

# Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity

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**ABSTRACT** In recent years, Islamophobia has become a useful tool for right-wing parties to mobilize electors in many European nation-states. The general xenophobic campaigns of the 1980s have given way to Islamophobia as a specific expression of racism. It is not only the new incarnations of right-wing populist parties that are making use of Islamophobic populism, but also right-wing extremist parties, whose traditions hark back to fascist or Nazi parties. This development appears unsurprising, as Islamophobia has somehow become a kind of ‘accepted racism’, found not only on the margins of European societies but also at the centre. Another interesting concomitant shift is the attempt by such parties to gain wider acceptance in mainstream societies by distancing themselves from a former antisemitic profile. While the main focus on an exclusive identity politics in the frame of nation-states previously divided the far right and complicated transnational cooperation, a shared Islamophobia has the potential to be a common ground for strengthening the transnational links of right-wing parties. This shift from antisemitism to Islamophobia goes beyond European borders and enables Europe’s far right to connect to Israeli parties and the far right in the United States. Hafez’s article explores this thesis by analysing the European Alliance for Freedom, a pan-European alliance of far-right members of the European parliament that has brought various formerly antagonistic parties together through a common anti-Muslim programme, and is trying to become a formal European parliamentary fraction in the wake of its victory in the European elections in May 2014.

**KEYWORDS** anti-Muslim prejudice, antisemitism, Europe, far right, Islamophobia, populism, right-wing parties, transnational cooperation

## The decade of Islamophobia

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, much evidence had accumulated pointing to the spread of popular anti-Muslim sentiment across Europe. A 2011 European report, *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination*, compared attitudes in eight countries (Germany, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Hungary) and came to the following conclusion: ‘In most of the countries a majority believe Islam to be a *religion of intolerance*, with agreement just below 50 percent only in Great Britain and the

Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> The report concluded that there was ‘an astonishing extent of distance, suspicion and mistrust towards Muslims and Islam in Europe’.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the authors demonstrate that: ‘Anti-Muslim attitudes exist without Muslims. In fact, also in the eastern European countries, where the number of Muslims is negligible, prejudice against Muslims is quite prevalent.’<sup>3</sup> The fact that Islamophobia is widespread in Eastern European countries with a small number of Muslim inhabitants mirrors the long-established theory of antisemitism studies that argues that the prejudice reveals more about the antisemite than it does about the Jew,<sup>4</sup> and thus confirms the validity of approaches of antisemitism scholars such as Wolfgang Benz that are designed to learn from antisemitism studies when undertaking an analysis of Islamophobia.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I draw on such a notion of Islamophobia that does not assume an ontological category of Islam or Muslims, but rather understands both as existing in the imagination of the racist.

It is this imaginative power in the construction of Islam and Muslims that has made it so useful for far-right activists. Indeed, right-wing populist and extremist parties have been gaining ground for three decades now in many Western European countries by deploying racist discourse. In this article, I use the terms ‘right-wing extremist’ and ‘right-wing populist’ not to characterize parties in absolute terms, but to show their tendencies and special lineages. ‘Right-wing extremist’ is used to point to the historical roots of parties such as the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ, Austrian Freedom Party) or the Sverigedemokraterna (SD, Swedish Democrats) that reach back to a Nazi past and/or a Nazi milieu. These parties have regularly trivialized National Socialism and antisemitic discourses and used openly racist discourses.<sup>6</sup> ‘Right-wing populist’, on the other hand, is used for parties

1 Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper and Andreas Hövermann, *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination: A European Report* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung 2011), 61, available on the *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* website at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/do/07908-20110311.pdf> (viewed 18 August 2014) (original emphasis).

2 *Ibid.*, 161–2.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. from the French by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books 1995), 13–14; Alexander Pollak, ‘Antisemitismus: Probleme der Definition und Operationalisierung eines Begriffs’, in John Bunzl and Alexandra Senfft (eds), *Zwischen Antisemitismus und Islamophobie: Vorurteile und Projektionen in Europa und Nahost* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag 2008), 17–32.

5 Wolfgang Benz, ‘Vorwort’, *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, vol. 17, 2008, 9–14; Wolfgang Benz (ed.), *Islamfeindschaft und ihr Kontext: Dokumentation der Konferenz ‘Feindbild Muslim—Feindbild Jude’* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag 2009).

