

**THE NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE EUROPEAN CENTRE-RIGHT  
AND  
CENTRE-LEFT AT THE BEGINNING OF NEW CENTURY**

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**Abstract**

*The political systems of the 1960s-1980s in Western Europe witnessed a pas de deux of two political blocks, the moderate left and the moderate right, which both collaborate in order to achieve stability, welfare state and European integration. As most of the successful stories, this one came eventually to an end: starting with the 1990s, the centre-left and centre-right parties were not able to replicate their previous results. Moreover, due to different circumstances in the recent years they could only achieve half of the percentages they gained decades ago. The aim of this article is to evaluate the shape of the centre-right and centre-left nowadays in Europe and also to find out whether such a consensus would be possible once more. Some explanation of why party systems changed dramatically in recent years will be provided.*

**Keywords:** political consensus, centre-right, centre-left, elections.

**1. Introduction**

After 1945, a widely accepted consensus was the main feature of the political life in Western Europe. No matter if belonging to the left, right or centre, all political parties involved in government were committed to the same basic principles: smooth government, welfare state, social harmony, European integration.

Due to the recent history of Nazism and fascism and those days threat of communism, most parties tried to act closer to the centre, that is why most parties could be labelled as either of centre-left or centre-right, or moderate left and right.

The two main competitors were the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, with the Liberals coming as the third political family.

The main objectives, the welfare state, the European integration, European peace were achieved without heated debates. The best example for this is Italy, where Christian democrats were in power for more than four decades, being unaffected by the numerous changes in government, that is more than fifty between 1946 and 1993. The trade mark for Italian political system was the government based on broad alliances, formed by all sorts of parties, except the communists.

Despite several crises, economic problems, international difficulties, this system worked for almost five decades, with centre-left and centre-right parties alternating in power, sometimes even forming large coalitions. Starting with the 1990s, the (West) European political arena changed slowly. New parties emerged, the two main political groups started to loose votes and the old informal arrangement seemed to become obsolete. New leftist groups, Eurosceptic, populist, anti-system parties entered the party systems and in years were able to threaten governmental stability or even to fuel serious decisions, such as leaving the EU (Brexit).

The article tries to analyse what is the current status of the moderate left and moderate right in Western Europe. Also, since the 1950s-1980s are recalled as years of economic expansion, social peace, political consensus (with all the drawbacks), one research question is that the political circumstances could generate a somehow similar broad political alliance between the centre left and centre right, a new 21<sup>st</sup> century consensus, as a base for political stability and political harmony.

First of all, an analysis of both the circumstances of 1960s-1980s, compared with the ones after 2000 is necessary. Secondly, the political environment, mainly the new party systems will be researched, to find out which are the new ideological and party developments; it is important to see where the parties are nowadays located, from an ideological point of view. Eventually, the current situation of (centre) left and right will come under scrutiny.

The literature is quite vast in what regards the left-right divide in politics. There are several attempts to measure the location of parties on a left-right scale, using different methods. All these analysis had been coded and integrated in databases, which all generates significant literature. Chief among them are the Chapel Hill expert surveys<sup>1</sup> and the MARPOR (Manifesto Project)<sup>2</sup>. Based on expert surveys and manifesto coding, they were

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unc.edu/~gwmarks/data\\_pp.php](http://www.unc.edu/~gwmarks/data_pp.php) [Accessed 22/08/17]

<sup>2</sup> <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/> [Accessed 22/08/17]

followed by a lot of literature. The Chapel Hill surveys were described in Bakker et al. (2015) and also Polk et al. (2017). On the other hand, the Manifesto Project, since it is based on a longer endeavour, it could generate a longer list of articles and books. Dominant among them are the ones written by the MARPOR team, such as Budge et al. (2001), Klingemann et al. (2006) or Volkens et al. (2013). Other articles or works, based on these two sources or other ones will be highlighted in this article.

