

Towards the consolidation of a populist newsroom: Euroscepticism in 2009 EP elections in Austria

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Introduction

Austria belongs to those member states of the European Union where drawing on Eurobarometer a substantial part of the population is generally categorized as Eurosceptic expressing low degrees of support with European integration and its institutions (Commission of the European Union 2009). The Austrian political climate is further impaired by the permanent anti-system mobilisation of the late Jörg Haider and his party vassals in the FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) and BZÖ (Alliance for the Future of Austria). Developing a style of 'modern populism' in symbiosis with the mass media (McGuigan et al. 2005) these parties have come off in mobilising substantial parts of the electorate. Over the last two decades, the FPÖ has consolidated as a 'hard' Eurosceptic party fundamentally and regularly opposing European integration in terms of principle, scope and project (Fallend 2008). In this regard, Euroscepticism in Austria is strongly institutionalised and organised. Expressions of Euroscepticism in Austria are not unique and marginal but penetrating the core of the political system. Since 1999 there has been a stable percentage of around one quart of the Austrian population supporting explicit Eurosceptic parties in EP elections. Governmental parties instead were regularly defeated in European elections not being able to mobilise the electorate and loosing on issues such as national sovereignty, borders and foreigners. European parliamentary elections are also atypical in the sense of drawing the attention to political outsiders, who mobilise protest votes against political parties and the established system of political representation. The mainstreaming of Euroscepticism is manifested in generalised patterns of resistances mobilised against the deepening of European integration and enlargement. In the following, I will first give a brief historical account of Eurosceptic mobilisation in Austria. Secondly, I will explain the strong symbiosis between party mobilisation and media amplification as the principal explanatory variable for the enduring success and impact of Euroscepticism. The media survey of EU Parliamentary election campaigns in June 2009 will illustrate the case.

The historical roots of Euroscepticism in Austria

There is a notable shift in discussing European integration and Austria's role in an integrated Europe over the last two decades, which is related to Austria's peripheral position of forced neutrality during the Cold War and its unexpected return to European centrality after the fall of communism. After regaining sovereignty back in 1955, Austria stood apart from the process of Western integration. In contrast to the pre-war period when the majority of the population still wished a Union with Germany, the post-war truncated Austrian state became more than a practical arrangement. As a way of dealing with the guilt of the past, the Austrian *Sonderweg* was welcomed as a detachment from Nazi Germany and fostered the re-interpretation of German regionalist into Austrian national culture (Lepsius 1989). The new post-war Austria did democratically consolidate and established as a liberal market economy but, in contrast to Germany, did not develop a strong Western identity. Supranationalism as linked to the project of European integration was seen as an infringement of neutrality being at the heart of Austrian post-war identity (Pelinka 2002)

After the end of the Cold War, Austria's new central geographical position with open borders towards the East and its own capital only a few miles away from Bratislava and Budapest created mixed feelings among the Austrian population and an attitude of economic opportunism paired with cultural protectionism and strong reactions against 'unwanted' migrants from the East. The country's post war position in the periphery of Western Europe was not only the pretext for displacing the Nazi past. It also shielded Austria from its former 'colonies' at the East of Vienna, which were not exactly 'unknown territory' as many made believe after the end of the Cold War but became rather associated with the re-discovery of a specific historical and cultural burden. During the Cold War, Austria's negative attitudes towards the project of (West) European integration were nourished mainly by the negative stance of the left (including the governing Social Democrats SPÖ), which officially defended neutrality and anti-militarism behind the curtain of cultural closeness. After the Cold War, neutrality as the official alibi for social and cultural closure soon lost its impact in public debate shifting towards a more offensive and exclusive rhetoric. Euroscepticism turned from an issue of the political left into the favorite topic of right wing nationalist ideology.

The historical justification for not joining the EEC in the fifties was still hold valid, and, in fact, can be found in many of the discussions evolving around the accession of the country to the European Union in 1995 (Pelinka 2004: 211). After the fall of communism, the SPÖ

quickly turned from a defender of Austrian neutrality to a supporter of membership in the EU. In turn, the extreme right represented by the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) discovered the issue of Austrian neutrality to justify their hostility towards the opening of the borders towards the East and the sharing of sovereignty with Brussels. This takeover of the Eurosceptic issue by the Austrian right went hand in hand with the reframing of Austrian post-war history. The rejection of Western integration was now justified with a revisionist reading of history, the negation of Austria's guilt of the past and a rapprochement to Nazism and all-Germanism.

The populist strategy to mobilise EU opposition by reference to popular sentiments is facilitated by some particularities of the Austrian political system, which give a strong standing to direct elements of democracy through national referenda¹ and so-called popular initiatives (*Volksbegehren*).² The accession referendum in 1994 made clear that in spite of anti-European campaigning from both the right and the left, a stable majority of 66,6 per cent of the electorate (more than in any other country joining the EU in 1995) supported EU membership. In this sense, the referendum still reflected the consensual style that characterized Austrian post war politics. The electorate was (still) on the side of the political establishment and acknowledged the need for a reorientation of Austria and its rapprochement to Europe.

Although anti-EU campaigning during the accession referendum of 1994 was largely unsuccessful, the Eurosceptics succeeded to occupy important issues like resistance against deeper integration and enlargement. The possibility of popular initiatives gives the opposition, even though in a minority position, a powerful tool to oppose official governmental policies and guarantees high public attention and mobilisation. Four popular initiatives took place: *Österreich zuerst* (Austria first) in 1993, the *Volksbegehren Neue EU Abstimmung* 2000, the 'Veto gegen Temelin' (veto against Temelin, a nuclear power plant in the border area with Austria of the Czech Republic) in 2002 and the popular initiative "Österreich bleibt frei" (Austria remains free) in 2006 launched with the intention to incommode the Austrian Council Presidency. Even though the popular initiatives failed to attract substantial voters'

¹ National referenda are obligatory in the case of a total revision of the constitution and facultative or consultatory in cases of substantial or minor revisions. The constitutional referendum is initiated by the Parliament.

² Popular initiatives can be initiated by one mil of the Austrian population (approx. 8.000 people) and, once accepted, need to mobilize support in the form of at least 100.000 signatures to be further proceeded by the Parliament. The national government or the Parliament can however not be compelled to change legislation or to take action on the basis of the advise of the initiative.

attention they contributed to the mainstreaming of anti-foreigner and anti-EU discourse, often with openly racist contents and frequent reminiscences to Nazism.

