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**APA 7th ed.**

Krtolica, Marko. (2021). The role of crises (financial, migrant and covid-19) in the rise and fall of the radical right political parties in europe. *Iustinianus Primus Law Review*, 12(Special Issue), 1-13.

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Marko Krtolica, "The Role of Crises (Financial, Migrant and Covid-19) in the Rise and Fall of the Radical Right Political Parties in Europe," *Iustinianus Primus Law Review* 12, no. Special Issue (2021): 1-13

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Krtolica, Marko. "The Role of Crises (Financial, Migrant and Covid-19) in the Rise and Fall of the Radical Right Political Parties in Europe." *Iustinianus Primus Law Review*, vol. 12, no. Special Issue, 2021, pp. 1-13. HeinOnline.

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## THE ROLE OF CRISES (FINANCIAL, MIGRANT AND COVID-19) IN THE RISE AND FALL OF THE RADICAL RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES IN EUROPE

Abstract.....	1	IV. Causes for the rise of the radical right parties in Europe during the financial crisis (2007-2009).....	7
I. Introduction.....	2	V. Causes for the rise of the radical right political parties in Europe during the migrant crisis (2014-2019).....	8
II. Ideological background of the radical right political parties.....	2	VI. The impact of Covid-19 over radical right political parties in Europe.....	10
III. The impact of different crises over radical right parties.....	4	VII. Conclusion.....	12

### -abstract-

The rise of the radical right political parties has marked the European political scene in the last two decades. The global financial crisis in 2007 and the migrant crisis in 2014, paved the way for the rise of the radical right parties in Europe. By raising their voice against political and economic elites, as well as, against supranational institutions and globalization, radical right parties have managed to gain many votes in countries that were severely hit by the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008. Additionally, the migrant crisis in 2014 gave new impetus for the favorite radical right topic - immigration. By stressing out that migrants represent a cultural and economic threat to the domestic population in Europe, the radical right parties used the migrant crisis to spread their views and in return gain support. Defined as a serious and unique alternative to the traditional political parties, the rise of the radical right political parties very often was portrayed as the biggest danger to the European democracies. However, the Covid-19 outbreak has stopped their rise and in the short run, it has even decreased their ratings. The radical right political parties became completely lost during the Covid-19 outbreak due to the creation of the division of „them” vs. „us”, which in the light of Covid-19 was not effective. Additionally, speaking against globalization, supranational institutions, immigration and open borders during Covid-19 has lost its momentum. In that regard, it is becoming evident that radical right political parties are gaining momentum during the political, economic and migrant crises but they do not manage to use circumstances when it comes to the health crises. What remains to be answered is the question how radical right political parties will cope with the post-pandemic crises. Will they grow or will they continue to fall?

**Key words:** *politics, political system, political parties, radical right parties, crisis, Covid-19.*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Starting from the 80s of the XX century, the radical right parties managed to earn many votes in France, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Finland, Sweden and thus become factor that affects the formation of political coalitions and current developments in the political systems of the abovementioned states. In this last decade, there is an emergence and reinforcement of the ideas of the radical right in the countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe (Ataka, Golden Dawn, Jobbik). These political parties, by making a sufficient distance from the fascist and neo-fascist organizations and at the same time by relying on nationalism, dogmatism, rigidity, exclusivity, authoritarianism, racism and xenophobia, have succeed in these last decades to become politically attractive for many people in Europe and with that to become great danger to the further democratic and liberal flows in Europe.

The radical political groups, whether they are located on the left or the right side of the ideology axis, they become attractive for the citizens in times of crisis. In the last two decades the world has gone through three great crises. The first crisis was a financial one and hit the world starting from 2007 and lasted until 2009. The second crisis lasted from 2014 until 2019 and was connected to the great Syrian migrant and refugee crisis. Finally, the third crisis represents a unique crisis, which arose from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a health crisis that has had a huge impact not just on the political scene but also on all spheres of human life.

Quite expectedly, all these crises have had a major impact on the fate of the radical right parties in Europe. In this regard, the main aim of this paper will be to analyze the impact of these three different crises on the development of the radical right parties in Europe. However, at the very beginning the ideological background of the radical right parties will be analyzed in order to get a clear picture regarding their political positions.

## **II. IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RADICAL RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES**

Among the radical right political parties and the positions that they represent there is a radical heterogeneity, but still, there are certain issues for which all political parties that belong to this family have same or similar positions.

First of all, the radical right party presents itself as a party close to the people, i.e., the voice of common people.<sup>1</sup> Accepting the values and the rules of democracy, the radical right parties highlight that the corrupt technocratic governments had caused the crisis of the representative democracy. According to them, common people are too far from the decision making processes and that is one of the reasons why they feel alienated from their institutions. Therefore, the radical right parties promote greater degree of direct democracy through which the voice of the common people should be heard.<sup>2</sup> In fact, radical right parties are populist parties that through their policies and actions are creating ‘them’ (traitors) V.S ‘us’ (pure people) dichotomies in their societies. According to the radical right, corrupted elites are part of the team ‘them’ and radical right parties are representatives and spokesmen of the pure people (team us).