It must be underlined that while all these articles brought new facts and offered several explanation or description on the state of left and/or right, they somehow lack dynamism due to the fact that they are entirely based on program analysis or expert surveys. Most of them only analyse the position of a party on paper, without taking into consideration electoral campaigns, electoral results, the reaction of the party after some events, such as the British Conservatives or the Austrian Peoples Party, which moved to the right when it comes to policies/attitudes, while staying in the same position or even moving to the left in the recent years.<sup>3</sup> In several cases, analysis showed that a party stayed in the same position on a left-right scale, or even moved in a direction, yet in reality, it had a quite different position.

**Figure 1. Position of British Conservatives regarding European Integration**



Source: [https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp\\_dashboard/](https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp_dashboard/) [Accessed 22/08/17]

Note: The right is above level 0, while the left is located under level 0. It can be seen that since 2000, the Conservative party had a rather leftist position regarding European Integration that is a rather pro-EU position, fact which is denied by its recent position during Brexit.

<sup>3</sup> Briefly, the British Tories moved to the right partly due to the threat coming from UKIP

The article discusses the party systems of the democratic countries of Western Europe after 1945, mainly the six which founded the European Union, plus Austria and the United Kingdom.

## 2. The left and right during the 1950s-1980s

After a devastating war, the political systems of the Western European countries changed dramatically. Several parties disappeared, so were entire party families. Fascism was outlawed, while communism was better regarded, due to the involvement of communist in the WWII battles. Conservative parties were punished for their closeness to fascism and there were the Christian-democrats who replaced them (Vaida, 2013). Economically, Europe witnessed what was called *Les Trente Glorieuses* that is almost three decades of economic boom, doubled by a generous welfare system.

The political life was as one would expect after a world war and all sort of extremist movements of the 1930s that is a rather calm one, without political shocks. The notable event of the 1950s were the attempt to block the communist parties to enter the government.<sup>4</sup> The main parties in the political system were the Christian-democrats and the Social-democratic parties. By being moderate right and moderate left, these parties were able to attract a huge number of votes, in some cases even 90% of them, together (see Germany 1965, 1969, 1972, Austria 1956, 1959, 1962, 1966, in the tables below).

**Table 1. Electoral results in Germany, for the main competitors, 1949-1998**

	1949	1953	1957	1961	1965	1969	1972	1976	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998
CDU	25,2	36,4	39,7	35,8	38,0	36,6	35,2	38,0	34,2	38,2	34,5	36,7	34,2	28,4
CSU	5,8	8,8	10,5	9,6	9,6	9,5	9,7	10,6	10,3	10,6	9,8	7,1	7,3	6,7
SPD	29,2	28,8	31,8	36,2	39,3	42,7	45,8	42,6	42,9	38,2	37,0	33,5	36,4	40,9

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/germany2.html> [Accessed 4/09/17]

Note: The two main blocks received, combined, more than 80%

Once with the 1980s, the political environment started to change, even so it worked not differently from the years before. Both the economy and the social-cultural areas were

<sup>4</sup> When speaking in this text about politics, political event, actions, etc, I mean only events involving parties and party systems, and not in the broader sense.

affected by new incidents or processes, which all challenged the political parties.

First of all, there were the two energy (oil) crises of the 1973 and 1979. Secondly, the post-war economic boom came naturally to an end, and the welfare state based on Keynesianism required more and more money. The latter, fuelled by a combination of crises in several industrial areas, the ending of the Bretton Woods system led to rising unemployment and inflation. What most Western governments did was to slowly abandon Keynesianism and adopt monetary policies, that is to cut some welfare policies funds, to privatise some key economic areas (transportation, telecommunication, electric power) and in some cases to adopt genuine neo-liberal policies.

What was interesting is that even Social Democratic parties accepted these measures, in some cases being ready to adopt them, while in government.

