explain this. Firstly, no mention is made of Europe in the speeches delivered by our political leaders. Today Europe is no longer a subject in itself, but every public issue that has to be dealt with by our leaders bears a European aspect, which is systematically obscured. Hence, we only speak of Europe when we have to implement restrictive EU-regulations, in addition to our national rules, which incidentally are accepted and even put forward by the government.

France has remained in a time when Europe was growing with the tacit agreement of people, since it

Emmanuel Macron became France's president after beating Marine Le Pen (source: euobserver.com).

provided stability, prosperity and success. It is disappointed that it can no longer "dream of Europe", whilst there was no room to dream of an organization with its legal, diplomatic, and even bureaucratic stumbling blocks. It has to be driven, guided – we have to convince our partners, and this means pedagogy every single day, but which is never undertaken. France is not the only one in this situation, but its place in Europe has always been at the forefront and its problem is therefore all the more serious. Since Robert Schuman, the initiator of the project, every president has been involved more or less – they have provided it with their proposals (but not all of them) and have been able to explain to the French what they wanted for the continent. This has not been the case since the introduction of the euro and the French have turned away from it in the main, since no one talks about Europe.

Then, undeniably the changes that occurred in Europe have changed the way the Union is perceived. To say the least the French no longer recognise "their Europe". It has become established, has grown heavier, become diversified and speaks English. But according to the law and eleven treaties, it is the champion of legalism – could it be otherwise, since it is a question of agreements between sovereign nations? And the law has sometimes become an end in itself for its administration, due to a lack of political dynamism, notably on the part of the Member States. This lack has been used as an excuse in support of the recurrent criticism of Europe's democratic deficit. If this does exist it is largely due to the indifference of the French institutions vis-à-vis events in Strasbourg and Brussels.

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[1] http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/divers/the-french-and-europe-60-years-after.pdf

France has not shone through in recent times with its European proposals. To the point that some believe that it has not been involved. But France is a country which prefers to imagine the rules collectively, rather than to respect them in the long term. It was the one that invented the 3 percent budgetary deficit rule that should not be surpassed, and which has constantly challenged it ever since. It no longer even invents any of these rules but wallows in incantatory criticism at a time in which the European Union is the only one in the world that is trying to regulate unbridled globalization.

Hence, we might provisionally conclude that the French electoral campaign has revealed all of France's European tribulations and even manipulated by the various candidates.

Some, like Marine Le Pen, and a few outsiders, would like to "throw the baby out with the bath", there are those who want to "reorient" it, even "reinvent" it, who challenge the treaties and want to reform them. In the reforms some see the be-all and end-all of France's European policy. There are those who still advocate "the Europe of nations" in reference to General de Gaulle, as if it has not always been an alliance of sovereign nations. Finally, there are those who accept to be part of the European framework and put forward ideas that lack imagination in terms of reviving it.

A political earthquake

For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, the candidates of the country's two main government parties – the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (LR) – were severely sanctioned and eliminated in the first round of the election.

Together they rallied 26.37 percent of the votes, i. e. -9.84 points in comparison with the first round of the presidential election of 2002, when the socialist candidate Lionel Jospin came third, beaten by Jean-Marie Le Pen (FN).

"I no longer have the legitimacy to lead," François Fillon told a crisis meeting of The Republicans' executive committee a day after leading the party to its most humiliating defeat in half a century. He stayed only a few minutes at the talks as recriminations and anger mounted over the party's unprecedented elimination in the first round of the presidential election. "It was not our ideas that were defeated," said Laurent Wauquiez, party vice chairman. "We are paying a high price for the atmosphere of sleaze." Rachida Dati, mayor of Paris's 7th arrondissement, said it was "a historic moral defeat of the Right". Eric Woerth, another senior party figure, commented: "It's not the Right that lost, it's Fillon." Alain Juppé said the party must now change its "political direction".

