

Abstract

Present understandings of extreme right parties tend to stress the prevalence of national identity and conversely reject both European construction and supranational identities. Yet more or less severe opposition to the process of European construction can sometimes be contradicted by some appraisal of perhaps one of the most critical preconditions for the future development of the EU: a European identity.

The puzzle at the root of this enquiry is that of how extreme right parties reconcile two normally irreconcilable approaches to identity, one emphasising a closed national identity, and one tentatively accepting the existence of some type of European identity. The research question is thus “under what conditions does a European identity discourse emerge in extreme right party discourses?”

The argument to be developed is that, in terms of their relationship with the EU, extreme right parties cannot only be defined from the perspective of nationalism. Rather, the process of development of the European Union can lead to tension between national and supranational identity discourses within the extreme right parties, which can lead them to reformulate, or at least qualify, their stance on identity. The argument separates between the internal and external aspects of European construction as potentially having two distinct impacts on extreme right identity discourses. On the internal dimension, enlargement represents an opportunity to reformulate identities, among extreme right parties of both old and new member states. On the external dimension of European construction, it is hypothesised that increasing interactions of the EU with such actors as the US, Russia, or Turkey, can help to “fix” a European identity imagined in opposition to these external actors.

This project is based on case studies, complemented by discourse analysis in order to map out the evolution of individual parties’ approach to the EU.