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POPULISM REPORT



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RALLYING POPULISTS

After the surge of European populists in the first half of 2018, the third quarter has been once again a blooming period for populist forces which seems to be worrying for the mainstream parties less than a year before the next European Elections. The rise of anti-establishment powers has mainly affected Eastern Europe, especially Latvia, where a few weeks before the next legislative election populist parties almost doubled their vote share.¹

During the summer holiday, populists have had more important things to do than relax: They revved up the engines of campaign for the 2019 European Elections. Beyond doubt, the most worrying moment in the last three months for progressives was the meeting of the populist duo: the Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán and the Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini. The supportive visit by the Hungarian PM can be translated as a stance against Brussels's establishment and its migration policy. The Italian interior minister's hard-right policy on migration, particularly the refusal of allowing rescue ships to dock in Italy have been praised by Orbán. The latter also presented his proposals for the next European Commission and Parliament: strengthening the borders of the bloc and sending illegal migrants back to Africa and the Middle-East.² The two politicians forgot to mention that they

1 For more details, see the Q3 data of the Progressive Post's Populism Tracker here: <http://progressivepost.eu/spotlights/populism/graph/>

2 Read more on Salvini's plans here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/01/italy-vows-to-send-home-undocumented-immigrants>

had clearly opposing views on the key question of the migration, namely on the refugee quota system. Contrary to Hungary, which is currently neither a transit nor a destination country, Italy is an important destination for refugees from Africa, and thus Rome insists on implementing the quota system, while Budapest harshly opposes it.

The two politicians are definitely preparing for the 2019 European Election which they want to be seen reductively as the battle of the pro-European and the Euroskeptical forces, where Emmanuel Macron, George Soros and the current leaders of Brussels embody the global liberal elite that doesn't represent the interest of European people. Moreover, Salvini also invited the leader of the French National Rally Marine Le Pen to Rome: the two party leaders have met in October.

The hustle and bustle of far-right populist powers outlines a potential coalition among anti-migration parties after next year's European Elections. At the same time, their nemesis, Emmanuel Macron wants to reshape the EU's leadership and create a new liberal and progressive central pole in the EP. Strange as it may sound, the two side's strivings reinforce each other and create a political climate where the cleavage is not anymore between rightwing and leftwing, but the pro-European progressives and the anti-establishment populists. However, populist parties across Europe have different positions on several key issues, thus it seems difficult, if not impossible, to bring these powers together into one EP group.

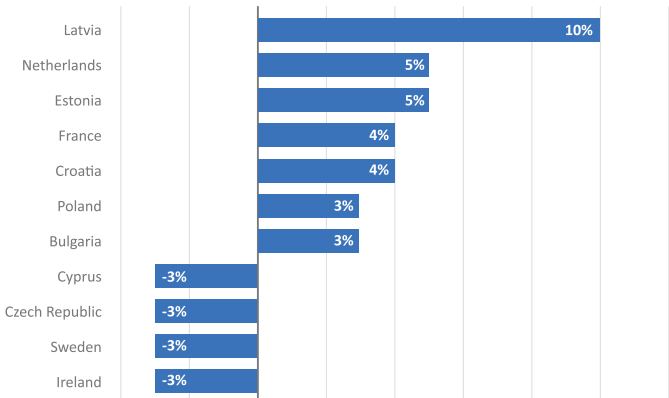
Regarding political developments in Q3 2018, the most important event in Europe was the Swedish legislative election held in September, where populists' outbreak has fortunately been stopped, however, the Swedish Democrats made historic

gains. This rightwing populist party (with roots in the neo-Nazi movement) was blaming immigration and multiculturalism for Sweden's current problems, urging the country's exit from the EU and generally fuelled nationalist sentiments among citizens. Finally, they couldn't achieve such a good result as the many journalists previously predicted.

General trends in Q3 2018

We can observe a **major shift regarding support for populist powers in 11 countries in the EU**, while in the other 17 Member States, the change in their popularity did not exceed the standard sampling error in polling (0-3%). There were **four countries where the aggregated popularity of populists decreased** by 3 points (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Sweden), but on the other hand, we can see much greater increase, particularly in Eastern Europe. Populist parties in Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia and Poland gained at least 3 points, but **in Latvia they soared by 10 points within 3 months**, which foreshadowed the Latvian parties' breakthrough in the parliamentary elections held in October. In France and the Netherlands, where already a massive number of people had backed populist powers, non-mainstream parties also expanded their voter base by 4 and 5 points, respectively.

