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У ВЛАСТИ И В ОППОЗИЦИИ (НА ПРИМЕРАХ ФРАНЦИИ И ПОЛЬШИ)**

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**THE CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY AND RIGHTS IN DISCOURSES OF
EUROPEAN POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT AND IN
OPPOSITION: THE CASES OF FRANCE AND POLAND**

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Statement of the research problem

The populist radical right has long been portrayed as small, but dangerous fringe groups at the margins of mainstream politics, groups with neo-fascist agenda, hostile to the very notions of *democracy* and *human rights*, let alone democratic principles and values (e.g. Harris, 1990; Ford, 1992; Laqueur, 1996; Fenner and Weitz, 2004, Palheta, 2018; Traverso, 2019). Yet, the growing support for PRR *parties* and movements in Europe (e.g. Roodujn, 2015; Minkenberg, 2017) and elsewhere (e.g. Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018; Bergman, 2020), their active participation in government formation (e.g. Zaslove, 2012), including cases when PRR parties were able to constitute governments by themselves (Mudde, 2019a), have highlighted not only the normalisation and mainstreaming of populist radical right *politics* across Europe and beyond (Mudde, 2019b), but has also demonstrated limitations of the oversimplified vision of the relationship between the populist radical right and *democracy*.

The PRR is often seen as the ultimate threat to *democracy* and *human rights* (e.g. Pedahzur and Weinberg, 2001; Vidmar, 2020; Neuman, 2020),¹ and yet, in their discourses, different PRR actors frequently invoke both the rule of the people (e.g. Debras, 2016) and the need to protect *rights* and *freedoms* (e.g. Schneiker, 2019). In fact, many in academia agree that the PRR opposes the values, institutions and rules of *liberal* or *constitutional democracy* (Perrineau, 2001: 6) but does not reject *democracy* as such (Mény and Surrel, 2002: 5).

This research resides on the assumption that populist radical right parties have participated in the co-construction of the concept of democracy and the concept of rights and freedoms along with other political forces, present in the public field of the European Union.

¹ Roth, K (2017) The Dangerous Rise of Populism. Global Attacks on Human Rights Values. In *Human Rights Watch World Report 2017*. Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/global-4> (accessed 19.07.2021).

This research strives **to highlight the *common core of various* interpretations of the concept of democracy and the concept of rights and freedoms advanced by *different* EU populist radical right parties.**

To do so, it focuses on discourses of the leaders of two very dissimilar PRR parties in contrasting positions regarding access to power, i.e. in government and in opposition, from two very different, yet compatible contexts within the EU. This approach to the research problem allows not only to examine how the concept of democracy and that of rights and freedoms are conceived, conveyed, and utilised in political discourses of populist radical right parties in the EU, but also helps to put these cases into perspective with each other and highlight similarities between them.

State of the art

Since the emergence of the populist radical right in the European political landscape in the early 1980s, its complex relationship with *democracy* and, to a lesser extent, with *rights and freedoms* has drawn much attention of academia.

At the initial stage, the research was heavily influenced by studies of historical fascism. The populist radical right was deemed a *pathology* of Western democratic societies, while the support for populist radical right values was seen as essentially incompatible with the values of *democracy* (e.g. Betz, 1994; Taguieff, 1995).

The dominance of this *normal pathology thesis* has had a profound effect on academic research in the field. In its most extreme form, this approach has precluded any attempt to employ mainstream concepts and theories to studying the populist radical right. In its more moderate editions, the *normal pathology thesis* has limited the focus of populist radical right studies to attempts to explain why populist radical right parties could be successful in modern democracies (e.g. Taguieff, 1994; Betz and Immerfall, 1998; Perrineau, 2001). Most importantly, this approach has shifted the focus almost exclusively on the demand-side of politics, while ignoring the role of the populist radical right itself, let alone its relationship with *democracy* and *rights*.

Yet, as the *normal pathology thesis* grew increasingly unable to hold up under empirical scrutiny, it was replaced by the *pathological normalcy thesis* arguing that the ideology of the populist radical right is “well connected to mainstream ideas and much in tune with broadly shared mass attitudes and policy positions” (Mudde 2010, 1181). This paradigmatic shift has permitted to focus on the supply-side of populist radical right politics and put the *party* at the centre of the attention of academia.