6 Anders Hellström, Tom Nilsson and Pauline Stoltz, ‘Nationalism vs. nationalism: the challenge of the Sweden Democrats in the Swedish public debate’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2012, 186–205; Anton Pelinka and Ruth Wodak, ‘Dreck am Stecken’: *Politik der Ausgrenzung* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag 2002).

created after the Second World War that, like Geert Wilders's Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, Party for Freedom), have no links to a fascist or Nazi past, but play the nationalist card by claiming to defend liberal values. One important difference between the two is that right-wing extremist parties with an antisemitic profile have often positioned themselves against Israel and defended Palestinians (and thereby Muslims) as a result of their antisemitism, as well as their anti-Americanism. This difference concerns foreign-policy issues, but not domestic policy, as the far-right extremist concept of 'ethno-pluralism' calls for the preservation of imagined homogeneous nation-states without the mixing of different ethnicities.<sup>7</sup> But even this notion of ethno-pluralism may dissolve in the face of the process of *religionization*, as Islamophobia becomes more and more relevant.

To give but two examples. The English Defence League (EDL) included people of Asian descent into its ranks, just as the the Austrian FPÖ began to include Serbs—formerly excluded from the national community as *Ausländer* (foreigners) in the 1990s—among their 'we' by arguing that they all shared a common struggle against Islam, that is, a European Occidental-Christian world-view.<sup>8</sup> Here, the process of racialization is reversed by marking a common *religion* as the defining aspect of one's belonging. Religion and not race becomes the principal criterion for drawing borders between identities. At the same time, this does not mean that the notion of race is completely absent. Rather, the term 'race' is replaced by the modern-day term 'culture'. The far right's 'differential racism' or 'cultural racism' incorporates notions of religion and culture as by-products of a biological determinism that merely hides the notion of race that has become taboo in contemporary public discourses.<sup>9</sup> Hence, Islamophobia racializes Islam and the Muslims and cannot only be seen as an expression of religious bigotry.<sup>10</sup> Nasar Meer draws on Junaid Rana's insight about 'a shared and overlapping racial history of the Jew and the Muslim' that continues to work today.<sup>11</sup> Islamophobia has become the main exclusionary project of the far right: an attempt to mark Muslims as naturally different—at times as inferior and capable of conspiring against their western 'host societies'—in order to oppress them collectively and exclude them from the national collective. Or simply, as Matti Bunzl put

7 Karin Priester, *Rassismus: Eine Sozialgeschichte* (Leipzig: Reclam 2003), 247–93.

8 Farid Hafez, 'Identität im Fluss: Über das "Eigene" und das "Fremde" in der Islamdebatte', in Christian Danz and André Ritter (eds), *Zwischen Kruzifix und Minarett: Religion im Fokus der Öffentlichkeit* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag 2012), 15–30.

9 Priester, *Rassismus*, 247–69.

10 At the same time, Nasar Meer observes a 'virtual absence of an established literature on race and racism in the discussion of Islamophobia; something that is only marginally more present in the discussion of antisemitism': Nasar Meer, 'Semantics, scales and solidarities in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 500–15 (501).

11 Junaid Rana, quoted in Nasar Meer, 'Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 385–98 (386).

it with respect to the 1990s, 'migrants became Muslims, and Europe's right wing found its target'.<sup>12</sup>

Right-wing extremist and populist parties continuously flesh out the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' by addressing issues of identity, values and lifestyles.<sup>13</sup> Some authors even argue that the new 'national identity axis' in party politics, which is also recognized by the centrist parties, has structured the political opportunities available to far-right parties.<sup>14</sup> Islam was already seen as the new enemy on a global level even before, and much more so after, the fall of the Soviet Union,<sup>15</sup> making it possible to target Islam as the new 'enemy within', a tactic used by the far-right camp over the course of the last ten to twenty years.<sup>16</sup> Today, Islamophobic discourses are a feature of many divergent parties in the far-right camp.<sup>17</sup> The Dutch Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) claimed, as far back as 1991, that Islam was a threat to liberal democracy and a hindrance to the 'integration' of immigrants. In the late 1990s, Pim Fortuyn, author of *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur* (Against the Islamification of Our Culture), introduced a cruder Islamophobia,<sup>18</sup> and his party List Fortuyn gained 17.5 per cent of the vote in the 2002 elections. Having adopted most of Fortuyn's proposals, the VVD became the senior partner in the coalition government after the general elections in 2010. In 2000 Jörg Haider's parties – first the FPÖ and then the Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ, Alliance for the