ELECTIONS PRÉSIDENTIELLES
23 avril - 7 mai 2017

Reconciling France with the European Union?

The electoral campaign in view of the presidential election has brought together eleven candidates. None of them is happy with the European Union. Four of them simply want to leave the Union. All of the others want to reform it more or less.

Has it become, as François Hollande stated on 16th April, the "scapegoat of our relinquishment s?" Or is it simply indicative of a French malaise, a kind of reflection that shows the French an inferior image of their national ambition? Isn't it being used rather as an excuse in the dissatisfied quest for a particular role in the world? Or it is just an easy distraction of the increasing anger over the unexplained turmoil that is ongoing in the sciences, the economy, politics and, therefore, in society?

Two voters in three believe that the European dimension will be "significant" in the way they vote in the presidential election. The French have not therefore become anti-European. Only a small share of them, in rejection, anger or out of conviction claim themselves to be as such. However much is expected of Europe and its image has suffered.

It must be both a focus of pride, foster a feeling of belonging, which has not been cultivated for a long time by French political leaders, and also lead to greater effectiveness in terms of settling issues as complex as the security of Europe, migration and economic revival. The French are clearly expecting Europe to be "more political". This will require a new president to take hold of this, to make it a daily issue, to explain in a transparent manner what he intends to decide with his partners in key areas. Explaining economic, financial and therefore diplomatic interdependency, the consequences of hyper-connectivity, the challenge to multilateralism and the inevitable subservience of small powers vis-à-vis their larger neighbours, migration, or the territorialization of the oceans, the future stakes of power relations between States – these are the issues that deserve to be brought before public opinion.

French initiatives can put France back at the centre of Europe and which can be beneficial in its effort to recover. They would show just how much they have in common with the concerns of other Europeans.

Marine Le Pen claimed a "historic, massive result" for Front National in her concession speech (source: The Telegraph).

The European Union is not the reason behind the France's problems. But France is being hit, like many others, by doubt and legitimate concern that has to be alleviated. This would be the new president's first duty.

Regarding domestic, as well as the European issues, he will have to take on board criticism and challenges. These must not be rejected with disdain, as is often the case. They must be heard and real answers must be given – having been thought through and completed with results and even justified with reform in the functioning of the European Union. A pro-active France has a good chance of being heard and listened to by its partners.

No one doubts that the French are capable of finding a new European path, which they have never really left but for which they no longer have a view of the horizon. If France is more active in Europe, the French will find reasons to be satisfied and for acceptance. If the French elect a resolutely European president who makes a commitment, they can win back their reasons to be proud of belonging to Europe.

The European Union, the regulatory power of globalisation, will for its part, have a better chance of developing in the right direction. Will France make its return to Europe? That is one of the issues at stake in this election.

Immigration has become a central topic in Western European political campaigns

AUTHORS: NÁNDOR GÖMBICZ, FERENC SULLIVAN (HUNGARY)

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the poor economic situation, unfavourable environmental conditions and civil war, irregular migrants have arrived to Europe in large numbers over the past years. The conflict in Syria is only the largest and most conspicuous of these reasons of the flow, which has seen migrants arriving to Europe from a variety of other countries including the most distant corners of the world.

The European asylum system was unprepared to manage the crisis. Since 2015, close to 2.4 million migrants have entered the European Union.

A total of seven main migratory routes now exist. These are the Western African route, the Western Mediterranean route, the Central Mediterranean route, the Apulia and Calabira route (linked to the Central Mediterranean route since October 2014), the Western Balkan route, the Eastern Mediterranean route and the so-called Eastern Borders route leading to Eastern Europe.

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At least two million migrants arrived to Europe in 2015

According to figures released by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), a total of 1 822 177 attempts were made to cross state borders across Europe in 2015.