Anti-system and anti-EU opposition in contemporary Austria is dominated by the FPÖ and its offshoot BZÖ (*Bündnis Zukunft Österreich*, Alliance for the Future of Austria). Unlike other countries where we can observe a mainstreaming of Euroscepticism as part of governmental strategies, the Austrian case is characterised by a strong system-people confrontation.

Euroscepticism has become an opposition strategy to support demagogues and minority parties' claims to side with the people. Pro-European attitudes are instead identified with a corrupt governing elite that betrays people's genuine interest. A Euroscepticism of the left that is dominant in other member states is no longer politically represented (though it can still be found as a position in discourse). The FPÖ learned to combine the anti-foreigner and the anti-EU agenda, which allowed them to hold the EU responsible for the incessant 'flux' of foreigners pervading the country and being particularly outspoken against enlargement (Pelinka 2006). Euroscepticism of the right is further nourished by the historical animosity against the Czech Republic and the unsettled question of the expulsion of German speaking minorities after the Second World War (the so called Benes Decrees) and the issue of a Nuclear Power Plant in the Austrian border area.

Right wing extremism in Austria was progressively expanding during the nineties luring substantial parts of the voters away from the two majoritarian parties ÖVP and SPÖ. In the October 1999 national elections, the FPÖ arrived for the first time second (coming within 290,000 votes to the first placed SPÖ) and, with the disapproval of Austria's European partners, entered into negotiation with the third placed ÖVP to form a governmental coalition. This right-wing turn of Austria was perceived by many as a breach in European values and as such provoked indignation and reactions against Austria in other member states (Van de Steeg 2006; Wodak and Pelinka 2002). In a joint declaration, the 14 governments of the EU member states instigated their colleague Schüssel from entering a coalition with the FPÖ and threatened with sanctions in case the FPÖ would be placed in government. After the presentation of the new Schüssel government in January 2000 the governments of the EU member states could however only agree to take diplomatic measures which excluded Austrian delegates from informal Council meeting. Nevertheless, these measures were generally referred to as 'sanctions' in the Austrian debate as well as in the debate in other Member States (van de Steeg 2006.). The adequacy of these 'sanctions' were heavily debated in Austria and in other member states and a Committee of three wise men was put in place to

check whether the new Austrian government would infringe EU laws. The wise men evaluated the sanctions as counterproductive and concluded in September 2000 that Austria had not violated any EU legislation. Political commentators in other member states were however still ready to declare Haider a Nazi and Austria a revisionist country that violated the European chore of values (Van de Steeg 2006). A campaign against Austria was fought by the media and by political commentators in other member states, treating the 'Haider case' as an issue that concerned the whole of Europe.³

The question to what extent the Haider debate contributed to the mainstreaming of Austrian Euroscepticism and strengthened the Euro-hostile attitude of a significant proportion of the Austrian population is discussed controversially in the literature. On the one hand, the impression that the EU sanctioned Austria (and the electoral choice of the Austrian people) prevailed and foreign reactions against the Austrian government had mainly negative repercussions within Austria solidifying the solidarity of the Austrian population with its government (an experience, which prevented European governments to take similar measures against unwanted governmental coalitions in other member states, notably in Italy). In response to the foreign sanctions, the national allegiance was strengthened whereas the left opposition could be blamed for being disloyal with Austria (Fallend 2008: 212). On the other hand, Pelinka (Pelinka 2004) evaluates Eurobarometer figures showing that support of European integration has not significantly fallen down in the aftermath of the 'sanctions'. With regard to the FPÖ one could also argue that Euroscepticism has become majoritarian before the new right government of 2000 took office. The ÖVP-FPÖ coalition government on the other hand sought normalisation with the EU, Haider himself damped down his anti-EU rhetorics and stepped back as the party leader in spring 2000 as a measure to appease the conflict. The monitoring of Austria by its European neighbors thus brought about the domestic ceasefire of Eurosceptic campaigning and the FPÖ shared the destiny of many populist opposition parties, who, once in government lost the appeal to the voters. The decline of the FPÖ continued also in the European elections of 2004 where Haider's party was reduced to 6,4 percent of the vote. Internal quarrels about leadership eventually resulted in the schism of the party with the new Alliance for the Future of Austria (*Bündnis Zukunft Österreich*, BZÖ) competing for right wing voters.

³ Risse and van de Steeg have investigated the Haider debate as a case for an evolving European public sphere, in which debates about shared values, identities and normative projects are made possible. Their results show that also indignation against Euroscepticism and the breach of shared values remains a strictly European phenomenon. The 'Haider debate' was clearly confined to Europe with US commentators taking a much more distanced stance.

The temporary crisis of the nationalist right in early 2000 is however not indicating its defeat. In programmatic terms, there has been little change in Eurosceptic rhetoric and mobilisation. In organisational terms as well, the new populist right soon regained its former strength (Pelinka 2006). Both FPÖ and BZÖ continue to profile with a right-wing programme campaigning against Europe,⁴ against foreigners and with reminiscences to Nazism. The electoral success of both parties in the 2006 and 2008 national elections shows that right wing populism is firmly established and rooted within the electorate. After the death of Jörg Haider, who continued to act as the chairman of the BZÖ until 2008 and remained a very popular governor of Carinthia, a reunion of the BZÖ with the FPÖ becomes more likely.

The 2009 EP election turnout shows a further radicalization with the right extremist and Eurosceptic parties back in favor of the electorate. As the following analysis will show, Euroscepticism is firmly established as the most prominent and most successful issue of partisan contestation with 35 per cent of the electorate giving the vote to an explicit Eurosceptic party.⁵ At the same time high abstention reveals the unwillingness to become engaged in defense of European integration.⁶ Austria is thus a clear example for how latent Eurosceptic perceptions and passive attitudes of the population measured through Eurobarometer need to be explained in relation to public mobilization and discourse. It is therefore essential to explore the realm of political communication in the Austrian public sphere. How do political actors address relevant publics and how is the issue of European integration framed in public discourse? The following analysis draws on an online media survey of debates on European integration during European Parliamentary election campaigns. In the first part of the analysis, an hypothesis for explaining the ‘unusual election result’ will be presented based on the thesis of media populism. In the second part, this hypothesis of media populism will be substantiated by a) outlining the salience and scope of online campaigning in the context of EU parliamentary elections beyond the background of the general contours of the political e-sphere in Austria, b) providing a classificatory scheme for assessing evaluations of EU-legitimacy and the mobilization of opposition to the EU.