The paradigm shift coincided with a general reassessment of the approach to a (wider) problem of the relationship between populism (not just the populist radical right) and democracy. As a result, over the past two decades, researchers have produced an impressive amount of literature on populism and its different aspects, including the relationship with democracy. One can distinguish at least five major approaches to populism: as a “thin-centred *ideology* that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté general* (general will of the people) (Mudde, 2007: 23; used also in e.g. Mudde, 2004; Fieschi, 2004; Stanley, 2008; Wodak, 2015: 7–8; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017); as a political *strategy*, employed to generate or retain support (e.g. Betz, 2002; Weyland, 2001); as a *discourse*, a particular mode of political expression that pits “the people” against “the elite” (Hawkins, 2009) or “the oligarchy” (de la Torre, 2010); as a particular structuring *logic* of political life (see Laclau, 2005a, 2005b, 2006 but also Panizza et al, 2005); and as a political *style* (e.g. Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014; Moffitt, 2016).

Researchers have extensively analysed the ideology and discourse of the European populist radical right at different levels: some studies have dealt with the whole party family (e.g. Mudde, 2007; Minkenberg, 2013; Van Kessel, 2015; Camus and Lebourg, 2017; Pytlas, 2018; Wodak, 2021), others have opted for a particular region (often these have been Western (e.g. Betz, 1994; Ignazi, 2003) and Eastern Europe (e.g. Pirro, 2015; Minkenberg, 2017)), yet others focus on a specific country or a party (for instance, much has been written specifically on the French *FN/RN* (e.g. Souchard et al, 1997; Surel, 2002;

Rydgren, 2008; Alduy and Wahnich, 2015; Mondon, 2016; Igounet, 2017; Mayer, 2018, Nilsson, 2018) and the Polish *PiS*, especially relevant for this research (e.g. Stanley, 2008; Pankowski, 2010; Wojtas, 2012; Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2016; Żuk and Żuk, 2018; Krzyżanowski, 2018, 2020; Kłosińska and Rusinek, 2019; Stępińska et al, 2020)).

Over the past two decades, researchers have struggled to clarify *what* the populist radical right means when speaking about *democracy*: some have reconstructed PRR visions of democracy (Debras, 2016), others have complemented such reconstructions with an analysis of tensions between PRR interpretations of *democracy* and *liberal democracy* (Betz, 2004; Mudde, 2007), yet others have not only examined how the PRR frames its ideas as democratic but also offered a profound critique of *liberal democracy* itself (Mondon and Winter, 2020).

Relatively less attention has been paid to the concept of rights and freedoms in populist radical right discourses and ideology. Usually, *rights and freedoms* have not been approached as a unified concept. Rather, researchers have tended to dedicate a specific study to analysing a particular category of references to *rights* and *freedoms*: some have highlighted the notion of *rights* in connection to the concept of *popular sovereignty* (e.g. Canovan, 2002), others have dealt with the PRR instrumentalisation of *progressive discourses* to promote its nativist agenda (e.g. Kallis, 2013; Balcer, 2019; Berntzen, 2020) and the use of *human rights rhetoric* to advance its populist agenda (e.g. Mudde, 2002), finally, there have been studies on *welfare chauvinism*, evoking nativist discourses on *social rights* (e.g. Keskinen, 2016; Donoghue and Kuisma, 2021).

As this short literature review shows, the research field in European populism and PRR studies has been quite crowded. And yet, much still remains to be done. In particular, although many studies have explored PRR discourses referencing *democracy* and *rights* in the European Union, few of them ventured to *reconstruct* the concept of democracy, and none has tried to *reconstruct* the concept of rights and freedoms. Even fewer of them have ventured to *compare different* PRR *interpretations* of *democracy* advanced in dissimilar European contexts and *highlight common features* in the use of this concept by *all* PRR parties in the European Union. Finally, virtually no attention has been paid to

how the concepts of democracy and rights advanced by the EU PRR parties have *transformed over time* spent (together) in the common (institutional) framework of the Union. This research strives to bridge exactly these gaps.

Research question

What common features in the use of the concept of democracy and that of rights and freedoms have emerged in discourses of European populist radical right parties in government (case of Poland) and in opposition (case of France)?

This formulation reflects the primary focus of the research on uncovering *similarities* between *different* interpretations of the concept of democracy and the concept of rights and freedoms, advanced by politicians from *very dissimilar* parties in *contrasting* positions regarding access to power but belonging to *the same* party family, which operate in *dissimilar* national contexts yet share the *common* frameworks of the European Union. At the same time, this research question points to the assumption that these concepts have not been absolutely rigid but rather *changed over time*.