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Goodwin, Vidhya Ramalingam, Rachel Briggs, *The New Radical Right: Violent and Non – Violent Movements in Europe* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Meagan Ashley Ayward, “The Rise of the Tea Party Movement and Western European Right – Wing Populist Parties: a Comparative Analysis,” (Master Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hil, 2011), 17.

Second, the parties that belong to the radical right are supporters of the so-called nativism and ethno-nationalism. The nativism and the ethno-nationalism indicate that one country should be composed of one nation solely. The non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state.<sup>3</sup> Thus, members of the radical right parties call upon the concept of national country based on the theory for national sovereignty. According to them, the nation is an organic, collective and indivisible body<sup>4</sup> composed of members that speak the same language, have the same culture, customs, blood and history. For the radical right, the representatives of minority groups cannot be integrated into society if they are not assimilated.<sup>5</sup> Immigrants and representatives of other minority groups either have to be assimilated or they have to leave the state. Therefore, the radical right parties criticize severely and reject the positions of multiculturalism and the idea of popular sovereignty. The term radical itself can be defined from two aspects. On the one hand, the term radical could represent a need of change from the root, but on the other hand it could also mean going back to the roots.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, the radical right political parties are going back to the roots, i.e., they refer that the source of the sovereignty in one society should be the nation, an understanding that refers to the XVIII and XIX centuries, when the first national states in Europe have been created and were based on the principle: one nation – one country (l'Etat-nation).<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, the radical right parties wishing to move away from the nationalistic organizations and to be closer to the European voters have been called on the theory of ethno-national pluralism. Ethno-national pluralism implies that the different national identities should be kept, and in that direction, the national identities of the immigrants should also be kept, but each national identity should stay and be developed in its own state.<sup>8</sup> According to this concept, the different national identities should not mix because it leads to their weakening on short term, and on long term it leads to a possible destruction. Using the theory of ethno-national pluralism, the parties of the radical right are trying to mask the nationalism in between their own ranks.

Third, the anti-immigrant policy is dominant between the radical right political parties.<sup>9</sup> The anti-immigrant attitude refers to immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. It can be freely said that the anti-immigrant policy is one of the most recognizable characteristics of the radical right political parties. The approach of the radical right political parties toward the immigration in all West European states is identical. The immigration represents a cultural and economic threat to the indigenous population of Europe and because of that the immigrants should be taken back to their native state. Moreover, the radical right parties are committed to introducing legislation that will maximally reduce the possibility of settlement of people from other countries.

Fourth, the radical right political parties are against further European integration. According to them, the European integration process influences the reduction of the national governments'

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<sup>3</sup> Cas Muddle, "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy," *West European Politics* Vol. 33 No. 6 (2010): 1173.

<sup>4</sup> Светомир Шкариќ, *Уставно право – втора книга* (Скопје: Union Trade, 1995), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Montserrat Guibernau, *Migration and the rise of the radical right* (London: Policy Network, 2010), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Vedran Obucina, "Varijacije unutar radikalne desnice: komparativna analiza programa radikalno desnih stranaka u Zapadnoj i Istочној Европи," *Sociologija i Prostor* Vol. 47 No.2 (2009): 189.

<sup>7</sup> Светомир Шкариќ и Гордана Сиљановска - Давкова, *Уставно право* (Скопје: Култура, 2009), 283.

<sup>8</sup> Guibernau, *Migration and the rise of the radical right*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Marcel Lubbers, Merove Gijsberts, Peer Scheepers, "Extreme right – wing voting in Western Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* Vol. 41 No.3 (2002): 350.

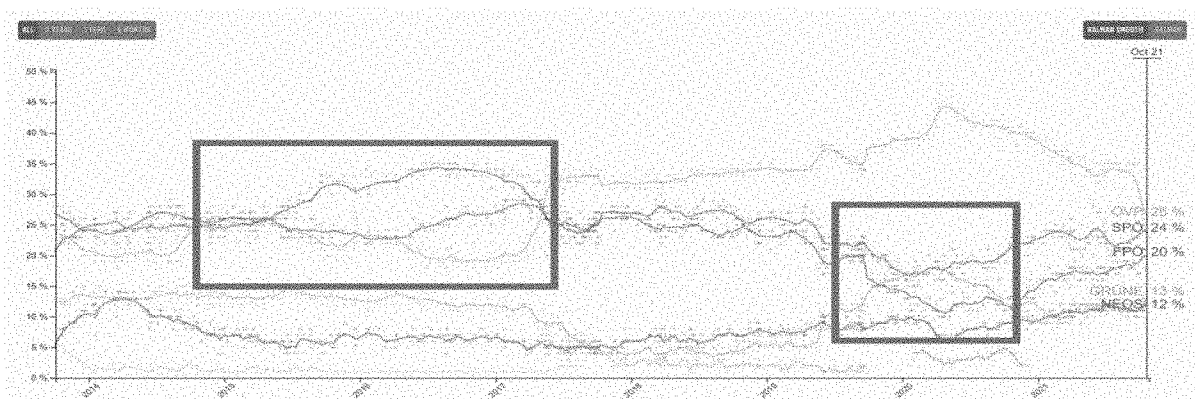
responsibilities in economic and social economy.<sup>10</sup> Considering that this situation violates national interest, the radical right political parties are opponents to further centralization of the European Union because that represents violation of the national states' sovereignty. For them, the European Union should be organized as a Union of national states with an aim to defend European values from the increasing number of immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