Hypothesis: Media populism and the mobilisation of the electorate

⁴ The argumentative repertoire is very similar. In the last national elections the FPÖ propagated the exit of Austria from the EU, the BZÖ campaigned against the “paternalism from Brussels”.

⁵ Hans-Peter Martin got 17,6 percent, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) got 12,7 per cent and the Alliance for the Future of Austria got 5 per cent.

⁶ The abstention rate was 54 per cent, slightly below EU average.

How can the repeated gains of populist, anti-EU parties in EP election turnouts be explained? The post-war Austrian consociational model of democracy has been traditionally characterized by a low salience of class politics and a tendency to define the political community in terms of ethnic, exclusive criteria (Pelinka 2002). On the basis of longitudinal public opinion data, the Austrian electorate has been characterized as strongly obsessed with 'cultural anxiety' and particularly predisposed towards right wing extremist or xenophobic attitudes (Strasser 2008). This has laid the grounds to the revival of an 'old politics of identity', deeply rooted in the ethnocentric and culturalist orientations of the Austrian population and now given organisational form in the emergence of extremist party beyond the consociational model (Arwine and Mayer 2008; Pelinka 2002).

In this chapter, it is claimed that an explanatory framework for Austrian exceptionalism cannot rely solely on a measurement of political culture through individual attitudes and opinion polls. The Austrian case can only be fully understood through the impact of media discourse as accounting for the high salience of exclusive nationalism and Euroscepticism in Austria (Wodak 2002). In the Austrian case, mass media provide a necessary and permanent soundboard for populism and Euroscepticism (Plasser and Ulram 2003) 40). News coverage is filled with anti-EU stories and a daily scandalising of the EU takes place as part of the regular campaigning of political parties and the media.

In particular popular media formats played a crucial role in reproducing and reinventing exclusive national identity over the last two decades. Austria's development provides an outstanding example of 'media populism' to be held responsible for the growth of neo-populism also in other parts of Europe (Mazzoleni 2003). As reflected in the different contributions of this volume, different media structures and practices of news-making are also a good indicators for variances in expressions and organisational forms of Euroscepticism. With regard to media's role in European integration, media account for the public salience of the EU, its actors and institutions and media provide the basic knowledge that enables people to relate to and to evaluate the EU (Trenz 2008). Euroscepticism is in this sense related to particular modes of representing the EU and European integration in the media (see the introduction to this volume).

One particularity of the Austrian case is the strong standing of popular and populist mass media in supporting and amplifying the direct voice of the people against the political establishment (Plasser and Ulram 2003)Trenz 2011). In a populist newsroom, tabloids contribute to the polarisation of the audience. In terms of content and quality of political news, the tabloidization of the Austrian newspaper market is a strong constraint to political

communication. Tabloid newspapers have established market monopolies giving low and highly selective salience to European and foreign news and emphasizing mainly conflict and national interest (Mokre and Bruell 2006; Sauerwein et al. 2006). From the popular, anti-elitist stance of tabloid newspapers, Europe is a prime target of anti-system campaigning. To explain the election turnout, we expect that parties from the fringes of the political spectrum must have profited from substantial media support. The online public sphere would thus replicate the dominant patterns of media populism, systematically damaging the image of mainstream political parties and supporting an anti-system mobilisation of the electorate.

In the existing literature, Austria's media populism is found to be mainstream, not marginal. Plasser and Ulram (2004: 30) spoke already ten years ago of the consolidation of a populist newsroom characterized by an editorial logic that tends to pick up anti-immigrant and anti-elitist topics and amplify popular prejudices. Media populism is described as defensive in the sense of emphasizing the core values of peoplehood over universal rights and a notion of popular sovereignty that is not compromised by any supranational authority of law and rights. It is offensive in the sense of attacking the political elites for having lost their ability to connect to the people. Media populism is thus relying on a strongly exclusive notion of national solidarity based on a culturally specific notion of peoplehood. The basic solidarity of the national community is threatened by the Europanisation of markets and law. It is further threatened by the erosion of borders and the presence of immigrants. Following this line, the media reasserts the national community by building on exclusive categories and negating the basic rights of the 'intruders'. The Austrian media are made responsible for the spread of right wing extremism and xenophobia (Wodak and Pelinka 2002).

In the case of news coverage about the European Union, newspaper populism strongly correlates with anti-Europeanism, which works across the ideological divide and traditional party cleavages. The *Kronenzeitung*, for instance, does not take a clear ideological stance in terms of partisan affiliation but has regularly expressed a strong anti-Europeanism.⁷ Also other tabloids tend to frame the EU in negative terms. Among the quality newspapers, *der Standard* is the only EU friendly newspaper in Austria. Others, like *die Presse* or regional newspapers, are neutral with regard to daily EU coverage but critical with enlargement (Trenz 2005: 242f.; Sauerwein et al. 2006). When circulation is taken into account, newspapers, which defend more or less openly a Eurosceptic agenda, reach approximately 60 per cent of

⁷ This pattern of volatile ideological affiliation but constant anti-Europeanism of the tabloids is also reported from other European countries, notably from *The Sun* in the United Kingdom (Price 2009).

the Austrian population while European friendly newspapers are read by just five percent of the Austrians.

For the 2009 EP election campaigns, the hypothesis of media populism can be reformulated as follows: in terms of issues, we expect that EU contestation will take place in the dimension of defining the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the polity and less in scope and institutional or constitutional design. In terms of actors, we expect a dominance of Eurosceptic party actors in alliance with citizens evaluating the EU/European integration in a dominantly negative way. In terms of justifications of Eurosceptic evaluations, we expect that the populist frame is mainly supported by references to democracy, the demarcation of ‘we the people’ against the other. This other will be variably defined as the ‘traitors of the political left’ and their ‘cosmopolitanism’ (domestic) and EU-elites, Islam, Turkey or Eastern Europe (external). Finally, we expect the dominance of a tabloid style of reporting about the EU with frequent breaches of the maxims of providing sufficient information, low connectivity of debates and transgressions in style or violations of netiquette.

Dimensions of Euroscepticism

In the following, we use the quantitative findings of our survey to qualify media populism in relation to European integration. This is done by systematically reconstructing who contests the legitimacy of the EU by raising what type of topics and concerns in the debate. Evaluative statements of EU legitimacy are further categorized along the lines of supporting or opposing particular dimensions of European integration in principle, the current EU’s institutional set-up or its future project. Finally, we look at the type of justification that is used to support or to oppose these polity dimensions of the EU.