Aims and objectives of the research

This research aims to uncover common features that have emerged in how populist radical right parties across the European Union have interpreted and used the concepts of democracy and rights in their political discourses.

To do so, I have to attain the following three main objectives:

1. To examine findings of the existing literature analysing the use of references to *democracy* and to *rights and freedoms* in populist radical right discourses;
2. To develop a methodological framework for the analysis of discourses of the selected PRR parties;
3. To reconstruct the concepts of democracy and rights in discourses of these populist radical right parties at different points in time and compare these concepts synchronically as well as diachronically.

Scope and limitations of the research

The research strives to uncover *similarities* that have emerged between interpretations of the concepts of democracy and rights in political discourses of *dissimilar* populist radical right parties in *contrasting* positions regarding access to power, i.e. in government and in opposition, from two very *different* national contexts within the *common* EU framework, i.e. in Poland and France. Thus, the strategic choice of this work is to conduct a comparative analysis, following the logic of the “most different systems” design (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 34).

The two national contexts, France and Poland, *differ* drastically one from the other: the two countries have very *dissimilar* historical legacies and *different* societal and economic backgrounds; the two political systems, the French presidential republic and Polish parliamentary republic, *differ* remarkably in their organisation and functionality; finally, France and Poland wield very *different* clout and resources and play very *dissimilar* roles in Europe and a wider international arena.

And yet, both nations share the *common* institutional, axiological, and discursive framework of the European Union. By proclaiming a *common* attachment to a set of *common* values with attachment to *democracy* and respect for *human rights* and *fundamental freedoms* being among them (Schimmelfennig, 2010),² the EU has effectively cemented public discourses on *democracy* and *rights* in *all* its member states. Thus, *any* political party taking part in elections at the national, let alone European level, would necessarily (at least nominally) share the values of the European Union. Simultaneously, as a *union* of its member states, the EU has had to come up with *common* solutions to *common* challenges (e.g. climate change, global economic crisis, migration).³

² See e.g. European Union (2012) Treaty on European Union (Consolidated Version). *Official Journal of the European Communities*. C 326/13. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF (accessed 19.07.2021).

³ See e.g. European Commission (2015) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A European Agenda on Migration. COM(2015) 240. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background->

At the same time, in France, despite its long history of populism that can be traced back to the 1950s movement of Poujadism (Taggart, 2000: 77) and in spite of the growing popularity of the populist radical right *politics* (Mudde, 2019b), populist radical right *parties*, first and foremost the *Rassemblement National (RN, National Rally*, before 2018 known as the *Front National*), have always remained in opposition (Mayer, 2018). In Poland, on the contrary, populist radical right parties have actively participated in government formation throughout the past two decades (Wojtas, 2012; Van Kessel, 2015: 121–143). After the 2005 parliamentary election, the government was formed by a coalition of the populist *Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej (SO, Self-Defence of the Polish Republic)*, the radical right *Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR, Ligue of Polish Families)* and the (increasingly radicalising) right-wing populist *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice)* (Van Kessel, 2010: 126–128). Since the 2015 parliamentary elections, Poland has been run by a coalition of the *PiS*, which by this time had already turned into a *truly* populist radical right party (Pankowski 2010, 152–165), with several minor conservative and radical right partners.

Despite the evident *differences* between the two parties and some disagreements regarding their possible classification discussed in the methodology chapter, both the *RN* and *PiS* are commonly listed as the biggest and most successful populist radical right parties (Mudde, 2019). Therefore, they are considered to share the *common* ideological core of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde, 2007: 11–31) and to belong to the *same* party family of the populist radical right.

The comparative analysis of the *FN/RN* and the *PiS* cases as the PRR parties in government and in opposition necessarily limits the research to the period between 2007 and 2019 (see Annex 1).

In 2004, Poland alongside nine other Central and Eastern European nations joined the European Union and became fully integrated into its institutional framework alongside 15 older member states, including France. Between 2004 and 2019, elections to the

[information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf](#) (accessed 19.07.2021)

European Parliament were held in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019. Candidates representing both *FN/RN* and *PiS* were elected to the European Parliament on all the four occasions.

In 2005, the *PiS* came to power in Poland for the first time in its history forming a coalition government with the *LPR* and *SO*. Thus, in 2007, the *PiS* took part in the parliamentary election as a *PRR party in government*. In the aftermath of the 2015 election, the *PiS* failed to form a government coalition, so it came back to power only in 2015 (Bušítková, 2018: 697). In 2019, the *PiS* won the Polish parliamentary election for the second time in the status of a *PRR party in government*.