In a new development, the Mediterranean Sea was replaced by the Aegean Sea as migrants' chief route, meaning that Greece, Balkan countries and Hungary came under migratory pressure instead of Italy. 885 386 border crossings took place in the Eastern Medterranean route leading from Turkey to Greece, while 764 038 such cases were recorded on the Western Balkan route leading through Hungary.

In many cases, immigrants illegally crossed external borders of the European Union several times, many arriving to the Western Balkan route across the Eastern Mediterranean. It should be pointed out that transit migration caused major disturbances in the Balkans and East Central Europe for Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary, and then for Croatia and Slovenia after Hungary erected a border fence. These countries were seen by migrants merely as transit states, their countries of destination being Germany, Sweden, Austria (which became a transit country after initially being a destination), Finland and the United Kingdom.

While migratory pressure on Europe eased significantly in 2016, it remained substantial throughout last year. Last year, the Central Mediterranean route leading to Italy again became the busiest and saw the number of migrants increasing by 11.7 percent compared to last year to 181 126. This is explained by enhanced border protection on the Western Balkan route and the EU-Turkey agreement entering into effect in March 2016.
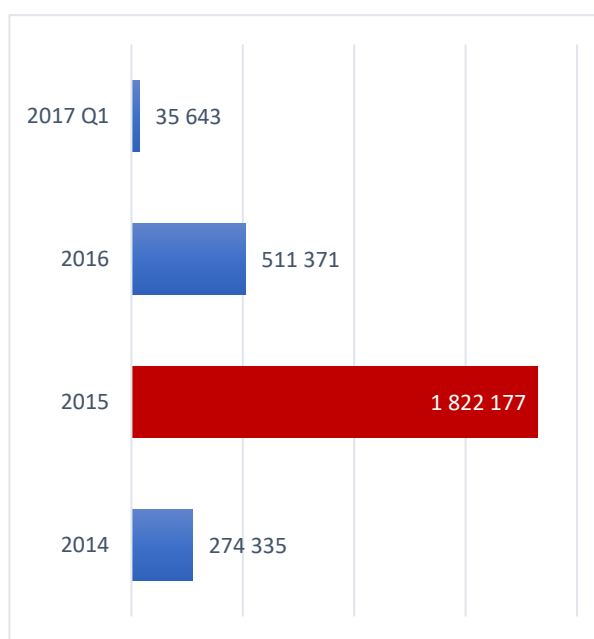
Number of illegal border crossings (Frontex)

Immigration will continue to face the European Union with a major challenge in the near future. According to preliminary figures, over 35 000 illegal border crossings took place in the first quarter of 2017 and 68 percent of migrants arrived to Italy through the Mediterranean Sea. In conclusion, attempts so far to confine the magnitude of irregular migration through the central Mediterranean route have failed, and if Turkey permanently renounces its agreement with the EU, the Balkans and Central Europe would likely be exposed to major migratory pressure. According to Frontex's projection for 2017, immigration from Africa, primarily for economic reasons, is expected to increase.
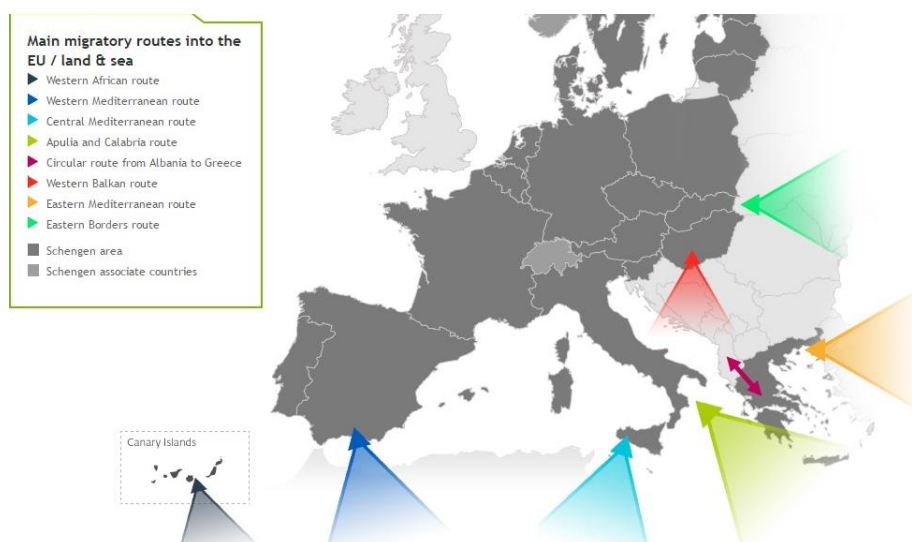
Immigration may potentially cause long-term problems