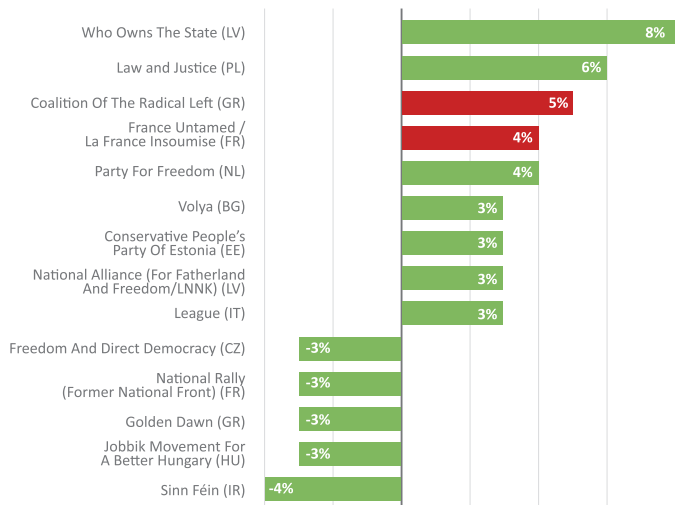
Countries with significant change of support for populist parties in Q3 2018



Graph 1. (Source: Populism Tracker)

Several rightwing populist parties lost ground significantly (at least 3 points) during the summer: the **Czech Freedom and Direct Democracy**, **Marine Le Pen’s National Rally in France**, the **neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece**. The greatest loser of the summer holiday was the Irish Sinn Féin which was losing ground by 4 points in just as many months.

Populis parties with significant change in support
(Q3 2018, green = rightwing, red=leftist)



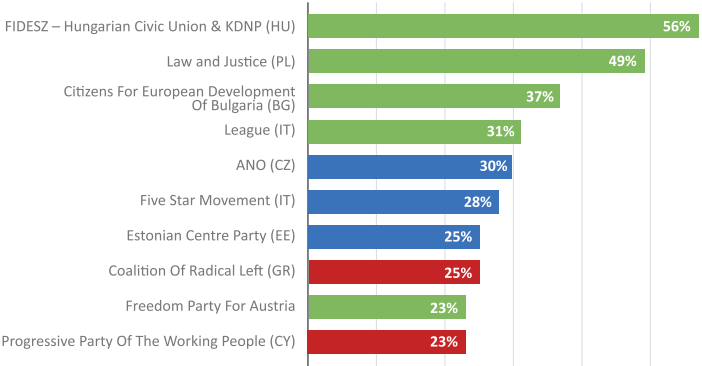
Graph 2. (Source: Populism Tracker)

There were only **two leftist populist powers which could significantly grow in the last three months**, the Greek governing party **Syriza** and the **France Untamed** led by the charismatic politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon - both parties could successfully retrieve voters that they had lost in the previous quarter of the year. Regarding the far right, except the **Dutch Party for Freedom** and the Italian **League**, only Eastern European parties were managed to expand,

namely the **Volya** (Bulgaria), the **Conservative People’s Party of Estonia**, the **Law and Justice** (Poland) and the **National Alliance** and the **Who Owns the State?** (Latvia).

The most popular populist parties in the EU

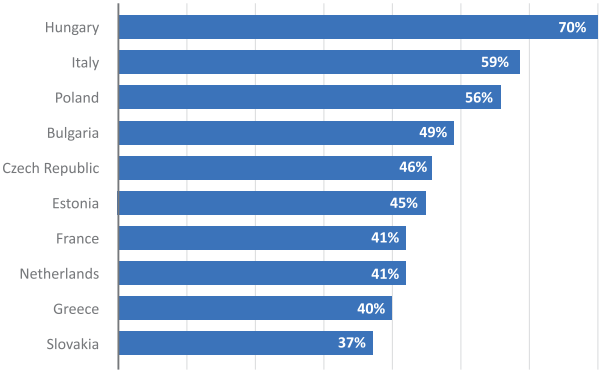
Q3 2018, support among likely voters
(green = rightwing, red = leftist, blue = other)