On the other hand, it was the moment when the baby-boomers joined the political arena and in certain cases they were unhappy with the traditional parties and their offers. Some of these post-materialist voters were concerned with other issues than their parents, such as world peace, environment protection and others (see Inglehart, 1990).

Last but not least, there were the years when economy based on industrial production started to be replaced by the one centred on services. One effect was the decrease in importance of the Social Democratic parties, which started to constantly loose votes as of the 1990s.

It was also the moment the green parties emerged, and in the 1980s they already received enough votes to be accepted as stable competitors.

**Table 2. Electoral results in the Netherlands, for the main competitors, 1948-1998**

	1948	1952	1956	1959	1963	1967	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
PvdA	25,6	29,0	32,7	30,4	28,0	23,6	24,6	27,4	33,8	28,3	30,4	33,3	31,9	24,0	29,0
CDA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	31,9	30,8	29,3	34,6	35,3	22,2	18,4
KVP	31,0	28,7	31,7	31,6	31,9	26,5	21,9	17,7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ARP	13,2	11,3	9,9	9,4	8,7	9,9	8,6	8,8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CHU	9,2	8,9	8,4	8,1	8,6	8,1	6,3	4,8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/netherlands2.html> [Accessed 29/08/17]

Note: Until 1977, the three Christian Democratic parties acted separately, eventually they merged in 1977

Even the 1980s had turbulent moments, except the arrival of green parties, nothing important happened in the European political systems. Yet, even the two large camps still dominated (the centre right and centre left parties) it was easy to notice that they did not

receive the same amounts of votes as one or two decades earlier. Besides the Greens, other parties, which even could not resist more than just few years begun to “steal” votes.

**Table 3. Electoral results in Austria, for the main competitors, 1953-1999**

	1953	1956	1959	1962	1966	1970	1971	1975	1979	1983	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999
SPÖ	42,1	43,0	44,8	44,0	42,6	48,4	50,0	50,4	51,0	47,7	43,1	42,8	34,9	38,1	33,2
ÖVP	41,3	46,0	44,2	45,4	48,4	44,7	43,1	43,0	41,9	43,2	41,3	32,1	27,7	28,3	26,9

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/austria2.html> [Accessed 29/08/17]

As mentioned earlier, the existence of communism in Eastern Europe influenced somehow the behaviour of parties and party systems in Western Europe, by making them to “freeze”, yet not in the classical Rokkanian way, but by forcing the main parties to accommodate each other and inducing moderate politics.

That explains partially the fact the centre right parties accepted rather leftist policies, mainly connected to the welfare state and vice-versa, parties of the centre left did not reject the neoliberal policies of the 1980s.