**For a variety of reasons, migratory pressure is likely to cause problems for Europe in the upcoming decades.**

Migrants are expected to embark upon the journey in growing numbers from crisis areas affected by civil war or states failing to perform even their most basic duties, such as Afghanistan or Somalia. Africa's situation is especially danger for Europe because the continent's population is expected to grow by 500 million within the next fifteen years, while education, health care, housing, and the supply of food and drinking water remains inadequate. A significant proportion of Africa's population is constituted of young people for whom their country is unable to provide a decent standard of living. The massive abyss between the creation of new jobs and population growth (33 percent of the population is below the age of 15) results in masses of low-skilled unemployed people, a situation made worse by the pace of population growth on the continent exceeding economic expansion.

In addition to economic difficulties, global warming will also stimulate immigration. As a result of global warming, both arable land and water supplies will dwindle, which on its own aggravates internal conflicts and serves as a basis of further radicalization. Accelerating desertification and the shortage of rainfall is now affecting half of all arable land in Africa. Problems resulting from water shortage and consequent disputes on the distribution of water will be even more pronounced traditionally arid regions such as Africa or the Middle East.

The population of the Earth, currently at 7 billion, is expected to reach 9.3 billion by 2050, 95 percent of which will live in developing countries. By 2050, the population of Africa will grow from 1.2 billion today to 2.2 billion.

Over the past two years, in fact, the majority of migrants came to Europe primarily in the hope of a better life. This is supported by data for last year suggesting that two-thirds of immigrants of 50 different nationalities arriving to Italy in 2016 claimed to have left their homeland for economic reasons. Eurostat figures reveal that a total of 1 255 640 asylum applications were handed in across the European Union in 2015.

The majority of these – a total of 362 775 – were submitted by Syrians, followed by Afghans at 178 230 and Iraqis at 121 535 applications. The largest number of asylum applications, a total of 441 800, were handed in Germany, followed by Hungary at 174 435 and Sweden at 156 110 applications. The number of asylum applications handed in remained largely stable in 2016 with a total of 1 204 280 being submitted in European Union member states. Similarly to the year 2015, the highest number of asylum applications were submitted by Syrian (334 820), Afghan (182 985) and Iraqi (126 955) citizens. By country of destination, the highest number of applications – a total of 722 265 – were submitted in Germany, followed by Italy in second place with 121 185 applications. In Hungary, the number of asylum claims handed in fell significantly, by almost 150 000 to 28 215.
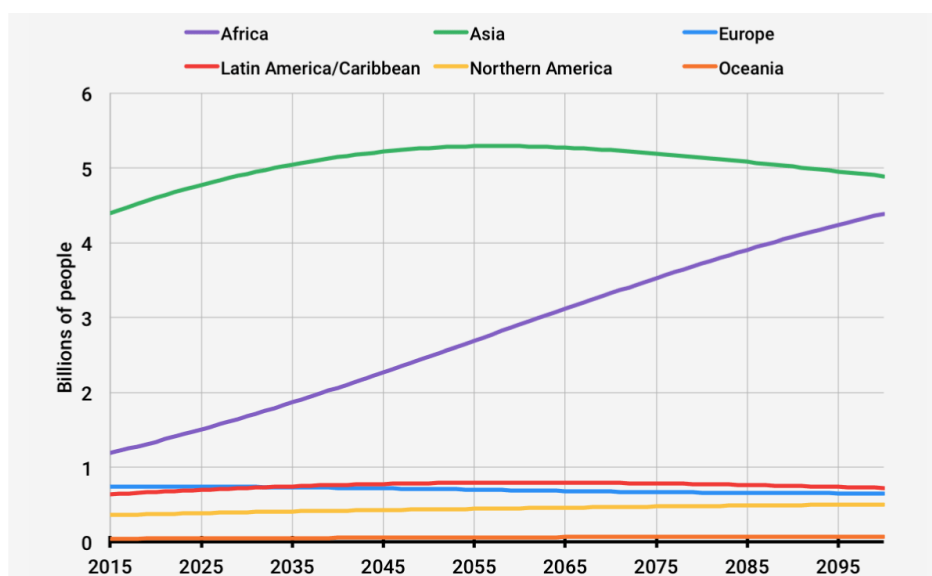
Population projections, 2015-2020 (source: UN Population Division/Thech Insider)