Graph 3. (Source: Populism Tracker)

Hungary is still a fairyland for populism: seven out of ten Hungarian voters prefer a populist party, while in Italy almost six out of ten voters choose anti-establishment parties. Including Bulgaria, **in four Member States at least the half of society backs a populist power, in six other countries, populist formations are popular among more than one-third of society.** There are **only five Member States** (Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania and the United Kingdom) where **the vote share of populists does not exceed 10 percent of the likely voters.**

Countries where more than one third of the likely voters supports populist parties in Q3 2018



Graph 4. (Source: Populism Tracker)

Populism in Northern Europe

In the region, and probably in whole of Europe, the most important political event was the Swedish general election, where **populists' breakthrough had failed**, although **Sweden Democrats (SD)** has strengthened its position on the country's political map. By its vote share of 17,53%, the anti-immigration party is still only the third strongest political power in the country, but its fraction in the Riksdag has grown by 13 seats which is the greatest increase among all Swedish parties. But the leaders of the SD couldn't have been satisfied with that result since before the election their support in polls was around 20%, and they had had a real chance to become the second or even the strongest party in the country. In addition, Sweden's other populist political formation, the Left has also been strengthened as their vote share rose from 5,7 percent to 8 percent. The former communist party's campaign focused on equality, they criticised the ideal of free market, wanted a larger welfare system and made a stand for LGBT+ and feminist rights.

Nevertheless, the two centrist coalitions failed to win a majority, and both refused to cooperate with the far-right party, leading to a hung parliament in Sweden. This deadlock still lingers on and should the fourth attempt at forming a government be abortive, Sweden will have to hold a new election soon.

We couldn't observe major changes in populists' support in the other Scandinavian countries. The support of **Denmark's** only populist power, **Danish People's Party**, has dropped one point in three months, their vote share stands at 18%. In **Finland**, still 9% of voters support the **Left Alliance** as in Q2, the populist right **Finns Party** has added 1 point and has the same support of 9% in Finnish society as the leftist populists have.

Populism in Western Europe

In the western side of the continent, **Netherlands** where the aggregated support for populists has grown from 24% to 27%. The main catalyst of this rise was Geert Wilders' **Party for Freedom (PVV)**, which was able to stop the advancement of its far-right competitor, **Forum for Democracy**. However, the support for PVV (13%) is still lower than its election result from 2017 when the party received 20%. The Forum for Democracy still stands at 6%, the same as it did in spring, the **Socialist Party** gained 1 point and stands 8 percent at the end of September.

By contrast, we don't see any relevant changes in the other Benelux states: **Luxembourg's** only populist party, **The Left** has still 5 percent of vote share, in **Belgium** the only relevant populist power, **Flemish Interest** gained 1 point within three months and stands at 9 percent.

In **France**, populist political formations have the same ratio of support (41%) as Dutch populist parties do, which indicates a rise of 4 percentage points in the country within three months. The main reason behind this rise is definitely the loss of support for Macron: the French President had numerous political scandals during the summer and his proposed reforms provoked resistance in society. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's party could capitalise the most on Macron's downturn, the **France Untamed's** popularity improved substantially by 4 points and stands at 14% among voters. Besides Macron's party (La République en Marche), the greatest loser of the quarter was the **National Rally**, formerly known as National Front, dropping 3 points in polls (17%), which is presumably linked to the investigation over Marine Le Pen's misuse of EU funds. Two minor leftist populist parties could also slightly improve, both the **New Anticapitalist Party** and the **French Communist Party** are

backed by 2 percent of French people. Meanwhile, the French Socialist Party's support dropped to 5%.

A role in a coalition government generally weakens populist powers, and that's exactly what we see in **Austria**: the only relevant populist power in the country, the **Freedom Party of Austria's** vote share of 23 percent is its worst result since the legislative election of 2017, where the far-right party got 26 percent of votes. At the same time, the largest opposition force, the Social Democratic Party of Austria managed to hold its 26% support and its second position in the Austrian polls.

Neither the violence in Chemnitz, nor the tensions in the CDU-CSU coalition had any effect on populists' popularity in **Germany**, **Alternative for Germany** and **Die Linke** have the exact same vote share as in the second quarter of the year. The anti-migration party is backed by 16 percent of Germans and every tenth voter would choose the far-left party in the most populated country of the European Union.