Over the period between 2004 and 2019, France held three parliamentary elections (in 2007, 2012, and 2017), in all of which the *FN* participated as a *PRR party in opposition*.

The validity of the results is ensured with the synchronicity of the comparative analysis. Both the *PiS* and *FN/RN* cases are analysed on two points in time, 2007 and 2019. These are the only years when the *PiS* and the *FN/RN* almost concurrently organised their electoral campaigns and participated in elections at the national and European levels as a *PRR party in government* and a *PRR party in opposition* respectively. Moreover, this approach allows controlling, to some extent, *common* challenges that *both* France and Poland simultaneously faced as members of the *shared* institutional framework of the EU. The synchronic comparative analysis of the two party cases is compounded with the diachronic analysis of each of them separately.

The internal validity of the results is also ensured with the addition of the 2015 parliamentary election to the analysis of the Polish case: in this way, the *PiS* is analysed *both* as a *PRR party in government* (in 2007 and 2019) and as a *PRR party in opposition* (in 2015).

Regarding external validity, the results of this research are not expected to be transferable to non-Western contexts or apply to party systems, significantly differing from that of the European Union.

At the same time, the common features, identified in how the *Rassemblement National* and *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* interpret and use the concepts of democracy and rights in

their political discourses, are expected to be valid in the cases of *all* EU populist radical right parties. The findings on the trajectories of the individual parties in government and in opposition are deemed to apply to parties with similar backgrounds (e.g. radicalised conservative right or de-radicalised extreme right parties), existing in conformable conditions (e.g. in opposition in Western Europe (e.g. *Sverigedemokraterna* (*Sweden Democrats*)) or leading a majority government in Eastern Europe (e.g. *Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség* (*Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance*))).

Methodology

This research follows the theoretical perspective of constructivism: it resides on the assumption that the politicians from EU populist radical right parties have assimilated the notions of *democracy* and *rights* and *freedoms*, but have conceptualised differently, putting forward anti-liberal, populist radical right interpretations of the concepts of democracy and rights. This assumption subscribes to the constructivist ontology of relativism suggesting that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences directed towards certain objects and ideas (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 24). The form and the content of these subjective constructions – in my case, the concepts of democracy and rights – vary.

Accordingly, my intent as a researcher is to make sense of the meanings that politicians from the *RN*, as a PRR party in opposition, and from the *PiS*, as a PRR party in government, have about the concepts of democracy and rights. To do so, I rely largely on the methodology of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse analysis and the discourse-conceptual approach to CDA, closely related to the DHA.

The discourse-historical approach was developed in the late 1980s by a group of researchers from Vienna with Ruth Wodak at the head (Reisigl, 2014: 68). This approach has already shown its effectiveness in studying far right (i.e. extreme right and populist radical right) discourses (see e.g. Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Wodak, 2013; Krzyżanowski, 2018; Wodak, 2021).

The discourse-historical approach is interdisciplinary (Wodak, 2001a: 69). Its methodology is abductive⁴ and pragmatic: the categories of analysis are informed by the research question, and the research constantly moves back and forth between theory and empirical data (Meyer, 2001: 27). Its theory, as well as methodology, is eclectic: this approach integrates any theories and methods allowing one to understand and explain the object under investigation (Wodak, 2001a: 69).

The DHA regards the language as a “social practice” used to construct ideologies and identities. Discourse is defined as “a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016: 27). Specific discourses are realised in a variety of different genres, i.e. “socially ratified way[s] of using language in connection with particular type[s] of social activity” (Fairclough, 1995: 14), and texts, i.e. parts of discourses that “make speech acts durable over time and thus bridge two dilated speech situations, i.e. the situation of speech production and the situation of speech reception” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 89–90).

Any text as the object under investigation is considered to be as “a semiotic entity, embedded in an immediate, text-internal co-text and [simultaneously in a wider] intertextual and socio-political context” (Wodak, 2008: 2).

This DHA pays special attention to the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses and allows identifying specific discursive strategies used in practice to construct ideologies and identities.

At the same time, rather than trying to “*demystify* the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that establish, perpetuate or fight dominance” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 88), I want to *reconstruct* the interpretations of the concepts of democracy and rights advanced by EU PRR parties in government and in opposition and *recontextualise* them by revealing the links to other related concepts.