Who contests EU-legitimacy?

In a first approach to our data, we group the campaigning actors who have become salient in either contesting or defending EU legitimacy. Results point to a low intervening role of the journalists who do not take part actively in campaigning. This is expectable with regard to the traditional role understanding of journalists as neutral brokers of the political process.

Opinion-making in both quality and tabloid news outlets is restricted to comments. Also journalists of the populist *Kronenzeitung* do not actively campaign against the EU but either leave the floor to partisan actors or take a more passive role in selecting negative news on the EU. More surprisingly, also political bloggers do not take an active part in EP campaigning.

The explanation for this is to be searched, on the one hand, in the low salience of the issue in political blogs, on the other hand, in the shift of target of anti-populist campaigning, which is not directed against the EU but against the taboo breaking style of campaigning of the radical right. The blogging community used the context of EP elections not for a discussion of EU legitimacy but as a pretext to open a battle against the populist right in Austria. Blogging is seen as the antidote to populism as expressed by mainstream tabloids exposing the EU hostility. In most blog entries, EU polity evaluations appear as indirect quotations with the intention of the blogger to express outrage or irony against the leaders of the Austrian populist right and their style of campaigning.

		Actor			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Journalist / Blogger	2	1.1	1.6	1.6
	Citizen(s)	79	44.6	63.2	64.8
	Party Actor	41	23.2	32.8	97.6
	Non-State Actor	3	1.7	2.4	100.0
	Total	125	70.6	100.0	
Missing	System	52	29.4		
Total		177	100.0		

		Actor Scope			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	National	118	66.7	94.4	94.4
	Foreign	3	1.7	2.4	96.8
	EU	4	2.3	3.2	100.0
	Total	125	70.6	100.0	
Missing	System	52	29.4		
Total		177	100.0		

In terms of participants, we observe a strong symbiosis between media populism and party campaigning. Media populism is not self-standing and running against political parties but constantly fed by national opposition parties who campaign for voters attention. Journalists, especially of the tabloid *Kronenzeitung*, are not actively writing against the political elites, they are even passive in framing debates and do not step forward as active opinion-makers against Europe. Media populism is thus linked to an editorial policy of selecting and amplifying political messages and contention not the active role of journalists in contention. It consists in painting a political reality not of substantial policies and choices but of protagonists fighting for power, emotions and credibility.

Both newspapers (quality and tabloid) use party actors as their main source of information and as the legitimate voice that evaluates EU legitimacy. EP election campaigns in the internet are fought by domestic parties. MEP candidates have a low salience compared to domestic party leaders. The only visible EU actor was the independent MEP candidate Hans-Peter Martin who defended his seat successfully through explicit Eurohostile campaigning. Non-partisan actors or other EU actors and institutions remain marginal. Also news coverage of election campaigns from other member states is restricted and foreign political actors are only given voice in exceptional circumstances. Debates in online fora are exclusively carried forward by citizens, who remain among themselves, do not enter into dialogue with other political actors or journalists and do also not refer systematically to statements of political actors (measured, for instance, through indirect quotations of political actors' statement as a reference point for the unfolding of online discussions).

The tabloidisation of political discourse had a clear exclusive effect affecting mainstream political parties and rational arguments that were not framed in tabloid style. This explains the invisibility of the Green party which was mainly present as a target of populism but not as an agenda setter in its own right. Online media do not change this general pattern, they provide alternative media, e.g. political blogs to fight populism but in terms of salience of political communication, the populist newsroom is largely reproduced.

There is no visible campaigning effect in the small sample in terms of the gradual intensification of the debate. Salience and participation remains at an equal level with a peak around the election days. The sequencing of debates matters only with regard to EU polity evaluations, which are mainly found in the campaigning period and drop significantly after the elections. There are also no salient issues that are repeatedly taken up to promote more

consistent debates of topics of shared concern. News-making was rather advanced through arbitrary issue selection by the journalists with news stories that were often unrelated to political events and mainly served the purpose of indirectly promoting the editorial line of the newspaper. As an example, two days before the elections, the *Kronenzeitung* published a leading article, to blame the 'luxury pensions' of EU officers. Hans-Peter Martin was given ample opportunity to claim that in times of economic crisis, Austria must make sure that the privileges of EU officers are restricted and announced to take measures against the excess of privileges.

In terms of actors' coalitions, governmental and opposition parties involved in EP election campaigning in Austria did not agree on a common agenda for debates but instead addressed their constituents with separate topics and through different media channels mainly following the line of government-opposition. The *Kronenzeitung* became the principal forum of the three opposition parties to address and also to actively involve their electorate. *Der Standard*, was used for placing an anti-populist agenda and raised quality standards against the tabloidization of the Austrian news market.

In terms of actors' dynamics and grouping, the Agenda of the EP elections of June 2009 was largely set by the aggressive campaigning of the two right wing populist parties (FPÖ and BfÖ) and the campaign of a single person, Hans-Peter Martin. The populist opposition parties took the opportunity to raise fundamental questions about the EU. They chose an 'essentialist strategy' leading straightforwardly to a Eurosceptic agenda: raising the 'existential' questions about membership, the rationale of integration, and the scope, authority and inclusiveness of the present and future EU polity. Among the 'essentialist' topics raised by the two right wing extremist parties, the question of the borders of Europe and the inclusiveness towards new members ranked highest. Resentments against the new member states survived especially in user comments where 'Eastern European' were encountered with hostility and made generally responsible for economic decline, crime, and public disorder. The exclusive and populist rhetoric was also found in the debate on Turkish membership. Since all political parties except for the Greens expressed themselves against membership of Turkey in the EU, a further radicalization of the debate became necessary for the populist right to distinguish its own position on Turkey. The distinctive feature was found in islamophobia. Like in other European countries, Turkish membership instigated a general debate on Islam as an imaginary enemy that was seen as threatening the political community both from the inside and the outside.

This anti-EU agenda was also central in the campaign of Hans-Peter Martin but with a different focus. Martin was the leader of the Austrian ESP group in 1999 and after the break with his party defended successfully his seat in the 2004 elections with his own list "Hans-Peter Martin" – For genuine control and transparency in Brussels" (*Liste Dr. Hans-Peter Martin – Für echte Kontrolle in Brüssel*). In the 2009 election campaign, Martin presented himself as a 'populist of the middle' and a 'long-standing crusader against EU money wastage'.⁸ Martin became a symbolic figure for the fight against elites and alleged power abuses and corruption. His call to defend the ordinary people from the 'power abuse' of the Brussels bureaucrats got decisive media support with excerpts from his book 'The European Trap' published in a weekly column of the *Kronenzeitung*.