Fifth, the radical right is great opponent of the globalization processes. For the radical right parties the globalization is an evil which is imposed from outside.<sup>12</sup> The radical right political parties promote their position against globalization on two levels: cultural and economic level. On one hand, the radical right political parties believe that globalization contributes for many changes, which represent a threat for erosion of national identities and national culture.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, globalization contributes for many changes in the economic sector of the countries (formation of post-industrial societies). According the radical right such changes affect the common people the most.

### III. THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT CRISES OVER RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES

Given the ideological background of the radical right parties, it becomes clear that the financial, the migrant and the Covid-19 crises have opened up a lot of space for the radical right parties to act. Many of their ideological positions become relevant and attractive during such crises. In that direction, to get a clearer picture of the development of the radical right parties during these three crises, we would like to take a look in a more graphic way at the movement of their ratings before, during and after each of those crisis separately. The analysis of the movement of the ratings of the radical right political parties will be conducted for Austria (Chart 1), Germany (Chart 2), Denmark (Chart 3), Italy (Chart 4), Norway (Chart 5), Switzerland (Chart 6), Sweden (Chart 7) and Finland (Chart 8).

- Austria (Party For Freedom) – Chart 1<sup>14</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Simon Bornschier, *The Extreme Right – Wing Populist Challenge and the Transformation of Political Space in Western Europe* (Aarau: NCCR, 2008), 2.

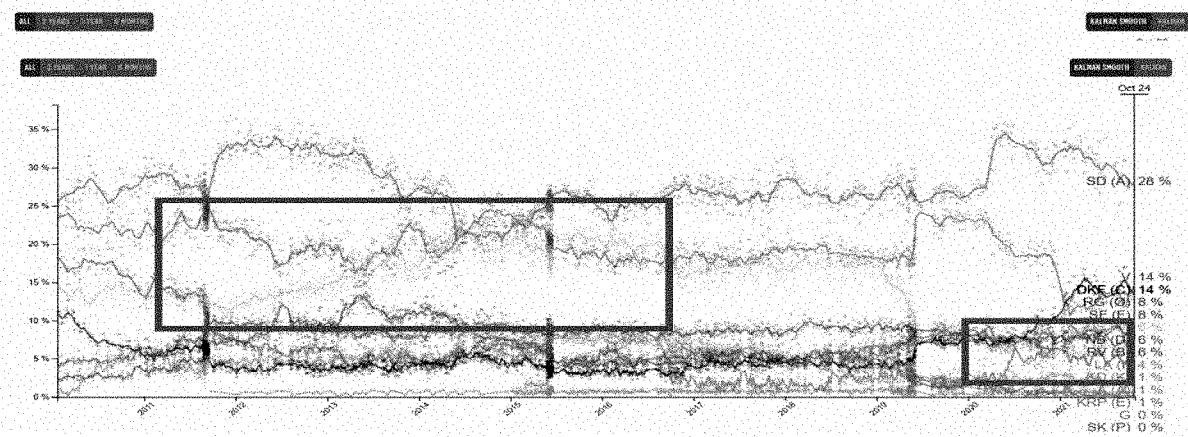
<sup>11</sup> Obucin, “Varijacije unutar radikalne desnice”, 200.

<sup>12</sup> Florian Hartleb, *After Their Establishment: Right – wing Populist Parties in Europe* (Brussels: The Centre for European Studies, 2011), 37.

<sup>13</sup> Hans – George Betz, *Exclusionary Populism in Western Europe in the 1990s and Beyond: A Threat to Democracy and Civil Rights?* (Geneva: UNRISD, 2004), 8.

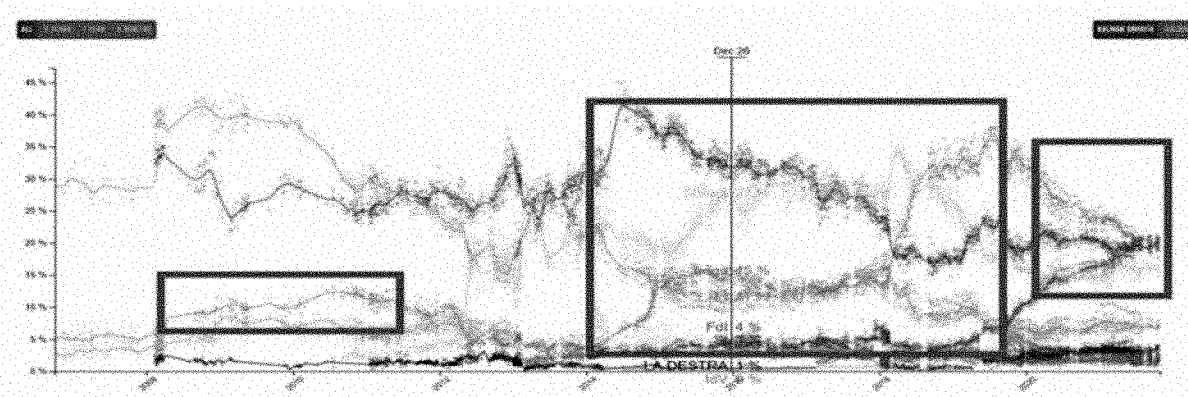
<sup>14</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe. Updated daily.” Politico at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/austria/>