⁴ Charles Peirce who introduced the notion of abduction defined it as “the process of forming explanatory hypotheses” and stressed that “it is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis” (Peirce, 1903/1934: CP 5.171). For a concise yet thorough account of Peirce’s theory of abduction see (Burks, 1946).

From this perspective, I follow the logic of the discourse-conceptual analysis (DCA) developed by Michał Krzyżanowski at the intersection of the DHA and the Conceptual History – *Begriffsgeschichte* – a school founded by the German historian Reinhart Kosellek in the 1950s (cf. Krzyżanowski, 2016; Krzyżanowski, 2019). The DCA puts a strong emphasis on the *reconstruction* of *semantic fields* of particular concepts, i.e. “discursive tracing of the processes of the concept’s building relationships with its *sister- and counter-concepts*” (Krzyżanowski, 2016: 317).

Methods

To describe how populist radical right parties in government and in opposition construct the concepts of democracy and rights in their political discourse, I have to *understand* the populist radical right concepts of democracy and rights, *discover* their subjective meanings, and *contextualise* these concepts.

The DHA analysis proceeds in three main stages: (1) first, the specific content or topic(s) of a specific discourse are identified; (2) next, discursive strategies used in the text are investigated; (3) finally, linguistic means and their context-dependent linguistic realisations are examined (Reisigl and Wodak 2016, 32). This research follows the outlined scheme but shifts its focus from the in-depth analysis of specific texts to tracing and analysing the use of specific structural and semantic units of language – words, – in this case, of the word *democracy* and its derivatives and the words *right* and *freedom* in the plural and/or with dependent words.

Discursive strategies are seen as “more or less intentional plan[s] of practice (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016: 33). There are five types of strategies: nomination (discursively constructing social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions), predication (discursively qualifying them), argumentation (justifying and questioning claims of truth and normative rightness), perspectivisation (positioning the author’s point of view and expressing involvement or distance), and intensification (mitigation) (modifying the illocutionary force and the epistemic or deontic modality of utterances) (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016: 33).

The DHA pays special attention to exploring argumentation strategies (Reisigl, 2014: 67): argumentativity is regarded as one of the three necessary conditions (along with macro-topic relatedness and pluri-perspectivity) for any discourse to exist (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016: 27). The present research also follows this approach and places particular emphasis on identifying and analysing argumentation schemes in the text.

Selection of empirical data

As this research is descriptive and seeks to present an accurate account of the phenomenon (Blaikie, 2000: 74), it focuses on *qualitative* data. In practice, the Polish case is centred on speeches given by Jarosław Kaczyński, the party leader of the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, in the courses of the 2007 and 2015 electoral campaigns for the Polish parliament and in the run-up of the 2019 European Parliamentary election. The French case is focused on speeches of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the *Front National*, given in the run-up of the 2007 parliamentary campaign and on speeches of his daughter Marine Le Pen, who succeeded him as the leader of the *French National* and later the *Rassemblement National*, in the run-up of the 2019 European Parliamentary election.

Such speeches are taken as “actual manifestations of political thinking” (Freeden, 1994: 151) of the party leaders who are considered to be the principal mouthpieces for the parties and their ideological preferences. Therefore, these speeches are seen as *a priori* ideologically loaded, i.e. aimed at “creating shared social identities and [at] establishing and maintaining unequal power relations through discourse” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016: 25) and considered to be used to construct such interpretations of *democracy* and *rights* that the party leaders want to convey to the public.

This research has no intention of analysing visions of the concepts of democracy and rights as they are promoted by rank-and-file members of the parties under consideration as *these* visions might be very different from those constructed by the party leadership.

In the *PiS* case, the analysis focuses on 53 campaign speeches. 19 speeches were given at the public meetings and party conventions in 16 different Polish cities, towns, and villages between 25 August and 19 October 2007; 15 speeches – at the rallies in 14 different locations between 20 June and 23 October 2015; finally, 23 speeches were recorded at

the public meetings and party conventions in 19 different locations from 23 February to 23 May 2019.

In the *RN* case, a total of 43 speeches were selected for the analysis. 21 speeches were given by Jean-Marie Le Pen at the rallies in 21 different French cities, towns, and villages from 20 September 2006 to 2 June 2007; 22 speeches were produced by Marine Le Pen at the public meetings and party conventions in 22 different locations between 13 January and 24 May 2019.

All the texts under consideration belong to the genre of election speech and refer to the same field of social action, i.e. political advertising.