How is Euroscepticism responded by mainstream political parties? Media debates in both newspapers leave no doubt that these campaigns were not well received and condemned by the political establishment for its blatant right-extremist, racist and anti-Semitic contents. Governmental parties did not campaign with positive EU messages in defense of European integration. There is no explicit pro-European campaign but an anti-populist campaign attacking the populists. Significantly, this campaign is not even lead by political parties, but one of the most salient actors is the church which strongly opposed the use of Christian symbols by the right wing radicals.

The anti-populist response is not a defence (in the sense of endorsing the value of European integration and the legitimacy of the EU) but a counter attack which challenges the personal integrity of the populist as a legitimate participant of debate. Since the populist right has placed itself beyond the pale of civilised public discourse, any response in substance would mean to accept company with the demagogue. That is why mainstream politicians shun, so far as they can, from entering a debate on 'essence'. They have no other choice than to ignore the existential questions raised by the demagogue as inappropriate or politically incorrect and to attack the personal credibility and integrity of the political opponent. They chose a 'reasoning strategy' calling upon the 'rational voter'. While anti-EU evaluations are essential, i.e. directed against the EU polity, the counter mobilisation is personalised, i.e. defaming the political opponent on the basis of style and tactics. This leads to a highly polarised debate of fundamental dissent: the political adversary is not recognised as a legitimate actor with whom to enter into a debate about substantial policy issues and solutions. The opponent is defined as

⁸See: <http://www.hp martin.net/>

racist and xenophobic and therefore excluded with 'good reasons' from the community of democratic parties.

This refusal by mainstream political parties and government to enter into a debate about essence has fatal consequences for the media representation of EP election campaigning. The re-setting of the terms in which the debate about the 'essence' of European integration was set by the populist right does not take place. The exclusive strategy of the political establishment is not successful to break the hegemony of the Eurosceptic voice in the media. It rather achieves the opposite: a non debate on Europe. As a consequence, media reality is detached from political reality. What becomes salient is alleged corruption and acquisitiveness of MEPs, accession of Turkey and even of Israel. The European Parliament is discussed in terms of corrupt and overpaid MEPs, who are seen as the betrayers of national interest, elitist and fundamentally undemocratic. With this, the basic legitimacy of the European Union as a political entity is negated. The European Parliament is not seen as the palladium of European democracy but quite to the opposite as the quagmire of corruption and even crime. MEP's are personally attacked and portrayed as criminals and not as representatives of the people. We can call this 'aggressive Euroscepticism', an extremism, which in the Austrian case turns into the main voice that represents Europe in the media.

From the perspective of media populism, it is however precisely this scandalising effect that attracts voters' attention. After all, and in light of alternative topics for campaigning, the FPÖ populist strategies were highly successful in setting the media agenda and imposing the topics and style of debate on other actors. A strong negativism in evaluating the EU is rewarded with high media attention. More balanced judgments or positive evaluations of EU polity worth have little news value (20 per cent as compared to 80 per cent negative evaluations of the EU). On the other hand, EU hostility was highly visible but not necessarily reported in an affirmative way. For instance, Bundespräsident Fischer strongly criticized anti-Semitism in the campaign of the FPÖ against Israel's membership turning thus the debate from essence to style and personal attributes of the offenders. Such a statement does not rescue the offended (making a positive statement about the EU) but tries to damage the reputation of the offender. By making extremist statements, the populist right thus precludes further debates on European Integration. The Eurosceptic parties maintain the monopoly of interpreting the EU while other actors in the campaign mainly scandalize the populist style of campaigning.

Finally, our data allows to conclude on the users' perceptions of Europe and interventions in the debate. Citizens' commentators are, in fact, the most salient actor category that expresses opinions in EU online debates. Our survey indicates that a substantial part of the users were ready to take up the topics raised by the populist opposition and to debate the EU in 'essentialist' terms. EP election campaigns are thus not merely about domestic politics. The electorate is ready to debate the EU and political opposition parties successfully raise EU topics in campaigning. Our survey also shows that this general willingness of the electorate to become engaged in EU debates corresponds with a likelihood to express negative attitudes and discontent with the EU and its performance. The governmental strategy to ban such debates, instead, is less successful in terms of users' resonance. Without providing counter arguments, it even risks to be counter-effective leaving the field of EU debates to the Eurosceptic contenders.

Evaluations of EU legitimacy

In a second step, we categorize the targets of EU evaluative statements in Austria, which can contain a positive or negative evaluation of the EU in principle, in terms of its present institutional or constitutional design or in terms of future project. One recurrent feature of the Austrian debate is first of all the almost complete absence of positive evaluations of EU legitimacy. The principle of integration is not defended but barely contested. In terms of polity and project, the EU finds few defenders but many principled opponents. European debates are further characterized by low levels of contestation within one medium but a strong polarisation between different media and their audiences.

In terms of frequency, contestations of EU legitimacy are dominantly based on contesting the inclusiveness of the EU/European integration in terms of present constitutional and institutional design (polity) and project. This addresses two interdependent aspects: On the one hand, evaluations of EU legitimacy are based on democracy, defined not in terms of rights but in relation to the populist idea of a defense of the sovereignty of the people against the EU and political elites in general. There is the widespread feeling that European integration has gone too far in terms of deepening and widening. The Lisbon Treaty is generally rejected without going into details of its provisions. Past rounds of enlargement are seen as the main cause for the malaise of the EU. As a general remedy, popular sovereignty should be restituted by re-nationalising the EU. Strategies for democratising the EU and its institutions are often not perceived as a potential solution but rather as an amplification of the

problem. On the other hand, the inclusiveness of the EU is contested on the basis of membership that should remain restricted to the core, exclude the periphery and draw strong borders towards the outside. This explains the strong correlation between anti-EU discourse and anti-islamism. The focus of this debate is on a potential membership of Turkey, which is fiercely opposed by all political parties (except the Greens) but also on illegal immigration, crime associated with foreigners and security. The borders between anti-Islamism and racism are fluent, transgressions in the form of explicit racist statements by political actors and candidates are frequent.