- 12 Matti Bunzl, 'Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: some thoughts on the new Europe', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2005, 499–508 (505).
- 13 Oliver Geden, 'Identitätsdiskurs und politische Macht: Die rechtspopulistische Mobilisierung von Ethnozentrismus im Spannungsfeld von Opposition und Regierung am Beispiel von FPÖ und SVP', in Susanne Frölich-Steffen and Lars Rensmann (eds), *Populisten an der Macht: Populistische Regierungsparteien in West- und Osteuropa* (Vienna: Braumüller Verlag 2005), 69–83.
- 14 Antonis A. Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010).
- 15 Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Random House 1981); Reinhard Schulze, 'Vom Anti-Kommunismus zum Anti-Islamismus: Der Kuwait-Krieg als Fortschreibung des Ost-West-Konflikts', in Norbert Mattes (ed.), *Wir sind die Herren und ihr unsere Schuhputzer! Der Nahe Osten vor und nach dem Golfkrieg* (Frankfurt on Main: Dayyeli Verlag 1991), 207–19.
- 16 Hans-Georg Betz, 'Rechtspopulismus in Westeuropa: Aktuelle Entwicklungen und politische Bedeutung', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, no. 3, 2002, 251–64 (253–6).
- 17 Raymond Taras, *Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012); Humayun Ansari and Farid Hafez (eds), *From the Far Right to the Mainstream: Islamophobia in Party Politics and the Media* (NY and Frankfurt: Campus Verlag 2012).
- 18 Pim Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur: Nederlandse identiteit als fundament* (Utrecht: A. W. Bruna 1997). Damir Skenderovic, 'Feindbild Muslime – Islamophobie in der radikalen Rechten', in Urs Altermatt, Mariano Delgado and Guido Vergauwen (eds), *Der Islam in Europa: Zwischen Weltpolitik und Alltag* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag 2006), 79–96 (92).

Future of Austria)—became a part of government, where they remained until 2006. Haider started targeting Islam and Muslims as the ‘enemy within’ in the year 2007, after his original Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) had begun to conduct aggressively Islamophobic election campaigns from 2004 onwards.<sup>19</sup> After the ‘cartoons affair’ in Denmark in 2007, the Dansk Folkeparti (DFP, Danish People’s Party) became even more influential, emerging with twenty-five parliamentary seats in 2007 (14 per cent), and the same number in 2011. Similarly, in September 2010, the Swedish Democrats (SD), initially a neo-Nazi grouping that deployed negative imagery of burqa-clad Muslim women knocking over Swedish pensioners and grabbing their state benefits, won enough votes (5.7 per cent) to enter parliament with twenty seats. Back in the Netherlands, the anti-Islam PVV (Party for Freedom)—whose leader Geert Wilders called for the ‘fascist’ Qur’an to be banned—gained a record twenty-four seats in the June 2010 general elections.<sup>20</sup> And, in Britain, two candidates from the far-right British National Party were elected to the European parliament in June 2009. In addition, outside of party politics, civic movements such as the English Defence League (EDL) or the umbrella organization Stop the Islamization of Europe (SIOE) regularly stage marches shouting anti-Islamic slogans.<sup>21</sup> Some civic campaigns, like the German PRO movement, which were initially set up to demonstrate against local mosques, have over time become political parties and won seats in regional parliaments.<sup>22</sup>

This focus on the Muslim scapegoat seems to bring new opportunities to many of the right-wing extremist parties that have a historical link to a fascist or Nazi past, such as the Austrian FPÖ, the Swedish Democrats or the French Front National. All of them try to rid themselves of the historical stench of their antisemitism in order to become more acceptable to a broader electorate. While they have attempted to achieve this for a long time, the recent stricter focus on Islam seems to offer strategic help to these parties. It allows them to appeal to voters who do not consider themselves racist or antisemitic, who are not attached to a Nazi past and who are concerned with the perceived ‘threat’ of ‘radical Islam’ that has a hegemonic presence in the media coverage on ‘Islam’,<sup>23</sup> and, accordingly, creates the image of Islam in the public sphere,

19 Farid Hafez, ‘Jörg Haider and Islamophobia’, in Ansari and Hafez (eds), *From the Far Right to the Mainstream*, 45–68.

20 Due to internal rivalries, the PVV only gained 15 seats in the elections in 2012, while it became the second strongest party in the European parliamentary elections of 2014.

21 Stefan Theil, ‘Far-right politicians find common cause in Israel’, 27 February 2011, available on *newsweek.com* at [www.newsweek.com/far-right-politicians-find-common-cause-israel-68583](http://www.newsweek.com/far-right-politicians-find-common-cause-israel-68583) (viewed 22 September 2014).