Major findings of the research

The research *reconstructs* the concepts of democracy and those of rights and freedoms advanced by the leaders of two very dissimilar populist radical right parties in contrasting positions to power, i.e. the French *Rassemblement National* (as a PRR party in opposition in 2007 and 2019) and Polish *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (as a PRR party in government in 2007 and 2019 and as a PRR party in opposition in 2015). By applying the discourse-historical and discourse-conceptual approaches to the analysis of electoral speeches given by Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen, the leaders of the *FN/RN*, and Jarosław Kaczyński, the *PiS* president, it *analyses each of the two party cases diachronically* as well as *puts them into perspective* with each other.

These reconstructions allow us not only to trace the *transformation of discourses* of the two parties over the past two decades but also *highlights common features* that have emerged in their discursive use of the concepts of democracy and that of rights and freedoms.

The diachronic comparative analysis shows that references to *democracy* and *rights* became more frequently employed both in the *FN/RN* and *PiS* discourses between 2007 and 2019. Yet, this trend is not unidirectional. A close examination of the *PiS* case as a PRR party that has been both in government *and* in opposition suggests that there exists a correlation between the PRR party's access to power and the frequency of references to

democracy used in its political discourse. The analysis of the Polish case allows us to suppose that the PRR parties are more inclined to evoke *democracy* (usually conceived as something desirable and necessary, but fragile and under threat both from inside and outside), when they are *in power* than when they are *in opposition*.

Although the ways how the concepts of democracy and rights are interpreted and used diverge significantly in the two cases, both of them share a common ideological core informed by nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.

The concept of rights and freedoms, omnipresent in European political discourses, has been turned by the populist radical right into an important discursive instrument used to construct the identities of social actors. Contrary to Taggart (2000: 116), a discourse of rights is not reserved for the minorities: on the contrary, the PRR instrumentalises the concept of rights and freedoms to construct the majority, i.e. the people. The PRR creatively reimagines the concept of rights and freedoms to fit in its ideological core of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism and uses references to *rights* and *freedoms* to construct identities along primarily nativist and populist lines.

As the PRR identifies itself with the people, equated with the citizenry and constructed along nativist and populist lines, *rights* are always attributed to it. The populist radical right positions itself as the defender of the people and its *rights*, while the elites and the aliens are predicated to threaten the people and the realisation of its *rights*.

By relying on the findings of the existing research on the role of references to *rights* and *freedoms* in populist radical right discourses as well as on the results of the analysis of the two party cases, this study abductively develops a functional typology of references to *rights* and *freedoms* likely to be used in discourses of European populist radical right parties. It suggests that PRR discourses in Europe are expected to feature references to the (1) *right to sovereignty*, (2) *citizens' rights*, (3) *social rights*, and (4) *economic rights*.

When discursively constructing the (1) *right to sovereignty*, the EU PRR promotes a multilevel concept of sovereignty conceived along primarily populist lines. The nationalist dimension of sovereignty (sovereignty of the *peoples* or national sovereignty), centred on the nation-state, is supplemented with the populist one (sovereignty of the

people or popular sovereignty). Thus, at the first glance, this conception amounts to an essentially *populist* model of majoritarian democracy centred on the nation-state. However, as the three other commonly used types of references to *rights* and *freedoms*, i.e. (2) *citizens' rights* (abilities of each individual member of the people to exercise their will), (3) *social rights* (assistance to individuals provided by the State), and (4) *economic rights* (conditions, ensured by the State allowing economic agents to fulfil their economic potential) are always discursively attributed *only* to the people and represented as being fought over *simultaneously* with the elites *and* the aliens, the people is discursively constructed along populist, nativist, and authoritarian lines.

The findings of this research also question the oft-mentioned claim that the populist radical right staunchly opposes the centrality of *individual rights*, promoting a vision focused on the *general will of the people* instead (cf. Mudde, 2007: 155). The analysis shows that the populist radical right effectively instrumentalises *both* collective *and* individual *rights*: while collective rights are attributed to the people as a whole, individual rights are ascribed to the citizens as individual members of the people. In this way, in populist radical right discourses, the concept of rights and freedoms intrinsically links the individual with the collective, which, in its turn, allows the PRR to construct and promote a populist model of majoritarian ethnic democracy centred on the nation-state.

The concept of democracy is constructed primarily along the populist lines. *Democracy* is depicted as a system of government of a sovereign nation-state, in which all the legitimate decisions correspond to the will of the people, i.e. emanate from the majority of citizens equated with the people. This finding echoes earlier reconstructions of the PRR concept of *democracy* as “a government of the people by the people for the people” (Debras, 2016: 551–553).