Risks brought on by immigration

As shown by events over the past two years, mass irregular migration carries a multitude of risk; both its volume and its nature (illegal border crossings) have contributed to the falling sense of safety with in the European population through worsening public safety and the increasing threat of terror since 2015. Additionally, migratory pressure has also endangered the Schengen system providing for free movement within the EU and will also result in serious social and economic consequences.

Mass irregular migration carries serious national security risks. New Year's Eve atrocities in Cologne in 2015 have called attention to the gravity of crimes committed by irregular immigrants and the lack of preparedness of law enforcement officials. Figures released by the German Ministry of Interior for the year 2016 reveal that the number of crimes committed by immigrants has increased. However, the toughest security challenge faced by intelligence agencies is to identify individuals arriving to Europe trained primarily by the Islamic State (ISIS) to commit acts of terrorism in Europe. The terrorist organization has become aware of the weakening of European border protection and have exploited the immigration crisis as a means of entering EU territory without difficulty.

The link between mass irregular immigration and terrorism is confirmed by the assessment of the inhabitants of Germany, migrants' primary destination in Europe. Accord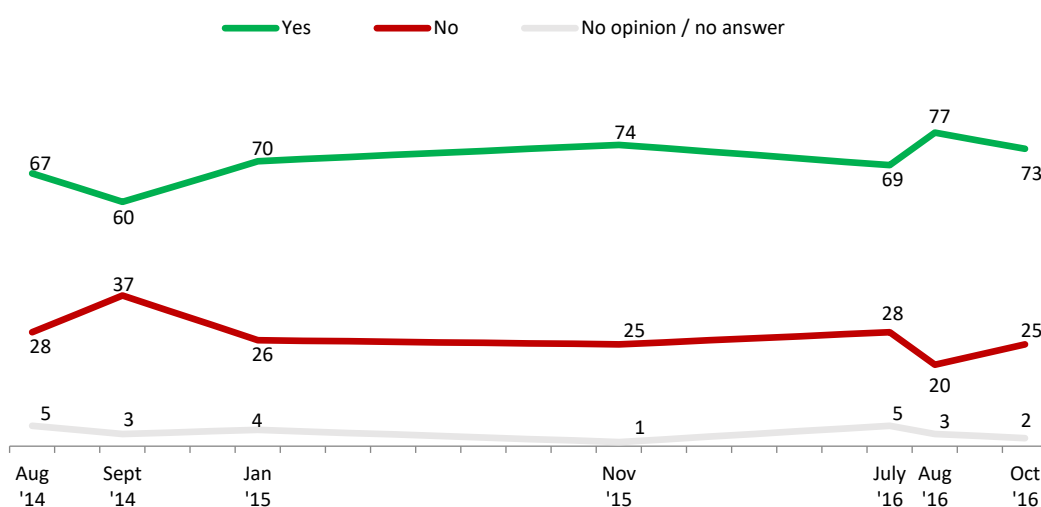ing to Forschungsgruppe Wahlen's public opinion poll, the share of respondents claiming that a terrorist attack can be expected in Germany within the near future had stabilized at above 70 percent by autumn 2016.