Principle of Integration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Positive	6	3.4	4.8	4.8
	Negative	27	15.3	21.6	26.4
	N/A	92	52.0	73.6	100.0
	Total	125	70.6	100.0	
Total		177	100.0		

EU Polity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	5	2.8	4.0	4.0
	Level - Negative	13	7.3	10.4	14.4
	Scope - Positive	2	1.1	1.6	16.0
	Scope - Negative	8	4.5	6.4	22.4
	Inclusiveness - Positive	6	3.4	4.8	27.2
	Inclusiveness - Negative	32	18.1	25.6	52.8
	N/A	59	33.3	47.2	100.0
	Total	125	70.6	100.0	
Total		177	100.0		

Project of Integration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	1	.6	.8	.8
	Level - Negative	6	3.4	4.8	5.6
	Scope - Positive	1	.6	.8	6.4
	Scope - Negative	2	1.1	1.6	8.0
	Inclusiveness - Positive	13	7.3	10.4	18.4
	Inclusiveness - Negative	45	25.4	36.0	54.4

N/A	57	32.2	45.6	100.0
Total	125	70.6	100.0	
Total	177	100.0		

Table xx indicates the complexity of EU evaluative statements in online debates. It is assumed, that arguments seeking to contest the legitimacy of the EU need to be not only public and generally accessible, they also need to meet the requirement of sufficiency (Morgan 2005: 38 ff.). In order to comply with this discursive standard, we claim that EU legitimization discourse embraces evaluations in terms of principle, polity and project. The exchange of arguments and justifications must be organised in a way to show that a) the principle of trans/supranational integration is defensible (i.e. there is a justifiable reason that we are better/worse off in doing things together), b) the institutional/constitutional arrangement fits (there is a justifiable product in terms of guaranteeing the general compliance with the principle), and c) the project is ideationally or materially supported (there are shared goals that drive the process of future integration).

Principle of Integration			Project of Integration							
			Level - Positive	Level - Negative	Scope - Positive	Scope - Negative	Inclusiveness - Positive	Inclusiveness - Negative	N/A	Total
Positive	EU Polity	Level - Positive					0	0	2	2
		Inclusiveness - Negative					0	1	0	1
		N/A					2	0	1	3
		Total					2	1	3	6
Negative	EU Polity	Level - Negative		2				1	2	5
		Scope - Negative		0				1	0	1
		Inclusiveness - Positive		0				0	1	1
		Inclusiveness - Negative		0				2	2	4
		N/A		0				1	15	16
		Total		2				5	20	27
N/A	EU Polity	Level - Positive	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
		Level - Negative	1	1	0	1	0	0	5	8
		Scope - Positive	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
		Scope - Negative	0	1	0	0	1	0	5	7
		Inclusiveness - Positive	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	5
		Inclusiveness - Negative	0	0	0	0	4	7	16	27
		N/A	0	2	0	1	4	32	1	40
		Total	1	4	1	2	11	39	34	92

The results point to the low complexity of the debate, in which arguments relating to principle, polity and project are not interrelated but isolated and self-standing. Evaluative statements are typically organised in a way to maximise the effects of publicity at the cost of sufficiency of argumentation. For that purpose, the main message needs to be focused and typically embraces only one of the three dimensions of evaluating EU legitimacy. There is also no difference between positive and negative evaluations of EU legitimacy in meeting the requirement of sufficiency. To the contrary, the contestation of EU legitimacy tends to be even less complex than the denunciation. Only in seven instances, a complex evaluation is delivered comprising all the three dimensions of EU legitimacy in terms of principle, polity and project and all these instances are categorized as Eurosceptic. One reason for this low complexity of EU justificatory discourse is given by the specificity of user commenting. The majority of EU legitimacy evaluations in our sample are found in user comments. These are frequently self-standing and not supported by a more sophisticated argumentation or justification of EU legitimacy in the main news article.

Justifications

After having reconstructed the targets of EU-polity contestations, we need to analyze more closely the type of justifications that are used to contest EU legitimacy. What kind of repertoire of justifications informs the critical practices of defending (challenging) EU polity worth in media discourse?

From the hypothesis of media populism, we would expect a dominance of evaluation emphasizing elements of national sovereignty, community and solidarity. This is clearly reflected in table xx with a dominance of evaluations relating to democracy followed by culture and, to a lesser extent, economic prosperity. A more in depth analysis of the evaluative statements justified in terms of democracy reveals that democracy is not defined in inclusive terms of personal rights, good governance and justice to be promoted by the EU but in terms of inclusion/exclusion of the political community and the restitution of popular sovereignty against the EU.. What concerns is not the democratic design of the polity and its scope of action but the defence of the political community, its borders and integrity.

Political actors and users converge in their use of justifications of evaluating EU legitimacy. This indicates that the concerns and expectations are shared among the partisan actors who lead the election campaign and the potential voters, who comment upon European integration in the discussion forums of the news sites. There is however a noticeable discrepancy between the official discourse of legitimation employed by EU elites and the domestic EU debates unfolding in the media. Attempts to legitimize the EU as a functional arrangement or as a welfare and security community in times of global crisis are not reflected in media discourse. EP election campaigns are mainly used to face the EU with regular demands of democracy, and the respect of cultural diversity raised by domestic actors and citizens and amplified through the media.

Justification of Worth

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Democracy	35	19.8	28.0	28.0
	Culture	20	11.3	16.0	44.0
	Necessity	8	4.5	6.4	50.4
	Economic Prosperity	13	7.3	10.4	60.8
	Safety	5	2.8	4.0	64.8
	Other	2	1.1	1.6	66.4

N/A	42	23.7	33.6	100.0
Total	125	70.6	100.0	
Total	177	100.0		

One recurrent pattern of Eurosceptic evaluations justified in terms of democracy is the expression of the will of the people against the elites. To understand the particular ways this citizens-elite divide is activated, it is not sufficient to point at the deficiencies of intermediation. The perception of the citizens-elite divide is not simply a consequential effect of real deficits and procedural shortcomings in the communication between the EU (or the Austrian government respectively) and its citizens. We rather need to reconstruct the primordial and mythical notion of the people that is underlying such conceptions. Following the dominant logics of media populism the Austrian people are portrayed as the ‘suppressed majority’, which suffer from foreign rule. Anti-Europeanism is an intuition, which does not need to be grounded in sophisticated argumentation. The ‘genuine’ sentiments and emotions of the people have a higher standing than the ‘artificial arguing of the intellectuals and the elites. The populist leader is not expected to enter into a political debate that tests different options, is open to new information or seeks understanding. The leader is supported precisely because she rejects the logic of rational debate and fair game. Following the populist logic, the meaning of leadership consists in giving voice to the speechless. It consists in representing and advocating those who are not able to express their diffuse fears and emotions. The kind of trust and charisma the populist leader builds, is relying entirely on the image of being ‘one of us’, not distinguished by office, higher education, elite attitudes or extravagant life styles.⁹