- Germany (Alternative for Germany) – Chart 2<sup>15</sup>



- Denmark (Danish People’s Party) – Chart 3<sup>16</sup>

- Italy (League) – Chart 4<sup>17</sup>

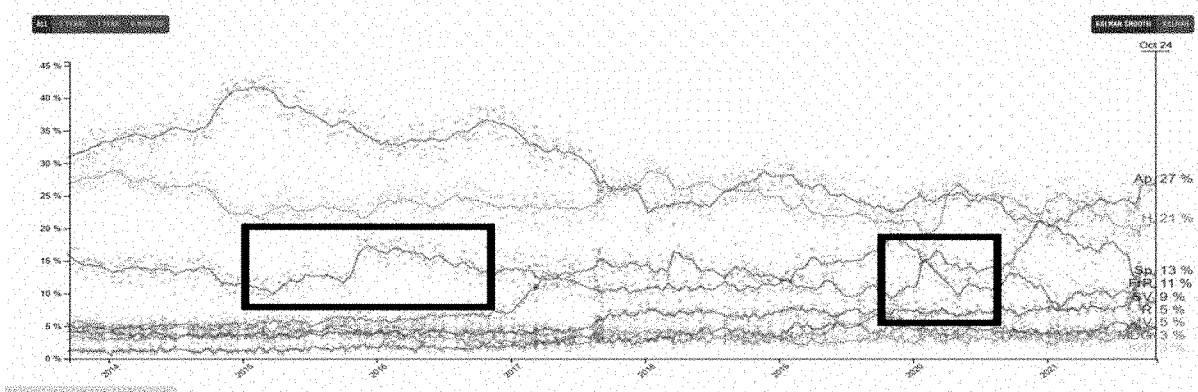


<sup>15</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe.” at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/germany/>

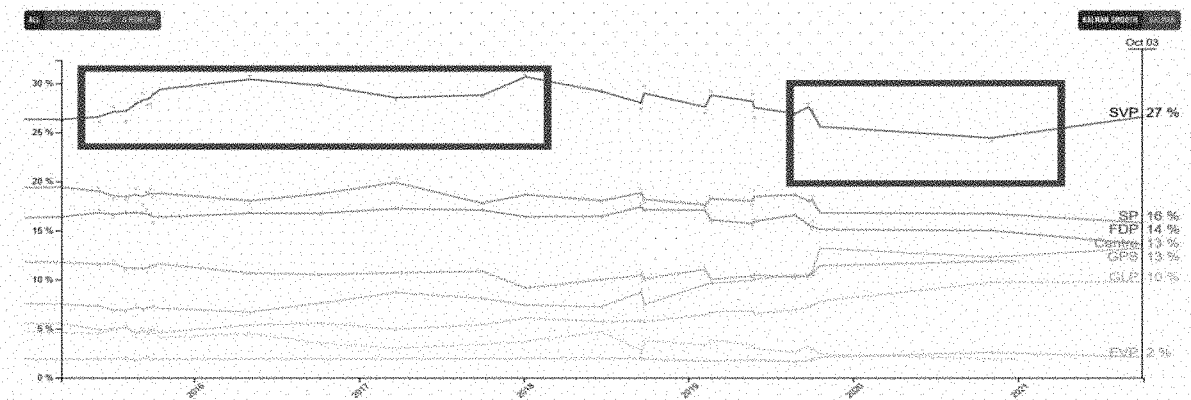
<sup>16</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe.” at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/denmark/>

<sup>17</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe.” at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

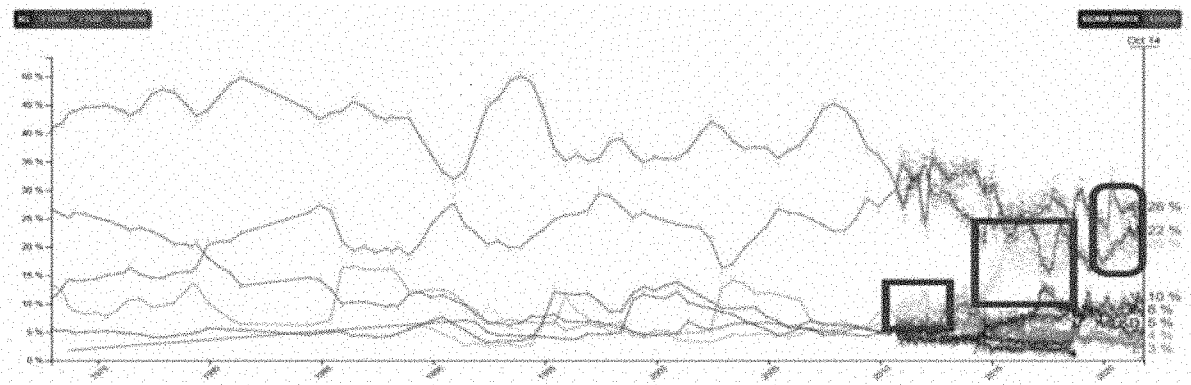
- Norway (Progressive Party) – Chart 5<sup>18</sup>



