

Europe's Civilizationalist Parties

Don't shun the populists; work with and learn from them

By Daniel Pipes

IS EUROPE RETURNING to the horrors of the 1930s? In an assessment typical of the moment, Max Holleran writes in the *New Republic* that “in the past ten years, new right-wing political movements have brought together coalitions of Neo-Nazis with mainstream free-market conservatives, normalizing political ideologies that in the past rightly caused alarm.” He sees this trend creating a surge in “xenophobic populism.” Writing in *Politico*, Katy O'Donnell agrees: “Nationalist parties now have

a toehold everywhere from Italy to Finland, raising fears the continent is backpedaling toward the kinds of policies that led to catastrophe in the first half of the 20th century.” Jewish leaders such as Menachem Margolin, head of the European Jewish Association, sense “a very real threat from populist movements across Europe.”

Germany and Austria, the birthplaces of National Socialism, naturally arouse the most concern, especially after the elections in 2017, when the Alternative for Germany (AfD) won 13 percent of the vote and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) won 26 percent. Felix Klein, Germany's commissioner to combat anti-Semitism, says that the AfD “helps make anti-Semitism presentable again.” Oskar Deutsch, president of the Jewish Communities of Austria, argues that the FPÖ “has

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never distanced itself" from its Nazi past.

Is this correct? Or does this insurgency reflect a healthy response by Europeans to protect their way of life from open immigration and Islamization?

TO BEGIN WITH, what to call the phenomenon under discussion? The parties in question tend to be called *far-right*, but that is inaccurate, for they offer a mixture of rightist policies (focused on culture) and leftist ones (focused on economics). The National Rally in France, for example, attracts leftist support by calling for the nation's banks to be nationalized. Indeed, ex-Communists make up a key element of support; Hénin-Beaumont, which is now among the most fervently pro-National Rally towns of France, previously was among the most Communist.

Charles Hawley of *Der Spiegel* claims that "all these parties are, at their core, *nationalist*," but this is historically incorrect. They are patriotic, not nationalist; defensive, not aggressive. They root for soccer teams, not military victories. They cherish English customs, not the British Empire; the bikini, not German bloodlines. They neither hanker for empires nor claim national superiority. Nationalism classically concerns power, wealth, and glory; they focus on mores, traditions, and culture. Though called *neo-fascist* or *neo-Nazi*, these parties put a premium on personal liberty and traditional culture; notions such as "One People, One Nation, One Leader" have little attraction to them.

Better to call them "civilizationalist," focusing on their cultural priority, because they feel intense frustration at watching their way of life disappear. They cherish Europe's and the West's traditional culture and want to defend it from assault by immigrants aided by the left. (The term *civilizationalist* has the additional benefit of excluding those parties that loathe Western civilization, such as Greece's neo-Nazi Golden Dawn.)

Civilizationalist parties are populist, anti-immigration, and anti-Islamization. *Populist* means nursing grievances against the system and a suspicion of an elite that ignores or denigrates those concerns. These are the "6Ps": police, politicians, press, priests, professors, and prosecutors. At the height of the migrant tsunami in 2015, German chancellor Angela

Merkel responded to a voter worried about uncontrolled migration with a characteristic rebuke about Europe's faults and condescending advice about attending church services more often. Dimitris Avramopoulos, the European commissioner for migration, flatly announced that Europe "cannot and will never be able to stop migration" and proceeded to lecture his fellow citizens: "It is naive to think that our societies will remain homogenous and migration-free if one erects fences. ... We all need to be ready to accept migration, mobility, and diversity as the new norm." Former Swedish prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt argued for more migrants: "I often fly over the Swedish countryside and I would advise others to do. There are endless fields and forests. There's more space than you might imagine."

All of these three, it bears noting, are what pass for *conservatives* in Europe. Others, like Nicolas Sarkozy of France and David Cameron of Great Britain, talked tough but governed soft. Their contemptuous dismissal of anti-immigration sentiments created an opportunity for civilizationalist parties through much of Europe. From the venerable FPÖ (founded in 1956) to the Netherlands' new Forum for Democracy (founded in 2016), they fill an electoral and societal gap.

Civilizationalist parties, led by Italy's League, are *anti-immigration*, seeking to control, reduce, and even reverse the immigration of recent decades, especially that of Muslims and Africans. These two groups stand out not because of prejudice ("Islamophobia" or racism) but due to their being the least assimilable of foreigners, an array of problems associated with them, such as not working and criminal activity, and a fear that they will impose their ways on Europe.