Over the past two years, the Schengen Agreement, an undeniable achievement of the European Union, has also faced danger. As a result of the immigration crisis beginning in Europe, Austria, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden have all suspended the implementation of the Schengen Agreement, and the establishment of a so-called "mini-Schengen" was raised as a possibility in Western Europe in late 2015 and early 2016.

Many in Western Europe see migration as an opportunity to stimulate economic growth and solve demographic problems. While the low cost of migrant labour is a regularly reiterated argument, analyses have proven that average national wage levels are largely unaffected by immigration. OECD figures confirm that unemployment is, on average, higher among immigrants than among those born in the given country.

Immigration mainly results in competition for low-skilled domestic labour and may only have a positive impact on the economy if immigrants are young and well-qualified. In the opposite case, immigration results in a major burden for the recipient state. The crisis beginning two years ago confirmed the latter scenario; seven percent of those arriving in 2015 had no formal education whatsoever, while a further quarter possessed only primary-level education.

Is a terrorist attack expectable in Germany in the near future?

Yes ─── No ─── No opinion / no answer

	Aug '14	Sept '14	Jan '15	Nov '15	July '16	Aug '16	Oct '16
Yes	67	60	70	74	69	77	73
No	28	37	26	25	28	20	25
No opinion / no answer	5	3	4	1	5	3	2

Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen

The political impact of the immigration crisis

As explained above, the immigration crisis that began in 2015 is a genuine problem that will influence the future of Europe in the short, medium and long-run alike.

Already during the past two years, the consequences of migration have had significant impact on European domestic policy; in this period, this topic made the greatest contribution to the European Union's political agenda. The assessment of the effects of immigration and proposed solutions to manage migratory pressure have resulted in a heated political debate both between member states and between certain member states and European Union institutions such as the European Commission or the European Parliament.

Additionally, the immigration crisis also continues to define EU member states' political agenda, thus considerably influencing the party race in various countries. This has been proven not only by public opinion polls but also by recent election results, which typically reflected a fall in support for traditional elite parties and the parallel upsurge of anti-immigration forces. Because the sluggish management of the prolonged economic crisis erupting in 2008 had already questioned the crisis management competencies of these political forces, it should be emphasized that against this backdrop, traditional elite parties were already in a disadvantageous position beforehand. This situation was aggravated further by the issue of immigration, and a though there has been progress in the areas, the traditional Western political elite remains partly unable to provide effective solutions to the problem. EU migration policy based on the admission and in-tegration of a proportion of immigrants has so far resulted in a spectacular failure; based on the quota system adopted in September 2015, only 16 340 immigrants have been relocated until April 2017 from the total number of 160 000 who have been approved for resettlement. In the meanwhile, a significantly larger number of new migrants have arrived to European territory. So far, only strict border surveillance implemented on the West Balkans route and the fragile agreement between the EU and Turkey have produced genuine results.

Concerning the assessment of the immigration crisis, cleavages have opened up in several member states between the traditional elite parties and a substantial proportion of the electorate. While the latter are in support of controlling better the irregular immigration, the former are inclined to accept a regulated but continuous flow of migrants. This difference in opinion has been reflected in the findings of public opinion polls, which show that anti-immigration parties have stabilized their positions or gained further strength in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Slovakia.

These findings have been confirmed by the results of elections held since the outbreak of the immigration crisis. In the countries listed above, anti-immigration parties significantly outperformed their earlier election results. Migration played a key role in campaigns ahead of elections; while this chiefly served the benefit of anti-immigration forces, traditional elite parties attempted to counter-balance this effect with support for European integration and championing the importance of European unity.