- Switzerland (Swiss People's party) – Chart 6<sup>19</sup>



- Sweden (Sweden Democrats) – Chart 7<sup>20</sup>

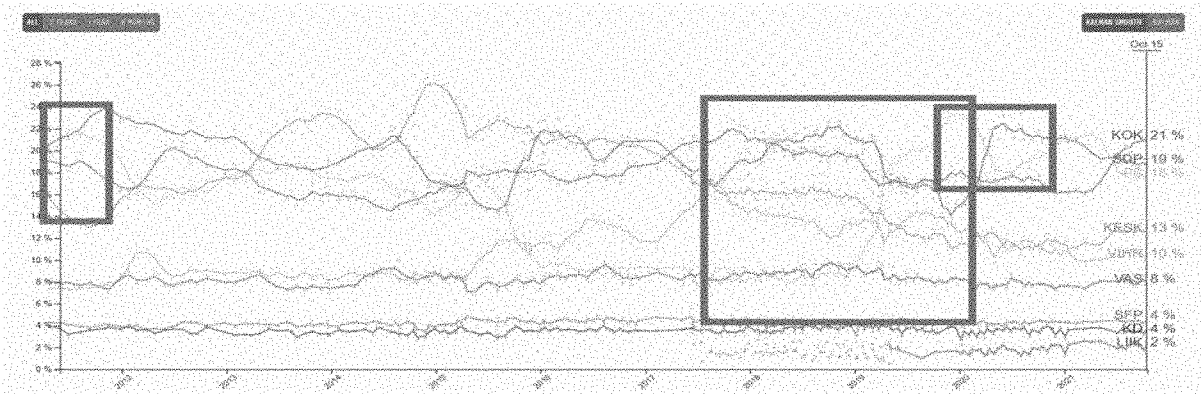


<sup>18</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe.” at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/norway/>

<sup>19</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe.” at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/switzerland/>

<sup>20</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe.” at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/sweden/>

- Finland (Finns Party) – Chart 8<sup>21</sup>



An analysis of the ratings movement of the radical right parties in several European countries may lead us to several important conclusions.

First of all, based on the information displayed on the charts one can easily notice that the ratings of the radical right political parties have increased during the financial and economic crises from 2007 to 2009. Additionally, a review of the charts reveals that the growth of the radical right political parties is also evident during the migrant and refugee crises from 2014 to 2019. This means that the radical right parties in Europe have grown under the button of both the financial and the migrant crises.

On the other hand, such a statement cannot be made when it comes to the Covid-19 crisis. Namely, the review of the charts reveals that the Covid-19 has contributed to stopping and even decreasing the ratings of the radical right parties in Europe. Having all that in mind, in the next parts of this paper the causes for the rise of the radical right parties in Europe during the financial and migrant crises will be analyzed, but also specific attention will be putted on the reasons why such a rise was absent during the Covid-19 crisis.

#### **IV. CAUSES FOR THE RISE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES IN EUROPE DURING THE FINANCIAL CRISIS (2007-2009)**

During the financial crisis, the parties of the radical right successfully approached the European citizens by locating the culprits for the crisis and the economic problems. Thus, the radical right parties during this shaky time managed to attract many voters by locating the blame for the unstable situation in the corrupt political and economic elites, the functioning of the EU, the immigration process and the process of globalization.

Firstly, the parties of the radical right have repeatedly stated that the political and economic elites are to be blamed for the financial crisis in 2007. The fact that a growing percentage of European citizens see moderate political parties as corrupt and alienated organizations,<sup>22</sup> has led radical right political parties to point out that the financial crisis happened because these elites care only about their own interests and not the interests of the common people. Having this in mind, the political parties of the radical right accused the mainstream and moderate political parties with great passion that they have not succeeded in providing answers and solutions to the accumulated economic and

<sup>21</sup> “Poll of Polls – Polling from across Europe.” at <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/finland/>

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Grecic, Srdjan Korac, “Politicki Diskurs Ekstremne Desnice u Zapadnoj Evropi: Pitanje Imigracije,” *Medjunarodni problemi* Vol. 64 No. 2 (2012): 218.



financial problems which persist in the societies across Europe. Therefore, the radical right parties were continuously pointing out that radical changes are needed, which the moderate political parties do not have courage nor determination to take, for the problems to be solved.