Finally, the parties are *anti-Islamization*. As Europeans learn about Islamic law (Sharia), they increasingly focus on its role concerning women's issues, such as niqabs and burqas, polygamy, *taharrush* (sexual assault), honor killings, and female genital mutilation. Other concerns deal with Muslim attitudes toward non-Muslims, including Christophobia and Judeophobia, jihadi violence, and the insistence that Islam enjoy a privileged status vis-à-vis other religions.

Muslims, it bears noting, form a geographical membrane around Europe, from Senegal to Morocco

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to Egypt to Turkey to Chechnya, enabling vast numbers of potential migrants with relative ease to enter illegally the continent by land or sea. It's 75 kilometers from Albania to Italy, 60 kilometers from Tunisia to (the tiny island of Pantelleria in) Italy, 14 kilometers across the Straits of Gibraltar from Morocco to Spain, 1.6 kilometers from Anatolia to the Greek island of Samos, fewer than 100 meters across the Evros River from Turkey to Greece, and 10 meters from Morocco to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

Increasing numbers of would-be migrants are circling around the entry points, in some cases resorting to violence to force their way in. In 2015, Johannes Hahn, the European Union's enlargement commissioner, estimated that "there are 20 million refugees waiting at the doorstep of Europe." That may sound like a large number, but when one adds economic migrants to the mix, the numbers shoot up still more; especially as water shortages drive Middle Easterners from their homelands, aspiring migrants might begin to approach Europe's population of 740 million.

ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION, civilizationist parties suffer from deep problems. Mainly staffed by neophytes, they contain disturbing numbers of cranks: anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim extremists, racists, power-hungry oddballs, conspiracy theorists, historical revisionists, and Nazi nostalgists. Autocrats run their parties undemocratically and seek to dominate parliaments, the judiciary, schools, and other key institutions. They harbor anti-American resentments and take money from Moscow.

These shortcomings usually translate into electoral weakness, as Europeans resist voting for parties that spew bile and cantankerous ideas. About 60 percent of the German voting public worries about Islam and Muslims, polls show, but only one-fifth of them voted for AfD. To advance electorally and achieve their potential, then, civilizationist parties must convince the voters that they can be trusted to govern. Older parties especially, such as the FPÖ, are changing, as shown by the perpetual personnel battles, party splits, and other drama; however messy and off-putting, this process is both necessary and constructive.

Anti-Semitism, the issue that most delegiti-

mates civilizationist parties and arouses the fiercest debates, requires special attention. The parties do often have dubious origins, contain fascistic elements, and give off anti-Semitic signals. Jewish leaders in Europe, accordingly, condemn the civilizationists and insist that the State of Israel do the same, even if the civilizationists are in government and Israel must deal with them. Ariel Muzicant, honorary president of the Austrian Jewish community, actually threatened Jerusalem were it to stop boycotting the FPÖ: "I will definitely speak out against the government of Israel."

But three points mitigate these concerns: First, civilizationist parties generally distance themselves from obsessions with Jews as they mature. Because of Jean-Marie Le Pen's obstinate anti-Semitism, his daughter Marine Le Pen actually expelled him in 2015 from the National Rally he had founded in 1972. In Hungary last December, the hitherto openly anti-Semitic Jobbik party renounced its old ways.

Second, civilizationist leaders seek good relations with Israel. They visit, they pay their respects at Yad Vashem, and in some cases (such as the Czech president and the Austrian vice-chancellor) they support moving their countries' embassies to Jerusalem. Run by the civilizationist party Fidesz, the Hungarian government has Europe's closest relations with Israel. This pattern has been noted in Israel; for example, Gideon Sa'ar of the Likud party calls civilizationist parties "the natural friends of Israel."

Finally, whatever the civilizationist difficulties with Jews, these pale in comparison with the left's rampant anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, especially in Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of Britain's Labour Party, symbolizes this trend: He calls the murderers of Jews his friends and has openly associated with them. As civilizationist leaders struggle to abandon anti-Semitism, many of their political opponents are diving headfirst into the filth.

IN THE SPACE OF 20 YEARS, civilizationist parties have grown from near irrelevance to become an important force in close to half Europe's countries. Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this ascent comes from Sweden, where the Sweden Democrats have roughly doubled their vote every four years: 0.4 percent in 1998, 1.3 percent in 2002, 2.9 per-

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cent in 2006, 5.7 percent in 2010, and 12.9 percent in 2014. It did not sustain this pattern in 2018, winning just 17.6 percent of the vote, but that sufficed to make it a substantial force in Swedish politics.