By advancing a nativist and authoritarian interpretation of the concept of the people, described above, the PRR brings the concept of democracy in line with its tripartite ideological core of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. All in all, it offers to the voter a “monocultural and ethnocratic form of republican [...] democracy that is guided

by a romantic, culturally and ethnically homogeneous nationalist discourse that is founded on popular majority rule (Nilsson, 2018: 109).

Yet, the strictly *populist radical right* interpretation of *democracy* is diluted with elements of the *liberal democratic* model dominating the EU. For instance, the PRR leaders claim that for the people to manifest and convey its will in a *democracy*, it must vote and elect *representatives*. Moreover, they argue that such *liberal democratic* principles as the separation of powers, the alternation of power through the mechanism of elections, media pluralism, freedom of political competition, and respect for *rights* and *freedoms* must be upheld.

In addition to the *referential* meanings of *democracy* and *rights* described above, in populist radical right discourses, both concepts acquire *pragmatic* meanings as (endangered) values, characteristic of and intrinsic to the European (or even wider Western) civilisation, rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Thus, by instrumentalising *democracy* and *rights* in a nativist way, the populist radical right identifies the European peoples with “ethnically- and culturally homogenous nation-states and [...] a common European civilization” (Nilsson, 2019: 110) and discursively distinguishes them from imagined national “others”.

The EU context helps explain why the concept of democracy and that of rights and freedoms have taken these seemingly contradictory shapes in PRR discourses. In the situation when both concepts have become hegemonic in the public field across the continent, the populist radical right has integrated *democracy* and *rights and freedoms* into its political discourses.

Moreover, as the axiological, discursive, and institutional framework of the EU has pushed the PRR to include some *liberal democratic* elements in its interpretation of *democracy* and *rights*, both concepts have been constructed as ideological complexes, i.e. “functionally related set[s] of contradictory versions of the world” (Hodge, 2017: 169). As the flexibility of political concepts allows the PRR to strategically orchestrate discursive shifts to normalise its views and positions (cf. Krzyżanowski, 2018; Krzyżanowski, 2020), the (formally) *liberal democratic* elements in PRR interpretations

of *democracy* and *rights* have also been transformed into ideological complexes, with their meanings redefined in line with the populist radical right ideological core of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.

All in all, these findings suggest that EU populist radical right parties have turned into active contesters in the ongoing interpretive struggle over the meanings of the concepts of democracy and rights. Instead of simply adopting *liberal democratic* interpretations of *democracy* and *rights*, the PRR has opted for adapting these concepts to its original ideological core and redefine them as ideological complexes.

Statements to be defended

1. The discourse-historical approach is applicable to the reconstruction of the content of concepts in political ideologies.
2. Over time, EU populist radical right parties have started to more frequently recur to the concepts of democracy and rights, turning into active contesters in the ongoing interpretive struggle over the meanings of these concepts.
3. Even though the common institutional, axiological, and discursive framework of the EU has turned the concept of democracy and that of rights and freedoms into hegemonic ones, in populist radical right discourses, they are conceived as ideological complexes where *liberal democratic* elements are (re)defined along *populist radical right* lines.
4. Although the ways how the concepts of democracy and rights are interpreted and used diverge significantly in the cases of the two very dissimilar populist radical right parties in contrasting positions regarding access to power, i.e. the *Front National/Rassemblement National* and *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, they share a common ideological core, informed by nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.
5. The concept of rights and freedoms is used to construct social actors. As the PRR identifies itself with the people, defined along nativist and populist lines, *rights* are always attributed to it. The populist radical right positions itself as the defender of

the people and its *rights*, while the elites and the aliens are predicated to threaten the people and the realisation of its *rights*.

6. The concept of rights and freedoms in populist radical right discourse intrinsically links the individual with the collective, which, in its turn, allows it to construct and promote a populist model of majoritarian ethnic democracy centred on the nation-state.
7. The concept of democracy is constructed primarily along the populist lines. *Democracy* is depicted as a system of government of a sovereign nation-state, in which all the legitimate decisions correspond to the will of the people, i.e. emanate from the majority of citizens equated with the people.
8. Only by advancing a nativist and authoritarian interpretation of the people, does the PRR bring the concept of democracy in line with its tripartite ideological core of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.
9. The uses of the concepts of democracy and rights are instrumentalised in coherent discursive strategies in a nativist way to depict *democracy* and *rights* as (endangered) values, characteristic of the European civilisation.