In Ireland, where the hottest political issue during the summer was the future of Northern Ireland after Brexit, the unionist **Sinn Fein** dropped 4 points, and only every fifth voter in Ireland backed the party. With that result, after the soaring observable in the second quarter of the year, Sinn Fein has returned to the same place where it was at the beginning of the year.

Due to internal conflicts between former and current party leaders, **UKIP** had a hectic summer in **the United Kingdom**, however, we can't observe a significant change in its support. Following Theresa May's Chequers Plan (a much softer plan for Brexit than previously proposed), UKIP's membership surged 15% in a month and it seemed that they might successfully retrieve far-right vot-

ers from the Tories, but they could gather only one point, and, at this stage, 4 percent of British people back them. Moreover, we can't see in the polls the result of UKIP's new strategy: the new party leader prioritizes in its communication the anti-Muslim rhetoric over Brexit and tried to integrate Tommy Robinson, a far-right activist attacking harshly Islam and Muslim communities, into the party. However, the Labour Party did not benefit either from the crisis of the UKIP or from the Conservative government's failures with Brexit, so the Labour and the Tories were neck and neck in the polls with 38% each.

Populism in Southern Europe

Alexis Tsipras has announced at the beginning of September that **Greece** will not cut pensions and will not raise taxes as planned, which can be considered as the beginning of **Syriza's** campaign for next year's legislative election. These promises have taken effect: after Q2's vote share of 20%, Syriza's support has been boosted by 5 points. The **Communist Party of Greece** dropped one point and stands at 7%. On the other hand, the summer was disappointing for the far-right: **Golden Dawn** lost 3 points and stands at 6 percent despite the fact that the controversial name dispute between Greece and Macedonia heavily fuelled nationalist feelings. **Independent Greeks** and **Popular Orthodox Rally** are still marginal political powers with 1-1 percent of vote share.

Populists are slightly weakening at the western end of the Mediterranean: the number-one opposition party in **Cyprus**, **AKEL** lost 2 points and stands at 23 percent, the far-right **ELAM** dropped by one point and stand at 6 percent in polls. **Citizens' Alliance** vote share of 2 percent means that the left-wing populist party remains an irrelevant political power on the island.

Support for populist parties on the Iberian Peninsula is essentially identical to that of Q2. In **Spain**, **Podemos** is still at 16% which means that the anti-austerity party has been unable to shift from this level since the end of the last year, despite their chance to grow: Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez was under pressure over resignations in his cabinet, that lead to a decrease in the government's popularity. Similarly, there was no major shift in the support for **Portugal's** populist parties: **Left Block** has 8%, **Unitary Democratic Coalition** has 7% of support among likely voters.

Matteo Salvini's **League** has definitely overtaken the lead in **Italian** polls, almost every third voter (31%) supports the far-right party. The Italian Minister of the Interior has started to organise an anti-EU platform together with his fellow populist, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The two leaders met in August, where they confirmed their common desire for the renewal of European Union by a new leadership. League's coalition partner - the more pro-European - **Five Star Movement** lost 1 point in polls and stands currently at 28%.

There is still no relevant populist party in **Malta**.

Populism in Eastern Europe

In **Hungary**, the post-election increase of **Fidesz** has not stopped yet: 56% of likely voters back the governing party which has received some painful attacks on the European scene. The European Parliament voted a censure motion (known as Sargentini report) which criticized Hungary due to the government's possible breaches of EU's rules and values. The decision has put Hungary under the process known as Article 7. This - in a later phase, called Article 7.2 procedure - might lead to the suspension of Hungary's voting rights in the European Council, although it's not likely to go as far due to the expected veto of the Polish (and potentially some other MS's) government in a decision which requires unanimity³. The decision is particularly embarrassing for Orbán and Fidesz because the majority of their European allies from EPP has also voted for the Sargentini Report. Nevertheless, Orbán does not need to worry regarding the Hungarian political scene: the opposition is more fragmented than before the election, and the second largest political party, the populist **Jobbik's** support narrowed by 3 points and stands at only 14%.