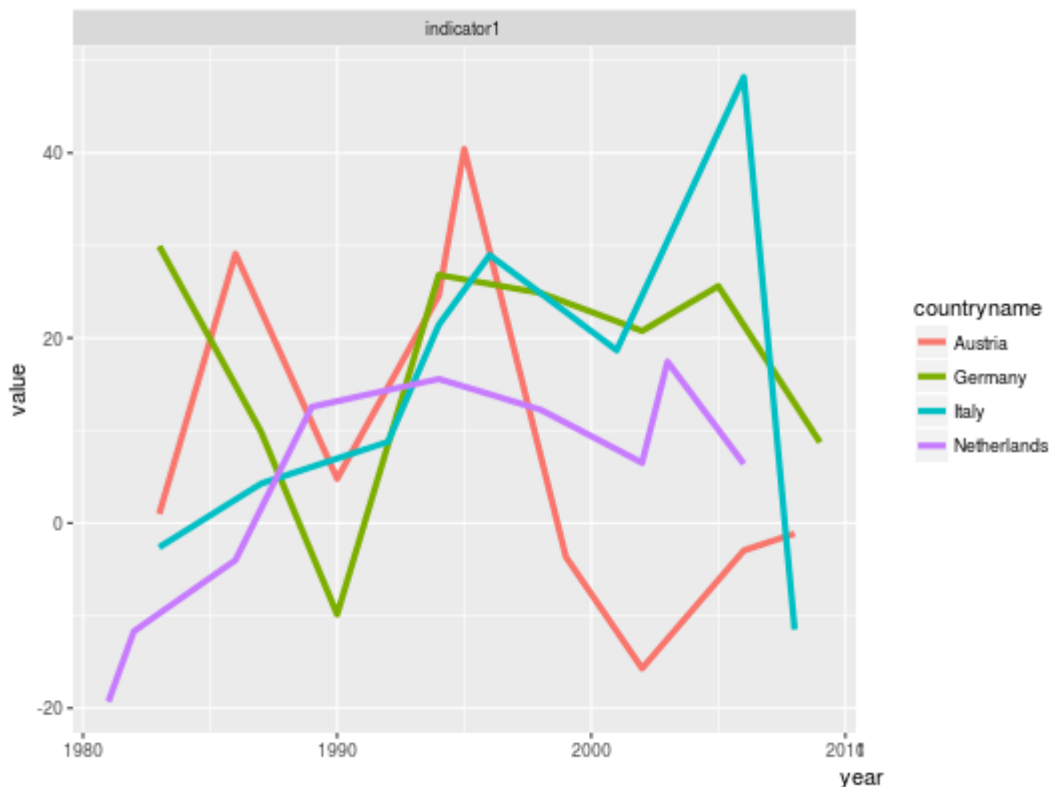
Once communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union accepted the fact that it “lost” the cold war, there were several consequences. First of all, Western communist parties were severely affected by the disappearance of USSR, which used to be a model for them, not to mention the financial support that they received. Their electorate lost the interest in supporting a party unable to reshape its message and policies and with an obsolete model. Best examples are the communist in France and Italy, where after 1989 their parties hardly received more than 5%, while in the 1970s, even 1980s, they were able to attract more than 20% of the votes, even an excellent 34,4% in Italy in 1976.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the ex-communist voters did not necessarily joined other left-wing camps, such as Social Democrats, but moved towards other political groups, even populists (Davies, 2014) or extreme right Eurosceptic, such as the Front National in France (Miscoiu, 2005). Also, ex-communist party members in unified Germany voted with Christian Democrats 1990 elections instead of more ideologically closer Social Democrats (Bösch, 2004).

On the other hand, curiously, those who lost from the fall of communism were the Christian democrats. While being pro-European, the Christian Democrats were fierce anti-communists and could attract many voters sharing the same belief. In other words, Christian

<sup>5</sup> In some cases communist parties virtually disappeared after 1989, see for instance Austria or the Netherlands, while in Sweden, Spain, Belgium or Luxembourg they survived, even in poor conditions.

Democratic parties were able to keep these voters “captive” just based on the issue of anticommunism. Once this threat gone, Christian democrats had difficulties in mobilising voters only by using the fear of communism. Paradoxically, even they could be named winners of the Cold War as a party family, Christian Democrats started to loose votes right after 1989.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, they voters chose the Green parties, while others moved to the right (Bösch, 2004). In fact, it was the moment when Christian democracy in general begun to move to the right (in Figure 2 it can be noticed the move to the right, after 1990, of Christian Democrats in four states, figures based on analysis of party programs, done under Manifesto Project – MARPOR)

**Figure 2. The place on a left-right map of four Christian Democratic parties**



Source: [https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp\\_dashboard\\_countries/](https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp_dashboard_countries/) [Accessed 22/08/17]

It could be an effect of growing secularization demobilization, the end of Cold War or other events, for the Christian Democrats, the fall of the Iron Curtain for the Communists, or

<sup>6</sup> In the Netherlands, CDA had the support of about 30% prior to 1989, and 22% respectively 18% at the first two elections in the 1990s. Those of Italian Christian Democrats are illustrious. In Austria, OVP received 43% and 41% during the 1980s, only to drop to 32% in 1990, and 27% at the next elections.

the decline of the industrial sector, for the Social Democrats, nevertheless it was in the 1990s when the traditional parties started slowly to lose votes. As mentioned, communists became rather marginal in the Western political arenas, while both the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats embarked in their move to centre, respectively to the right. In the case of Social Democrats, it was what they called the Third way, while the Christian Democrats became more conservative, ideologically (Seiler 1993, Vaida 2014). The recipients were the green parties, the extreme right or left, all sorts of liberals or regionalist parties.