The two right wing populist parties added to these elements of anti-elitism an exclusive and xenophobic rhetoric that replaces complex justifications with simple symbols and slogans. The FPÖ’s style of campaigning consisted in vilifying other religions and serving anti-Semitic prejudices (the possibility of EU membership of Israel). The campaign has also focused on religion on several other occasions. The party’s leader Strache drew attention by waving a crucifix at a party rally meant as a sign of protection against the ‘threat’ of foreigners and Islam. Another campaign slogan on posters and newspaper ads, “The West in Christian hands” (*Abendland in Christenhand*), also drew high public and media attention and

⁹ The leader of the BZÖ Stadler, a lawyer of profession, used the title “advocate of the people” in campaigning and addressed the voters with ‘mails from the advocate of the people’. After an Austrian court proclaimed an injunction against his abuse of title, he clarified that he would only assume this function as the ‘advocate of the people’ in Brussels.

was strongly rejected by high authorities of the Catholic Church, emphasizing, in turn, the inclusiveness of Christianity..

The possibility of membership of Turkey in the EU was regularly combined with the expression of fears of the 'islamisation' of Austrian society. In analogy to a Schmittian conception of Europe, Islam as the mythic enemy is found both as an open threat and as a secrecy and conspiracy (McCormick 1999: 93) 93. It further allows political entrepreneurs to make use of both liberal-progressive (defense of free speech, equality, anti-discrimination) and conservative-culturalist (Christendom) arguments that found a broad resonance within all strata of the population (Schneiders 2009).

The external enemy is further needed in order to identify the internal enemy of the people, i.e. the 'cosmopolitan elites' that were made responsible for the 'flux' of foreigners, In one letter to the Austrian voters by the self-appointed 'advocate of the people' Stadler this link is elaborated as follows:

„Ihr Asylanten, und besonders jene unter euch, die uns auf der Tasche liegen, die kriminell sind und sich nicht integrieren wollen. Ihr könnt euch bei Brüssel herzlich bedanken. Bedanken dafür, dass die EU eine Richtlinie herausgegeben hat, die unsere Asylgesetze massiv aufweicht und damit euch Asylanten Tür und Tor nach Österreich öffnet.“¹⁰

In similar terms, Turkish membership is often not taken up as an issue of debate but merely a reference point to mark a position in partisan contestation. To insinuate that someone is in favor of Turkish membership disqualifies her and turns her into an enemy. Political opponents are often categorized for the attitude they take towards Turkish membership. Any position in favor of Turkish membership disqualifies the political opponent as an enemy (*Volksverräter*, *Nestbeschmutzer*) of the Austrian people. Being Turkey friendly becomes a negative personal attribute. The SPÖ and the ÖVP are called anti-Austria parties and giving the vote to a political party, which is in favor of Turkish membership (the Greens), is considered as an act of treachery that disqualifies the citizen as insane:

„Eine Partei an die Spitze zu wählen die für einen Türkeibeitritt und für das neue Asylgesetz ist, da gehört schon ein bißerl Blödsinn dazu... Strache hat zugelegt, ja aber leider zu wenig“¹¹

Following the populist logic of argumentation, the accusation of being Anti-Austrian insinuates the breakdown of the system of representation and the return to real democracy

¹⁰ http://www.bzoe.pixelpoint.biz/assets/files/Kampagnen/EUWahl08/Post_vom_VA_3_Asylanten.pdf (last accessed 28.04.10).

¹¹ Extract from user comments at Kronenzeitung.at

through the direct empowerment of the people. EU bureaucrats and representatives are seen as dissociated from the people and allied with the enemy. This corresponds with the general anti-elitist and anti-parliamentarian tone of media populism, which emphasizes the legitimacy of the direct voice of the people over representation in the Parliament. Especially, the European Parliament is regularly portrayed as a breeding ground for corruption, not as a site for democracy. On the commenting pages, users call for *Echte Volksvertreter* (genuine representative of the people), instead of *EU-Verräter* (EU-traitors).

Of particular interest is further the type of self-justificatory rhetoric unfolding on the commenting pages through which users reassert the rightfulness and authority of their opinion through the applause from the user community. The citizen commentator takes here the role as the ‘surrogate representative’ of the people (Mansbridge 2003). By placing the comment on the public site, she claims to speak for the people as a whole, to be just one of the crowd who stands up to express the genuine feelings of the commons by the use of simplified language, the expression of outrage and emotions and the rejection of rational argument. Opinions expressed on the commenting page do therefore not need to be sophisticated, they are legitimate and representative precisely because they are articulated through emotional language and spontaneous thought. In line with this, users are also found to strongly identify with the newspaper, which they chose for their encounters. Other readers are seen as like minded and potential allies who distinguish themselves, e.g. from the audience of another medium. Part of this imagination of the audience is also the attribution of legitimacy in numeric terms: 3 million readers cannot get it wrong as one user at Kronenzeitung.at claims. Media populism is in this sense acclaimed as the more genuine and more authentic voice of the people that stands higher than the populism of political parties:

„Gerade weil sie unabhängig ist, kann die Krone es sich leisten, mal diesen und mal einen anderen Kandidaten bei div. Wahlen zu unterstützen. Viele andere Tageszeitschriften, sind ja nur neidig, weil sie nicht annähernd 3 Mio. Leser für sich beanspruchen können. Viele dieser Leser werden nur allzu gern als naiv abgestempelt, ihrer Meinung keinen Wert beigemessen: Für den Politischen Prozess dürften demnach lediglich die Meinungen selbsternannter geistiger Eliten (z.B. Standard-Leser) gelten“

The commenting of the users is elevated here to the daily plebiscite of the people. The ‘We’ of 8 million Austrians is put on stage against ‘alienated elites’ and ‘foreign rule’. This is populism in its pure form, which endorses the absolute value of popular sovereignty that is not compromised by representation, universal rights and justification. Media populism is in this sense more than a successful market strategy to create strong reader identification. It is

also an exclusive nationalist ideology, which puts the reader central stage as the avant-garde of the people who is empowered to fight for the renovation of Austria against the multiple internal and external threats to its unity: “Austria, wake up”.¹²