No other civilizationist party has grown so mathematically, but votes and survey research suggest that they will gain support. As Geert Wilders, the leader of a Dutch civilizationist party, notes: “In the Eastern part of Europe, anti-Islamification and anti-mass-migration parties see a surge in popular support. Resistance is growing in the West, as well.” They have three paths to power.

1) *On their own*: Civilizationist parties govern Hungary and Poland. Populations of these two former-Warsaw Pact countries, who won their independence only a generation ago and who watch developments in Western Europe with dismay, decided to go their own way. Both their prime ministers have explicitly rejected illegal Muslim migrants (while keeping the door open to Muslims who abide by the rules). Other Eastern European countries have more tentatively gone down this same path.

2) *Joining with legacy conservative parties*: As legacy conservative parties bleed voters to the civilizationists, they respond by adopting anti-immigration and anti-Islamization policies and join forces with the civilizationists. So far, this has happened only in Austria, where the Austrian People’s Party and the FPÖ jointly won 58 percent of the vote and formed a coalition government in December 2017, but more such collaborations are likely.

The 2017 Republican presidential candidate in France moved toward civilizationism and his successor, Laurent Wauquiez, has continued in the same direction. The nominally conservative party in Sweden, the Moderates, has started in the hitherto inconceivable direction of cooperating with the Sweden Democrats. Germany’s Free Democratic Party has moved toward civilizationism. Merkel may still be chancellor of Germany, but some in her government have repudiated her reckless immigration policy; in particular, the interior minister and head of an allied party, Horst Seehofer, articulated hardline immigration policies and even said that Islam does not belong in Germany.

3) *Joining with other parties*: Italy’s eccentric, anarchist, more-or-less leftist Five Star Movement teamed

up with the civilizationist League in June to form a government. To forestall civilizationist advances, some leftist parties, like Sweden’s Social Democrats, are with clenched teeth adopting vaguely anti-immigration policies. The Social Democratic party in Denmark took a leap in this direction when its leader, Mette Frederiksen, announced the goal of limiting “the number of non-Western foreigners who can come to Denmark” by setting up reception centers outside Europe, where applicants would stay while their application for asylum would be examined; strikingly, if accepted, the asylum seeker would remain outside Europe, his expenses paid for by the Danish taxpayer. More broadly, as the leftist political theorist Yascha Mounk argues, “the attempt to turn countries with monoethnic identities into truly multiethnic nations is a historically unique experiment.” Understandingly, he notes that this “has encountered some fierce resistance.”

AS CIVILIZATIONIST PARTIES gain in support and power, they open the eyes of the other parties to the challenges related to immigration and Islam. Conservatives, whose business supporters benefit from cheap labor, have tended to shy away from these issues. Leftist parties usually promote immigration and are myopic about Islam-related problems. Comparing Great Britain and Sweden, the two European countries most flaccid in the face of culturally aggressive and criminally violent migrants, very clearly shows the role of civilizationist parties.

The former has no such party, so these issues are not addressed; in Rotherham and elsewhere, sex-grooming gangs (really, rape gangs) in UK Muslim communities were allowed to operate for years and even decades with the 6Ps averting their eyes. In contrast, the Sweden Democrats have so changed the country’s politics that the right and left parliamentary blocs formed a grand coalition to block them from wielding influence. While this maneuver worked in the short term, the Sweden Democrats’ very existence has induced policy changes, such as tightening access for illegal migrants.

In similar fashion, the former Soviet satellites are disrupting the legacy NATO members. Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, stands out in this regard, with his deep analysis of Europe’s problems

and his ambitions to remake the European Union. Hungary in particular and Central Europe in general are acquiring unprecedented influence because of their stance against immigration and Islamization.

I hope to have established two fundamental points here. First, that civilizationist parties are amateurish, raw, and error-prone, but not dangerous; their advent to power will not return Europe to the “low dishonest decade” of the 1930s. Second, that they are inexorably growing so that in 20 years or so, they will be widely serving in government and influencing both conservatives and leftists. Rejecting, marginalizing,

ostracizing, and ignoring civilizationist parties in the hope they will disappear will fail. Such steps will not stop them from reaching power but will, counterproductively, make them more populist and radical.

The 6Ps should accept civilizationists as legitimate, work with them, encourage them to slough off extremist elements, help them gain practical experience, and guide them to prepare for governance. But it is not a one-way street, for civilizationists have something to teach the elites, possessing as they do realistic insights about sustaining traditional ways and maintaining Western civilization. 🇸🇦