### **3. The left and right during after the 1990s**

The new millennium brought new developments in the political systems of the European countries. Moderate left and the moderate right were further challenged by other political groups, some inexistent two decades ago. A list of what happened starting with the end of 1990s and the early 2000s could bring some suggestion about what was to come.

First of all, it was the process of European integration and EU enlargement that was in progress. In 2004, eight ex-communist countries joined the EU, two more in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. Not only was the end of a long European unification dream, but it also generated some difficulties. Briefly, it brought immigrants from the new member states, a process labelled mainly in the media under the phrase “Polish plumber” and which in some cases caused irritation. Secondly, the eight ex-communist states, less developed than their Western companions, needed and received European funds, which were lifted from old member states, the EU-15. Not to a large scale, but this also fuelled negative views regarding EU enlargement. Besides the new arrived states, “EU” and “Brussels” were blamed for the new situation by the new emerging party family, the Eurosceptics.

Already at the 1999 EP elections, the Eurosceptics received certain votes, yet under 5% and not disturbing the stable EPP/PES/LIB alliance. So did they in 2004, but it must be underlined that at this moment Front National and UKIP were able to gain 10%, respectively 16%.

At the beginning, the Eurosceptic parties were rather successful only at European parliament elections, where they gained more and more votes, yet, without affecting the decision making neither at European, nor at national level. That changed with the EP elections of 2009, where the Eurosceptics were able to win around 60 seats and able to form a stable and recognisable parliamentary group, based on the UKIP MEPs. In 2007 a second Eurosceptic/far-right group formed, yet only to collapse a few month later.



Even more important for a discussion on the European left and right was the formation of a new group (and in the same time, of a new trend in the European politics), the European Conservatives (officially, European Conservatives and Reformists). They came mainly from an EPP faction, unhappy with the moderate EPP and its support for the European Constitution, a heated topic of the 2004-2006 years (). They were able to form a group of about 60 MEPs (some MEPs came and left during the five years) and together with the Eurosceptics were able to induce a new tendency both at European and EP level, one opposing further integration and more Brussels.

It must be underlined that while in the 1990s, moderate left and right were still in good shape, historically one could point out the first years of the 2000s when the dynamics of the left and right started to change, to be more and more influenced by conservatism and Euroscepticism.

Besides the EU enlargement explanations, it must not forget the global economy difficulties. Years of economic growth ended in 2008, once with Lehman Brothers bank collapse. It was just the start of a four years economic recession, which affected the whole world economy. GDP growth was affected in almost every developed country, unemployment doubled in some cases, and the banking sector was heavily hit. Next came the Eurozone crisis, which affected already troubled Greece, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. The European Union helped these states by using several financial tools, such as bailout programs, loans, and all sorts of economic measures. As far as a left-right divide concern, these events had two main effects. On the one hand, at citizens' level, the general feeling was that taxpayers' money are spent to save countries which cannot follow basic financial rules. On the other hand, facing economic crises, almost all European governments, regardless their political colour, employed strict right wing measures, such as: financial austerity, budget consolidation, cutting spending (even of wages, especially in the public sector), increasing VAT. The short term effect of the all these were the fact that several citizens were affected by the crises and ready to punish those thought responsible. Obviously, they voted against parties in government when they could do so. The winners were not the left wing parties, as it would be logical when speaking about a government that imposed austerity, but the opposition parties, regardless of their ideology. Also it is worth to mention that that in several cases, there were the leftist parties that imposed austerity after 2009 and there were the right-wing parties those who won the next elections.