Immigration has become a central subject of campaigns

Immigration crisis mobilized both anti-immigration and pro-immigration voters in the EU.

Presidential elections took place in **Austria** in spring 2016, the first round of which, held on 24th April, was won by the candidate of Heinz-Christian Strache's Freedom Party (FPÖ). Gaining 35.1 percent of the vote, Norbert Hofer beat the runner-up, Green candidate Alexander Van der Bellen, by almost 14 percentage points. Candidates ran by the two parties forming the country's grand coalition performed poorly despite the Austrian government making a U-turn in its immigration policies in early 2016; in defiance of the policies pursued by Germany, for example, the country set an upper limit to receivable asylum-seekers for 2016 (37 500 persons). Social Democratic (SPÖ) candidate Rudolf Hundstorfer received 11.3 percent of the vote, slightly ahead of Andreas Khol, in representation of the People's Party (ÖVP), who gained a mere 11.1 percent.

In the second round, which was repeated due to voting irregularities, only Hofer and Van der Bellen were allowed to run; because of voters switching their party allegiances, the latter came first in both instances, although the Freedom Party candidate's results (22nd May: 49.65 percent; 4th December: 46.2 percent) definitely deserve attention.

The immigration crisis was a central component of Mr. Hofer's campaign, which primarily drew attention to national and public security risks brought on by migration. The FPÖ candidate also criticized the European Union for failing to manage the immigration crisis and championed the cause of Euroscepticism, pledging to call for a referendum on Austria's EU membership if elected. These statements are supported by the following slogan featuring on the candidate's billboards: "Austria needs freedom" and "Power requires control". Hofer's opponent, the candidate who came first in the second round and was thus elected President, attempted to counter-balance the Freedom Party candidate's campaign with a pro-EU integration message. Campaign messages of Mr. Van der Bellen, who was nominally independent with the backing of the Green Party in the first round and also received the support of grand coalition parties in the second, included "No to Öxit – We are stronger together".

As many as eight state elections have taken place in **Germany**, the primary destination of migrants, since the outbreak of the immigration crisis in 2015, and the issue of migration was high on the agenda in all local campaigns. The issue was championed primarily, and with considerable success, by the radical right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. AfD, founded in 2013, has gained popularity as a result of advocating anti-immigration policies, scoring results above 5 percent in all state elections held during the past two years, and has a strong chance of joining the German federal parliament at Bundestag elections this September. AfD scored outstanding results at state elections in Saxony-Anhalt (24.2 percent) and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (20.8 percent) but even gained 14.2 percent of the vote in the strongly left-liberal Berlin.

In all of these campaigns, AfD heavily referred to the question of immigration. The party used the billboard to campaign in Baden-Württemberg, where it reached 15.1 percent at elections on 13th March 2016. The billboard featured the slogan "Cologne – Stuttgart – Hamburg… More stafety for our women and daughters! Vote now for AfD!" was a clear reference to events occurring at New Year 2016, when several groups of immigrants attacked women celebrating New Year in these cities.

Van Der Bellen hardly defeated the Freedom party candidate Norbert Hofer (source: vanderbellen.at).

To quote another example, AfD campaigned with limiting immigration at state elections held in Berlin on 18th September 2016. The slogan featured on the first billboard was the following: "Berlin needs transparent rules. Stop asylum chaos immediately! Immigration must be limited!" Another slogan featured: "Immigration – yes. But not to our social system!" Governing parties – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) reacted to AfD's campaign by stressing safety, the importance of belonging to Europe and selecting from migrants. For example, CDU, led by Angela Merkel, attempted to counter-balance AfD's messages on immigration with billboards featuring the slogan "Safety for Berlin". As for SPD, the party's repertoire now features campaign elements reading "Migrants. Immigration must be controlled. We stand for selection."