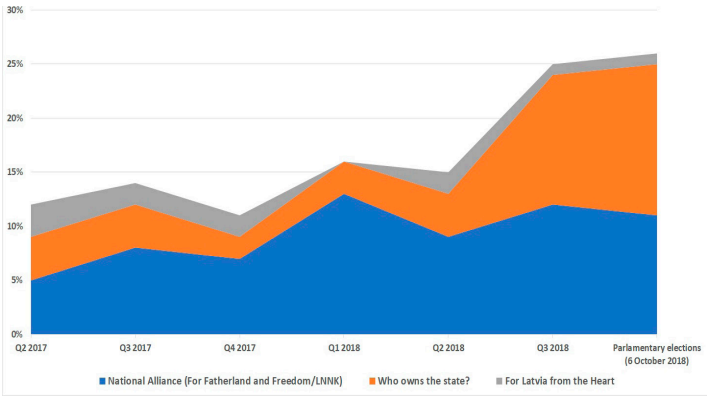
If we look to the east of Hungary, we still don't find any relevant populist power in **Romania**. **Bulgaria** is a different case, almost every second voter supports a populist power (49%). The boom of **GERB** that we experienced in the first half of the year has stopped: as in Q2, still 37% of Bulgarians back Boyko Borissov's right-wing governing party, just like we can't observe any shift in the support

3 Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union stipulates that „The European Council, acting by unanimity on a proposal by one third of the Member States or by the European Commission and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, may determine the existence of a serious and persistent breach by a Member State of the values referred to in Article 2 after inviting the Member State in question to submit its observations.”

for **United Patriots** (9%). On the contrary, the right-wing Volya has returned from insignificance and rose to 3 percent from zero.

In the Baltic states, populism is disquietingly expanding. Although there was no major shift in **Lithuania**, in **Latvia** the aggregated support for populists grew by 10 points. The main catalyst of this increase was the thunderous re-emergence of the **Who Owns The State?** (KPV LV): the populist party was once backed by 10 percent of voters in 2016, but after its recent agony the party leaders can once again confidently wait for the legislative elections of the country to be held in October with a vote share of 12% in the polls. The government member **National Alliance** has the same level of support as KPV LV which allows for the possibility that the right-wing party will lose a lot of seats in Saeima. The **For Latvia from the Heart's** 1 percent of support among voters may not be sufficient to enter the Parliament.

**Support of Latvian populist parties among likely voters
(between 2017 and 2018)**



Graph 5. (Source: Populism Tracker)

We can also observe a negative trend in **Estonia**: the **Estonian Centre Party** (25%), as well as the **Conservative People's Party of Estonia** (20%) increased its support by 2 and 3 points, respectively. It means that populism is increasingly emerging in Estonia, their aggregated support rose by 19 points since the European Elections of 2014.

But Estonia is not the only country with such a huge breakthrough of populists, in **Croatia** their aggregated support increased by 4 points during the summer and 16 points since the last EP elections. Both the **Human Blockade** and the **Milan Bandić 365** gained 2 points in polls since Q2, they are backed by 15% and 4% of Croatian voters, respectively.

Poland's governing party, the **Law and Justice** (PiS) boomed by 6 points in polls. The Polish government's reform of the courts is still on the table of the EU and President Duda's continuous attacks on the EU fuel the right-wing voters' emotions and result in a popularity of 49% for the populist party. **Kukiz'15** dropped 1 point and stands at 7% while **Wolność** has paled into insignificance.

The far-right **Freedom and Direct Democracy** in the **Czech Republic** lost almost half of their voters during the summer (decreasing from 8% to 5%), while the ruling party **ANO** (30%) and the **Czech Communist Party** (10%) are waiting for the municipal election from nearly the same position as they were before the summer holiday. We can't observe any major shift in the support for Slovakian populist powers, while in **Slovenia** only the **Slovenian National Party** lost 2 points within the last 3 months, the **Levice** still stands at 9%.



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Populism Reports

The past few years have seen a surge in the public support of populist, euroskeptical and radical parties throughout almost the entire European Union. In several member states, their popularity matches or even exceeds the level of public support of the centre-left. Even though the centre-left parties, think tanks and researchers are aware of this challenge, there is still more that could be done in this field. There is occasional research on individual populist parties in some member states, but there is no regular overview – updated on a quarterly basis – how the popularity of populist parties changes in the EU Member States, where new parties appear and old ones disappear.

That is the reason why FEPS and Policy Solutions have launched this series of reports, entitled 'Populism Report'.

- This report is edited by FEPS and Policy Solutions with the financial support of the European Parliament