The combination of immigration, Euro and economy problems further facilitated the

growth of Eurosceptic/right-wing parties. The progress they already experienced in 2009 and the next years continued with the 2014 European elections, yet under different circumstances. At this point, the Eurosceptic/populist/extreme right wing parties reached their best result at European level. They were able to win around 100 seats and strong enough to form even two parliamentary groups, the *Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy* and the *Europe of Nations and Freedom*, the former centred around UKIP and the latter having Front National as a core.<sup>7</sup>

The other right-wing group, the ECR succeeded in coming third being the first party family to surpass the liberals for the first time since 1989. The conservatives received 70 seats, being able, together with the Eurosceptic groups, to push the EPP/SOC/LIB alliance under 65% of votes.

In fact the results of Eurosceptics did not come as a full surprise. Starting with the 2010s, these parties acted electorally better and better, having the means to win elections or to jeopardize coalition formation.<sup>8</sup>

European countries were just recovering from the economic crises of 2008-2009 and new events challenged them, namely the European refugee crisis, starting with 2014, with a peak in 2015. Even though refugees arrive in Europe constantly and there are bodies and policies concerning them, the size of the new arrival waves took the EU by surprise. Most refugees came from countries involved in war, such as Syria or Iraq. The images with thousands of people trying to cross borders or sleeping in railway stations generated a lot of disputes. Obviously, the political arena was affected, at least in two aspects. First of all, some migrants were causing troubles after arriving, the media presenting the cases in a rather exaggerated manner. Secondly and most importantly, there were some terrorist attacks in Paris, London, Nice or Manchester, all being labelled as (Islamism terrorism). Even that most of these attacks were planned and executed by European born Islamist, it was common the belief that there might be some connection with the new arrived refugees. Needless to say that parties at the right, from conservatives to extreme-right ones, took position on this issue and demanded for firm action. Anyway, that further fuelled the rather anti-immigration, Eurosceptic discourse, which was in favour of the extreme-right wing parties.

Starting with 2015 there is a significant increase of votes for the far-right/Eurosceptic

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<sup>7</sup> Some MEPs, such as those from *Jobbik* or other far-right parties were not accepted in these groups.

<sup>8</sup> M5S in Italy, election winner in 2013, PVV in the Netherlands, coming third then second, in 2017 and 2013 respectively, UKIP coming third in 2015, or in France Marine le Pen entered the second round of the presidential elections; not to mention Austria, where a far-right candidate almost won the presidential elections.

parties in Europe. In 2016 a FPO member candidate was close to win the presidential elections in Austria, being defeated by a narrow margin. It must be mentioned that for the first time after WWII, there were no moderate left or moderate right wing candidate among those fighting for the presidential positions. Just month later, the same scenario took place in France, where Marine Le Pen, well-known leader of Front National, entered the second round of elections, being eventually defeated by Emmanuel Macron. Once again, there were no candidates of the left or the right in this presidential final round, a premiere, as in Austria. Also in 2017, in the Netherlands, the right-wing populist PVV arrived second in the parliamentary elections, while in Germany, a party with a similar position, AfD, received almost 13%, coming third after CDU/CSU and SPD. The same position was occupied by UKIP in 2013, with an astonishing 13%. At this point, it should be mentioned that UKIP was already a strong competitor, since it achieved 26% and the first place at the 2014 EP elections, after 16% in 2009. While not being very influential in the UK governmental area, and being able to be a voice only in Brussels, UKIP was instrumental in what was perceived as one of the most important blow for the EU, namely the Brexit.