Second, beside the political and economic elites at national level, the radical right parties were also blaming the elites of European Union for the financial crisis. According to them, the European integration process influences the reduction of the national governments' responsibilities in both the economic and the social sector.<sup>23</sup> Based on that, the radical right parties pointed out that most of the economic and social policies are continuously being created under the influence of Brussels. That is the reason why the radical right parties state out that the competences of the national authorities are limited and very often national governments to align their legislation with the European one, decide to make moves that are harmful and unpopular among their citizens.<sup>24</sup> Moves that according to the radical right parties, were contributors to the financial crisis in 2007.

Third, difficult economic times are usually associated with greater concern among natives over competition with immigrants for scarce jobs or public resources.<sup>25</sup> In that direction, radical right parties during the crisis period have successfully exploited the perception that the immigrants take job positions of European citizens.<sup>26</sup> Based on that perception, the members of the radical right party focused on promoting the position that the immigrants take over jobs of the domestic population and with that they contribute to the increase of the unemployment rate among domestic population.

Fourth, the radical right parties were blaming the process of globalization as another reason for the financial crisis. According to the ideology of the radical right parties, the globalization contributes for many changes in the economic sector of the countries (formation of post-industrial societies). The changes in the economic sector under the baton of globalization cause emergence of winners and losers<sup>27</sup>, i.e., people who profit from the modernization of society and also people who cannot adjust to the changes, leaving them to become jobless. For the radical right, the losers from the globalization process are the common people.<sup>28</sup> Common people that are part of the working class. Thus, at a time when the trade unions are weak, the labor parties either in free fall or concentrated towards the middle class, the radical right parties managed to become attractive for the members of the working class who have problems adjusting to the newly occurred economic conditions.

## **V. CAUSES FOR THE RISE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES IN EUROPE DURING THE MIGRANT CRISIS (2014-2019)**

Probably one of the most dramatic events of the last decade was the great Syrian migrant and refugee crisis. Since 2014, European countries have faced a large influx of refugees and migrants, primarily from Syria but also from other Middle Eastern countries. By the 2016, nearly 5.2 million migrants and refugees reached European shores.<sup>29</sup> Logically, such a large number of refugees has become a major topic on the political scene in many European countries. This situation has been

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<sup>23</sup>Bornschieer, *The Extreme Right – Wing Populist Challenge*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Bornschieer, *The Extreme Right – Wing Populist Challenge*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis Davis and Sumit S. Deole, "Immigration and the Rise of Far-Right Parties in Europe," *Ifo DICE Report* Vol. 15 No. 4 (2017): 14.

<sup>26</sup> Guibernau, *Migration and the rise of the radical right*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Muddle, "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy," 4.

<sup>28</sup> Bornschieer, *The Extreme Right – Wing Populist Challenge*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> "Refugee Crisis in Europe," UNCHR at <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/refugee-crisis-in-europe/>

widely exploited by radical right political parties, which have attracted large numbers of voters by claiming that the migrant crisis represents a threat to the domestic population in each of the European countries. Such a statement was promoted by the radical right political parties in Europe through the following arguments.

First of all, the radical right political parties were pointing out that the migrant crisis of 2014 represents a cultural threat to the domestic population living in Europe. Namely, radical right parties were pointing out that the immigrants, especially Muslims, who have migrated have values and customs that are incompatible to the western values and that they represent a threat to the survival of the western values.<sup>30</sup> That is why according to the radical right parties, the increasing number of immigrants on the European soil represents a danger to the national cohesion, national culture and national way of life of the western societies.<sup>31</sup> The radical right political parties were pointing out that most of the migrants and refugees have issues adjusting to the western way of life because their values are completely opposite from the values of one democratic society and that it is not possible to adjust them to one another. According to them, migrants and refugees have trouble accepting the equality between men and women, the freedom of speech, the separation between the religion and the state, which on the other hand represent thorough values of the western world.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the radical right parties used the moral panic among European citizens that the European values, as a consequence to the white plague, have been endangered and that they will be repressed by the immigrants' values, amongst whom a rise in the natural growth has been noticed.<sup>33</sup>

Second, the refugee crisis according to the radical right represented security threat to the domestic population of Europe. According to the radical right, the refugee flows were providing foreign terrorists with a potential new mode of entry to the European Union from ISIL-controlled areas in the Middle East.<sup>34</sup> With that, the radical right parties managed to demonstrate to the European citizens that terrorists are easily able to reach European countries through the refugee and migrants corridors, thus carry out terrorist attacks in European cities. Additionally, the radical right parties were pointing out that the migrants and refugees are contributing to the rise of crime and violence in the European societies. That is the reason why the radical right party in Germany (Alternative for Germany) during the 2017 election campaign used the slogan "Refugees are bringing crime into our town".<sup>35</sup> Also, Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) called the crisis an "Islamic asylum tsunami" and labeled the refugees "testosterone bombs" who "threaten our girls".<sup>36</sup>

Third, the radical right parties have managed to attract many votes by stressing out that refugee and migrant crises represents economic threat to the domestic population of Europe. This fact is consistent with the fear that low-skilled immigration is a factor of economic insecurity through its

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<sup>30</sup> Lubbers, Gijssberts and Scheepers, "Extreme right – wing voting in Western Europe," 349.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Goodwin, Vidhya Ramalingam and Rachel Briggs, *The New Radical Right: Violent and Non – Violent Movements in Europe* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012), 48.