Publications

Peer-reviewed research articles in HSE-approved journals

1. Алексеев, АВ, Фомин, ИВ (2020) “«Мы, защитники наций и свобод». Как европейские правые популисты конструируют идентичности (случай «Национального объединения»)”. *Политическая наука* 4: 128-156 (HSE white list).
2. Alekseev, A (2021) “‘It Is in the Nation-State that Democracy Resides’. How the Populist Radical Right Discursively Manipulates the Concept of Democracy in the EU Parliamentary Elections”. *Journal of Language and Politics (in press)* (WoS Q1, Scopus Q1).

- Alekseev, A (2021) “‘Defend Your Right!’ How the Populist Radical Right Uses References to Rights and Freedoms to Discursively Construct Identities”. *New Perspectives (in press)* (WoS ESCI, Scopus Q3).

Other peer-reviewed articles

- Алексеев, АВ (2019) “Ускользающий «топос»: К вопросу о содержании понятия и пределах его применимости.” *МЕТОД: Московский ежегодник трудов из обществоведческих дисциплин* 9: 98-113.

Conferences

- “Normalizing the Radical Right while Radicalizing the Mainstream Right: implications for the Vision of Democracy in Europe”. *1st ECPR/ODIHR Winter School on Parties and Democracy*. Warsaw, Poland (14 – 20 January 2019).
- “Concepts of Democracy in the Discourses of the European Populist Radical Right Parties in Government and in Opposition”. *5th DiscourseNet Summer School “Political Discourse and Mediatization of Politics in the Globalized World”*. Nizhny Novgorod, Russia (16 – 19 August 2019).
- “Concept of Democracy in the Discourse of the Populist Radical Right in Government and in Opposition: The Cases of France and Poland”. *49th UACES annual conference*. Lisbon, Portugal (1 – 4 September 2019).
- “Concept of Democracy in the Discourse of the Populist Radical Right in Government and in Opposition: The Cases of France and Poland”. *Convegno SISP 2019*. Lecce, Italy (12 – 14 September 2019).
- “Понятие демократии в дискурсе праворадикальных популистов у власти и в оппозиции: пример выборов в Европейский парламент 2019 года”. *XII Конвент РАМИ*. Moscow, Russia (21 – 22 October 2019).
- “Democracy under Threat! Strategies of the Populist Radical Right in Manipulating the Concept of Democracy”. *Evolution of Human Capacities to Know and to Act, or How to Convert Knowledge into Power?* Moscow, Russia (28 – 30 October 2019).

- “Rights and Liberties in the Discourse of the Populist Radical Right: Propaganda on YouTube in the European Elections Campaigns”. *ECPR Virtual General Conference 2020*. Salzburg, Austria (24 – 28 August 2020).
- “Concept of Rights and Liberties in the Political Discourse of the Populist Radical Right: The Case of the EU Parliamentary Elections”. *24th DiscourseNet Conference “Discourse and Communication as Propaganda”*. Brussels, Belgium (7 – 9 September 2020).
- “Concept(s) of Sovereignty in the Discourse of the EU Populist Radical Right: The Right of the People and the Right of the Peoples”. *Early Career Scholars Workshop “Conflicts of sovereignty in the European Union in Crisis (SovEU)”*. Brussels, Belgium (26 November 2020).
- “Права и свободы в дискурсе европейских правых популистов (на примере предвыборной кампании в парламент Европейского союза)”. *Конференция РАПН «Политическое представительство и публичная власть: трансформационные вызовы и перспективы»*. Moscow, Russia (27 – 28 November 2020).
- “Democracy and Rights in the (Changing) Discourse of the Populist Radical Right: The Case of the French Front National”. *XXII Апрельская международная научная конференция по проблемам развития экономики и общества*. Moscow, Russia (13 – 29 April 2021).
- “Sovereignty in the Political Discourse of the Populist Radical Right: The Right of the People and the Right of the Peoples”. *Helsinki Conference on Emotions, Populism, and Polarisation*. Helsinki, Finland (4 – 8 May 2021).
- “Language of Human Rights and (Changing) Political Discourse of the Populist Radical Right”. *27th DiscourseNet Conference “Language Ideologies and Political Discourse”*. Milton Keynes, the UK (12 – 14 July 2021).

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Annex 1. Configuration of the time period under consideration