#### 4. Conclusions

The objective of the article was to analyse the shape of the moderate right and left in Europe in the recent years, as compared with the same political pair in the 1950s-1980s. For many decades, the two political groups overwhelmingly dominated the political systems of the Western European countries (see Table 1, 2, 3). In some cases, the two main parties received more than 90% at certain elections. Starting with the 1990s, votes went to other parties, and the two political block could hardly find any solution. The result was that in two decades, they lost more than half of their votes combined (see Table 4, 5, 6).

**Table 4. Electoral results in Germany, for the main competitors, 2002-2017**

	2002	2005	2009	2013	2017
CDU	29,5	27,8	27,3	34,1	26,8
CSU	9,0	7,4	6,5	7,4	6,2
SPD	38,5	34,2	23,0	25,7	20,5

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/germany2.html> [Accessed 17/09/2017]

A first and basic conclusion would be, at this point, that the centre right and the centre left are in poor condition, compared with their situation decades ago.

What could explain the unfortunate situation of these party blocks? Obviously, they must be analyzed separately, even in certain cases their status was the result of their (non)cooperation. First of all, there are the parties of the left those who lost most of their influence and voters. Based on the classical cleavage of owners/workers, the socialist/social-democratic parties had a clear voter base that is the industrial workers in the first place, than any other worker category. Moreover, the left was voted by those less wealthy, those who wanted free education and health care and a protective pension system.

**Table 5. Electoral results in Austria, for the main competitors, 2002-2013**

	2002	2006	2008	2013
SPÖ	36,5	35,3	29,3	26,8
ÖVP	42,3	34,3	26,0	24,0

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/austria2.html> [Accessed 22/08/17]

To implement all these measures, which are the basics in a welfare state, the parties of the left needed several years, during which they were top electoral competitors (see the case of Austria, where Social Democrats received sometimes more than half of the votes, or of Germany or Great Britain). After the 1970s, the parties of the right not just accepted and imposed themselves such measures, but they did not challenged them, even in years of economic crises (except some minor adjustments). All these policies became part of the system. At this point, the Social Democrats ought to come with new proposals, regarding those less fortunate. What the parties of the left did was to move close to the centre, ideologically and adopt post-materialist views, socially. During the 1990s several parties of the left adopted close-to-the-centre positions, mainly in Great Britain (Third Way) and in Germany. Moreover, Social Democrats adopted positions regarding the environment, immigration or minorities of all types.

**Table 6. Electoral results of the Social Democrats in Germany, in percentage, 1949-2017**

	1949	1953	1957	1961	1965	1969	1972	1976	1980	1983
SPD	29,2	28,8	31,8	36,2	39,3	42,7	45,8	42,6	42,9	38,2
	1987	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005	2009	2013	2017	
SPD	37,0	33,5	36,4	40,9	38,5	34,2	23,0	25,7	20,5	

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/germany2.html> [Accessed 17/09/2017]

Another difficulty Social Democrats faced was the change in economy structure that is deindustrialisation. Industry, which once accounted for more than 40% of GDP output in the developed countries, is below 25% nowadays. There are less and less industrial workers, not to mention the fact that the importance of trade unions, once part of the Social Democratic environment, vanished.

**Table 7. Electoral results of the Social Democrats in Austria, in percentage, 1945-2013**

	1945	1949	1953	1956	1959	1962	1966	1970	1971	1975	1979	1983	1986	1990
SPÖ	44,6	38,7	42,1	43,0	44,8	44,0	42,6	48,4	50,0	50,4	51,0	47,7	43,1	42,8
	1994	1995	1999	2002	2006	2008	2013							
SPÖ	34,9	38,1	33,2	36,5	35,3	29,3	26,8							

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/austria2.html> [Accessed 22/08/17]

Facing the effects of globalization and of immigration, which in some cases brought job loses, the voters of the left moved in other direction, such as populist parties, even parties of the right. It must be noticed that from the two blocks that are researched in this article, the centre-left is in the worst position, compared with its situation in the 1970, for example (see Tables 6 and 7, with the particular situation of the 1972 elections in Germany or of the 1975 and 1979 in Austria).