<sup>32</sup> Obucin, "Varijacije unutar radikalne desnice," 197.

<sup>33</sup> Grecic, Korac, "Politicki Diskurs Ekstremne Desnice u Zapadnoj Evropi," 215.

<sup>34</sup> Marco Funk and Roderick Parkes, "Refugees versus terrorists," at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/greece/resource/static/files/refugees-versus-terrorists.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> "German far right capitalises on high-profile migrant crimes," EURACTIVE at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/german-far-right-capitalises-on-high-profile-migrant-crimes/>

<sup>36</sup> Daniela Pisoiu and Reem Ahmed, "Capitalizing on Fear: The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Movements in Western Europe," in *OSCE Yearbook 2015*, ed. IFSH (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2016), 166.

perceived effects on wages and employment.<sup>37</sup> Just like the period during the financial crisis of 2007, the radical right parties have managed to use the perception that the immigrants take job positions of European citizens.<sup>38</sup> Slogans of the radical right parties such as “foreigners take away your jobs” went down well among European citizens during the refugee crisis.<sup>39</sup>

Fourth, the members of the radical right political parties were pointing out that the migrant crisis represents a threat to the fiscal stability of European states. According to them, the great number of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, represent a great burden to the social and economic system of European countries. The radical right parties were stressing out that migrants and asylum seekers are misusing European welfare system, while according to them the benefits of the state’s welfare should be guaranteed solely for the domestic population of the European states.<sup>40</sup> Otherwise, the quality and availability of certain public services will be risked/impaired.<sup>41</sup> In theory, this position of the radical right political parties is known as Welfare chauvinism.

## **VI. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 OVER RADICAL RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES IN EUROPE**

The Covid-19 outbreak has caused grand changes in the functioning of the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has also had a major influence over certain political trends in Europe. What could be found as interesting, is that the Covid-19 outbreak has stopped the rise of the radical right parties and in the short run, it has even decreased their ratings.

Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic was marked by the slogan ‘rally around the flag’. Such slogan takes part in a well-known theory that predicts boosts in government support in times of international crisis, including war, as these situations distract the public from other important issues and call for national solidarity.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the economic crisis in 2007 and the migrant crisis in 2014, the health crisis caused by Covid-19 produced a feeling among European citizens that they should unite and support the current authorities in the implementation of Covid-19 measures. In such a state, the space for gaining political points through divisions and hate was completely closed. With that, the radical right parties lost their main weapon in the political battle – creation of dichotomies and enemies.

Still, the radical right parties could not understand the new political reality and they have continued with their political activity through projection of enemies. That is the reason why radical right parties during Covid-19 outbreak were desperately searching for culprit and enemy in the face of Covid-19. Precisely in that direction were the statements of the radical right leaders that Covid-

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<sup>37</sup> Anthony Edo and Yvonne Giesing, “Has Immigration Contributed to the Rise of Right-wing Extremist Parties in Europe?,” *EconPol POLICY REPORT* Vol. 4 (2020): 13.

<sup>38</sup> Guibernau, *Migration and the rise of the radical right*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Psoiu and Ahmed, “Capitalizing on Fear,” 170.

<sup>40</sup> Hartleb, *After Their Establishment: Right – wing Populist Parties in Europe*, 31.

<sup>41</sup> Edo and Giesing, “Has Immigration Contributed to the Rise of Rightwing Extremist Parties in Europe?,” 13.

<sup>42</sup> Jakub Wondreys and Cas Mudde, “Victims of the Pandemic? European Far-Right Parties and COVID-19,” *Nationalities Papers* 50, (2022): 92.

19 is an external enemy,<sup>43</sup> that Covid-19 is an Immigrant Virus<sup>44</sup> and Chinese Virus.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, radical right parties were accusing minority groups, in particular Muslims, of flaunting government policies and of thereby endangering the “native” population.<sup>46</sup> Also it should be taken into consideration that the radical right parties were using slogans like ‘WHO MAFIA’ and “Medical Deep State” to raise their argument against corrupted elites. Such a desperate search for enemy in a period when European citizens were standing behind the slogan “rally around the flag”, was definitely a wrong political strategy undertaken by the radical right parties.

Second, the favorite topics of the radical right political parties lost their momentum during the Covid-19 pandemic. Speaking against European sovereignty, open borders, migrant crisis and globalization has become completely pointless at a time when the whole world was applying border closures, strict controls on entry and exit points, while national governments and not the supranational institutions, were creating and implementing measures to deal with the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, the topics with which the radical right political parties managed to attract large numbers of European citizens have been completely put in the background.