„WIR brauchen etwas Neues, WIR sind das Volk, WIR wollen Mitbestimmung, WIR sind aufgerufen etwas zu verändern, ÖSTERREICHER WEHRT EUCH - gegen die unmenschliche Politik dieses Landes, gegen die Milliardenzuschüsse an die Ultrareichen, gegen Sozialabbau und gegen den Ausverkauf Österreichs. WIR wollen Demokratie - DEMOS = VOLK , KRATIE = MACHT , WIR sind 8 Millionen und lassen uns von ein paar Hundert Politikern unterdrücken, ÖSTERREICH ERWACHE!“

„Es geht um uns, es geht um Österreich, wachen wir auf bevor wir in der Einheits - EU unsere Identität verlieren - tun WIR etwas , bevor es für UNS zu spät ist.“

Conclusion

The Austrian 2009 EP election e-sphere is found to offer a platform for the placement of negative news and opinions on the EU. The main professional news sites analysed are dominated by political actors who launch campaigns against the EU and mobilise the people against the elites. In particular one main newspaper (*Kronenzeitung*) is divulging EU hostility through the campaigning messages of Eurosceptic parties and the active promotion of one single candidate (Hans-Peter Martin) as the main commentator on the EU. Anti-EU campaigns amplified by this tabloid newspaper unfolded on the basis of clichés and prejudices against the European Parliament and the EU in general, often enriched with the additional flavor of lies, insults and untenable accusations against EU protagonists or political representatives in general.

Apart from anti-elitism, a further characteristic of the EU debate in Austria is a strong expression of exclusivism and xenophobia. In the case of the EU as a foreign actor, an additional threshold of civicness of public discourse is overcome in the sense of focusing on the EU as the external enemy that is not protected by and that lacks recognition as a political entity. Eurosceptic audiences and xenophobic audiences largely coincide and Eurohostile discourse is often also xenophobic discourse with popular tabloids printing xenophobia, racist and antisemitic content. In spite of this strong overlap between xenophobic and Eurohostile discourse, a manipulation of the newspaper by right wing extremists can be excluded and the link between the media and political parties remains mostly indirect. The newspaper

¹² The last is a direct reminiscence to the *Deutschland erwache* slogan which was used by the NSDAP to win the 1933 elections

maintains its autonomy and is rather ready to serve the Eurohostile audience on its own account. It serves and at the same time creates a market of populism, anti-Europeanism, xenophobia and also anti-democracy.

Symptomatic for the Austrian debate is further the indifference of key actors towards political facts and the truthfulness of their assertions. The dynamic of campaigning is driven by the constant and systematic invention of political facts by the populist opposition parties and the denunciation of these lies by the governmental coalition. Public discourse is structured in a way that 'EU critical actors' have a license to exaggerate and to simplify, which is seen as legitimate to reduce the complexity of the issues and to explain the EU to the voters, whereas EU proponents, which stick to complex facts and details, appear as intransparent and elitist. To raise an 'invented issue' like the accession of Israel to the EU is then more successful than sophisticated exploration of the borders of Europe. Lies or exaggerations become a systematic element of a particular form of polity contestation, which is primarily concerned with essence and identity not with contents and experience.

Overall, these findings confirm our hypothesis of a strong correlation between expressions of Euroscepticism and media populism. Media populism is crucial for understanding the success of Eurosceptic parties in elections and the polarization of Austrian society. The Austrian EP election e-sphere largely reproduces the offline populist newsroom dominated by a tabloid style of news and opinion making. It reaches a mass audience that is made up of substantial parts of the Austrian population and that is already used to consume right wing populist messages and negative, anti-elitist news (Plasser and Ulram 2003). The critical point is that apart from its scope and impact on opinion making, online media populism also empowers the audience through more direct forms of participation and involvement in online debates. The tabloid readers find in the online newspapers not only the confirmation of its opinions but also the opportunity to actively express their negative attitudes and to exchange opinions with like minded. The internet offers a forum for this audience to express their negative views and to unfold hate speech against the EU and against political elites in general.

The activation of the audience through online formats adds a new dimension to media populism, which is no longer relying on the passive representation of the unitary force of the people by the demagogue. Through the dynamic unfolding of user debates, online media populism constitutes a self-referential resonance body for the voice of the people. The online medium offers a platform for the imagination of the community of the people that is only

randomly relying on inputs from political journalists or political representatives. As a matter of fact, both journalists and politicians are excluded from online user fora. The protagonists are the users themselves who meet many like-minded and mutually reinforce their opinions against the elites and against the political establishment.

EP elections are in this sense systematically exploited to formulate and to mobilize a populist agenda of anti-politics that is aimed at undermining the core values of liberal democracy (Crouch). If liberal politics are made up of competition, pluralism, incrementalism, justifications and the testing of arguments, populist anti-politics involves, a) the disillusionment about what is to be believed the world of deeply corrupted politics and politicians, b) the rejection of complexity and the trust in easy solutions to political problems, c) the rejection of pluralism of political parties and its replacement by the unitary representation of the people, d) the endorsement of the absolute value of popular sovereignty that is not compromised by universal rights and justification (Hogan 2007; Marden 2003; Mete 2010);

The counter strategy of established political parties against populist, anti-EU campaigning is found to occupy different topics and to use different media channels. *Der Standard*, the first online newssite in terms of salience but only the eighth most sold newspaper in terms of print copies, is used for placing an anti-populist agenda and raising quality standards against the tabloidization of the Austrian news market. Comparing the online presentation of *derStandard.at* and *Krone.at*, the impression prevails of a divided society. Both newspapers stand for two irreconcilable camps of the audience which do not debate with each other in any meaningful sense but treat each other as enemies. European topics and debates are one field where these strong cleavages and the incommunicability between the readers of different media products are sharpened.

In this sense, we must conclude that EP election campaigns rather reinforce existing cleavages and animosities within Austrian society and lead to a radicalisation of the political climate in which reconciliation and understanding of the political opponents in a democratic culture seems difficult. The online public sphere amplifies these logics contributing to the closure of a Eurosceptic and xenophobic user community that is almost exclusively addressed by the right wing political parties and that can no longer be reached by the political establishment. In this sense, the Internet rather strengthens the populist and not the democratic logic. It results in a situation of non recognition between the political adversaries that is translated into a

situation of non recognition between two opposing camps within the audience. Eurosceptic discourse is thus effectively dividing the electorate. European elections tear the demos apart and reconciliation seems difficult.

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