In **France**, two major elections took place since the beginning of the immigration crisis: regional elections were held in December 2015, followed by presidential elections in spring 2017. The first round of regional elections brought about the success of the National Front, with the anti-immigrant party coming first in six out of thirteen region. Although this advantage melted by the second round due to the peculiarities of the French electoral system, higher turnout and switching party allegiances, the performance of Le Pen's party well reflected the political impact of the migrant crisis. Similarly to most European Union member states, anti-immigration political forces made gains at polls in France. During the campaign ahead of regional elections, the National Front focused its message on the immigration crisis, by which it successfully set the political agenda. The party's clear standpoint on migration is well reflected by the billboard below, which features the simple but easily comprehensible message "100% National Front, 0% migrants".

During the recent election campaign, the National Front succeeded in dominating the agenda on migration despite Republican candidate François Fillon also calling for stricter immigration policies. Marine Le Pen addressed this issue with a number of billboards; one of the posters featured is explicitly aimed at stirring voters' emotions. The text featured: "Julie waited two years for a place in student accommodation. Unfortunately for her, Julie is not an immigrant." Even though Marine Le Pen failed to win the French presidency, she successfully qualified for the second round. The last time the National Front achieved a similar result was in 2002, when then party chairman Jean-Marie Le Pen qualified to run in the second round.

As for the campaigns pursued by traditional elite parties, both Republican candidate François Fillon and his Socialist rival Benoît Hamon failed to significantly influence the agenda of the campaign period. Criminal proceedings with serious political consequences distracted attention from Mr. Fillon's campaign, and although Mr. Hamon received the official backing of the Socialist Party, he proved to be a weak candidate against previous Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron. Mr. Macron, the centrist candidate eventually elected President, reacted to Marine Le Pen's campaign by demonstrating commitment to European integration, portraying himself as the defender of Europe. This is reflected by one of his campaign element, featuring the following quotation from the candidate: "I'm the only one who wants to defend Europe". This pro-Europe message played a key role in Mr. Macron's victory, as it successfully reclaimed the political agenda by the later phase of the campaign from migration, championed by Marine Le Pen.

Compared to elections in 2012, support for the anti-immigration Freedom Party increased at elections held in the **Netherlands** on 15th March 2017. The political force, led by Geert Wilders, won the second-highest number of mandates in the lower house of the Dutch Parliament. It should be added that because all other major parties declined to join a coalition including the Freedom Party in the early phase of the campaign, the party would not have been expected to gain a position in the government even having came first in elections. Therefore, it can be argued that over 1 370 000 Dutch voters gave their support for the anti-immigration political force knowing in advance that possible coalition talks would necessarily be doomed to fail. With regard to the campaign, the Freedom Party's messages logically focused on immigration. As it was seen from one of the billboards, Geert Wilders's party devoted special attention to the role of Islam in migration. The Freedom Party's slogan was the easily understandable "Stop Islam".

GroenLinks was a particularly interesting competitor the race for Dutch citizens' support. The political party, which combines green, left-liberal and pro-European progressive standpoints, advocated policies squarely the opposite of the Freedom Party. As a result, support for the party increased from only 2.3 percent in 2012 to 9.1 percent of votes in 2017 election. The group, led by Jesse Klaver, called upon the Dutch to support immigrants and the European Union.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the **Brexit** referendum last year in the United Kingdom. During the campaign ahead of the referendum, held on 23rd June 2016, pro-Brexit forces repeatedly drew attention to the immigration crisis. UKIP, led by Nigel Farage, was the most significant political party to do so. One of the billboards published by UKIP referred to the immigration party as a "breaking point" and called for taking back control of the country's state borders. The referendum finally resulted in the victory of the pro-Brexit campaign, with 51.89 percent of the British electorate voting in favor of leaving the European Union.

The National Front's clear standpoint on migration is well reflected by this billboard (source: fn57.fr).