On the other hand, the parties of the right had have a somehow better situation. Even they lost several votes and also political importance, in certain cases they still dominate the party systems in which they act (see Germany, Great Britain, and Luxemburg). Yet they had a price to pay. There were the Christian Democrats those who had to transform themselves, in some cases in a profound manner. They abandoned the centre economic policies adopting a rather neoliberal stance. They maintained most of welfare state policies, yet changing important parts of them: decrease of trade unions role, diminishing workers' rights and opening several economic areas. Except few parties, most Christian Democrats moved to the right, nowadays all these parties being labelled as 'Conservatives'.

Moreover, due to pressures coming from the right that is from populist/far-right parties the centre-right ones moved further to the right, abandoned their moderate position.

Tables 8a, 8b and 8c are a good example of how the party systems look nowadays and what are the main ideologies or political offers for the voters. The tables are selected from Wolfram Nordsieck's web page, which is a data base with electoral results (<http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/>). The page also contains a political dictionary, for terms such as conservatism, national conservatism, euroscepticism, etc. The three tables display the

electoral results and ideologies in recent elections in countries which decades ago had parties acting close to the centre.

**Table 8a. Electoral results and ideological offers, 2010s elections in Europe, example 1**

	2017	2013
Christian democracy Liberal conservatism	26,8%	34,1%
Social democracy	20,5%	25,7%
National conservatism	12,6%	4,7%
Liberalism	10,7%	4,8%
Democratic socialism	9,2%	8,6%

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/germany.html> [Accessed 17/09/2017]

**Table 8b. Electoral results and ideological offers, 2010s elections in Europe, example 2**

	2015	2011
Social democracy	26,3%	24,9%
National conservatism Social conservatism Right-wing populism	21,1%	12,3%
Conservative liberalism Agrarianism	19,5%	26,7%
Socialism Eco-socialism Euroscepticism	7,8%	6,7%
Liberalism	7,5%	5,0%

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/denmark.html> [Accessed 28/08/17]

It is interesting to notice that regardless the country, in the recent elections voters were in favor of right-wing, even far right parties. Once just exceptions, today these Eurosceptic/populist parties are at the core of the party systems, causing instability and in several situations obstructing government formations.

**Table 8c. Electoral results and ideological offers, 2010s elections in Europe, example 3**

	2017	2012
Conservative liberalism	21,2%	26,5%
Right-wing populism	13,0%	10,1%
Christian democracy	12,4%	8,5%
Social liberalism	12,2%	8,0%
Democratic socialism Euroscepticism	9,1%	9,6%
Green politics	9,1%	2,3%
Social democracy	5,7%	24,7%

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/netherlands.html> [Accessed 4/09/2017]

There are several final remarks that end this article. First of all, the situation of moderate left and moderate right changed significantly. As compared with the policies and ideological proposals of the 1960s-1980s, it is hard to say that we have nowadays large moderate parties. The Social Democrats are somehow close to the centre and still moderate. Their biggest problem is that they lost their political power (see table 8c) and electoral significance. Secondly, on the other part of the political arena, moderate right parties are virtually non-existent anymore. Those who were Christian Democrat or mild Conservatives four decades ago moved to the right, because of electoral or pragmatically reasons. Especially in the recent years, the expansion of far right populist parties forced them to adopt similar messages in order to preserve their voters. Thirdly, the main feature of the nowadays party systems all over Europe, not only in the Western part, is the asymmetric political scene, with several influential parties competing in the right, with few weak parties on the left side. In other words, the whole political spectrum is balanced to the right, and this could explain somehow the political unrest that is so common in Europe. Finally, to answer the question regarding the re-emergence of a political consensus between two moderate parties, one from the left, the other from the right, the answer is rather negative. It is not a valid proposal, at least not until some right-wing parties would return to the centre, and the left ones become significant again.

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