Third, the radical right political parties have shown distrust in science, as well as support and promotion of conspiracy theories. The radical right conspiracies of Covid-19 came in two kinds, often held simultaneously in the same message: that the virus does not exist and/or there is a manufactured deadly virus because “they” want to exterminate “us.”<sup>47</sup> For example Salvini, was promoting propaganda about the Chinese bio lab conspiracy theory and Thierry Baudet, who is the leader of the Dutch Forum for Democracy (FvD), often following Trump’s lead, first by pushing for more research into hydroxychloroquine and later arguing that that the virus would disappear “when the weather becomes nicer”.<sup>48</sup>

Beside distrust towards the existence of the virus, the radical right parties have shown distrust in the measures to suppress Covid-19. That is the reason why radical right parties were often speaking against restrictive measures and were offering easy solutions for dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. Radical right parties used increasingly sharp populist rhetoric against the mainstream governments, in particular against the lockdown but also against any mandatory anti-COVID-19 measures (from face masks to social distancing and finally to Corona apps).<sup>49</sup> In a situation where most European citizens demanded a greater degree of restrictive measures,<sup>50</sup> the policies of the radical right parties to reduce restrictive measures caused a decline in their party ratings. In fact, such measures were a vivid depiction of their incompetent policies and politics. That is why in the countries where radical right political parties had the opportunity to influence policies against

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<sup>43</sup> “This enemy can be deadly!': Boris Johnson invokes wartime language,” Guardian at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/enemy-deadly-boris-johnson-invokes-wartime-language-coronavirus>

<sup>44</sup> “Italy’s Salvini Eyes Comeback as Virus Spreads Among Migrants,” Bloomberg at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-30/italy-s-salvini-eyes-comeback-as-virus-spreads-among-migrants>

<sup>45</sup> “Trump’s ‘Chinese Virus’ tweet helped lead to rise in racist anti-Asian Twitter content: Study,” ABC News at <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/trumps-chinese-virus-tweet-helped-lead-rise-racist/story?id=76530148>

<sup>46</sup> Wondreys and Mudde, “Victims of the Pandemic?,” 89.

<sup>47</sup> Miranda Christou, “Is the radical right spreading the coronavirus?,” at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/radical-right-spreading-coronavirus/>

<sup>48</sup> Wondreys and Mudde, “Victims of the Pandemic?,” 90.

<sup>49</sup> Wondreys and Mudde, “Victims of the Pandemic?,” 97.

<sup>50</sup> “People in Advanced Economies Say Their Society Is More Divided Than Before Pandemic”, Pew Research Center at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/06/23/people-in-advanced-economies-say-their-society-is-more-divided-than-before-pandemic/>

Covid-19, the numbers of infected and of human casualties were very high. For example, Lega's Matteo Salvini circulated conspiracy theories which urged people to go on holiday while Covid-19 was ravaging the northern parts of Italy.<sup>51</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

In the last few decades, the political parties that belong to the radical right have managed to gain from 10% to 25 % of the European citizens' votes and to become an important factor in the functioning of the political systems in Europe. Such rise of the radical right was fueled by the economic crisis in 2007, as well as the migrant crisis in 2014. During the economic crisis the radical right parties in Europe managed to obtain many votes by locating the culprits for the financial crisis and the economic problems of the European citizens. By raising their arguments that the financial crisis is caused by the corrupt political and economic elites, the functioning of the EU, the immigration processes and the globalization process, the radical right political parties became an attractive political option for citizens that were hit by that crisis in 2007. Such a rise of the radical right became even more evident in light of the Syrian migrant crisis that started in 2014. The radical right political parties have successfully exploited the migrant crisis and managed drastically to increase their party ratings. By claiming that the migrant crisis represents a cultural, security, financial and fiscal threat to the domestic population of European countries, the radical right political parties have managed to gain more and more support from one election to another. That is the main reason why during the year of 2018 and 2019 the radical right parties were often described as the biggest threat to the liberal democracy in Europe.

However, in 2020 the world was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Quite unexpectedly, the outbreak has stopped the rise of the radical right parties and in the short run, it has even decreased their ratings. The feeling among European citizens that they should unite and support the current authorities in implementing the Covid-19 measures, as well as the absence of the favorite topics of the radical right political parties on the political scene have contributed to a status quo or even to a decrease of the party ratings during this time. Additionally, by openly questioning science and restrictive measures, while at the same time by supporting and promoting conspiracy theory, the radical right parties have completely missed their political strategy during the Covid-19. In fact, the Covid-19 has presented the vulnerability and incompetence of the radical right politics and policies. As a conclusion, the pandemic has contributed to a decline of the radical right political parties in Europe.

Still, the last public opinion surveys are showing that two years after the Covid-19 outbreak, the support for moderate political parties and mainstream governments again is decreasing. For now, such rating fall is not followed by great rise of the radical right political parties. However, the post-pandemic era filled with political, economic, social and ecological problems combined with dissatisfaction of the moderate political parties will definitely open the room for radical right political parties to grow quickly. This means that the podium for their rise is set. It is up to the radical right parties to seize the momentum.

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<sup>51</sup> Christou, "Is the radical right spreading the coronavirus?", at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/radical-right-spreading-coronavirus/>

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