22 Alexander Häusler, ‘Antislimischer Populismus als rechtes Wahlkampf-Ticket’, in Alexander Häusler (ed.), *Rechtspopulismus als ‘Bürgerbewegung’: Kampagnen gegen Islam und Moscheebau und kommunale Gegenstrategien* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2008), 155–69.

23 Kai Hafez (ed.), *Islam and the West in the Mass Media: Fragmented Images in a Globalizing World* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press 2000); Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris 2002).

as many polls suggest.<sup>24</sup> By targeting the imagined 'Islamic threat', they are also able to tap into wider worries over the slow demise of old national identities in the face of increasing multiculturalism and globalization. The contemporary western nativist right presents Islam as a threat to 'the spiritual foundations of the West' (values such as freedom, democracy, the rights of women), and the defence of 'liberal values' becomes a key part of the far right's strategy against Islam. However, it is not only the far right but also some 'liberals' who demand Muslim cultural assimilation or expulsion: they advance policy proposals that would render Muslims invisible.<sup>25</sup> By tapping into what I would call the more 'accepted racism' of Islamophobia, a number of far-right parties try to become more mainstream. An apparent obstacle on this path for some of these parties is their long history of antisemitism.

### **Shifting from antisemitism to Islamophobia**

Antisemitism has long been a central characteristic of far-right extremist parties. Having a reputation as an antisemitic organization has even prevented different far-right parties from cooperating with each other across national borders, as they fear burdening themselves with the bad reputation of their counterpart. Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National (FN) may be an ideal example of this process. The FN regularly made light of the Holocaust and was widely regarded as a racist and antisemitic party. The leader of the FN was largely seen as a radical, ideological right-wing extremist, not a populist. When Le Pen tried to present himself as a defender of European Jewry,<sup>26</sup> it stretched credulity, given his numerous antisemitic words and deeds. When his successor, his daughter Marine, was campaigning for the presidential elections in 2012, one of the ways in which she tried to improve the image of her party was by clearly distancing it from antisemitism, and focusing solely on the 'Muslim threat'. Prior to the presidential elections, she had ordered the exclusion from the party of a young FN politician after the publication of a photo in the *Nouvel Observateur* that showed him standing in front of a swastika flag doing the Hitler salute.<sup>27</sup> Unlike her father, she had no antisemitic past and was personally able to start afresh.

24 Mario Peucker, 'Islamfeindlichkeit—die empirischen Grundlagen', in Thorsten G. Schneiders (ed.), *Islamfeindlichkeit: Wenn die Grenzen der Kritik verschwimmen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2009), 155–65; Dirk Halm, Marina Liakova and Zeliha Yetik, 'Pauschale Islamfeindlichkeit? Zur Wahrnehmung des Islams und zur sozio-kulturellen Teilhabe des Muslime in Deutschland', in Dirk Halm and Siegfried Jäger (eds), *Mediale Barrieren: Rassismus als Integrationshindernis* (Münster: Unrast-Verlag 2007), 11–49 (21–5).

25 Ansari and Hafez (eds), *From the Far Right to the Mainstream*.

26 Meer, 'Semantics, scales and solidarities in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia', 508.

27 "'Front National' schließt Politiker wegen Hitlergruß aus', *Der Standard*, 20 April 2011. The photograph was published in the *Nouvel Observeur* on 29 March 2011.



Politicians like Marine Le Pen make use of the strategy of ‘victim reversal’ that has been adopted by right-wing intellectuals for many years. The political scientist Peter Widmann describes this strategy as an attempt to draw a parallel between Islam and National Socialism by arguing that the Islamic religion has a similar understanding of leadership to the Nazis. Supporters of this argument see antisemitism as something that is deeply rooted in Islam, and employ invented compound terms such as ‘Hitlerite radical Islam’. The function of portraying contemporary Muslims as the ‘executors of Nazi-reverent ideology’ is to construe the Muslim religion as genocidal and to portray Muslims as the principal enemies of Jews in the past and the present. Accordingly, Europeans become victims in solidarity with the Jews, portrayed standing side-by-side with Israel against the ‘Islamic threat’, while Muslims are branded as the fascists (‘Islamofascists’) of our time.<sup>28</sup> In 2010 Marine Le Pen compared Muslims praying on French streets to the invasion of France by Nazi Germany over seventy years earlier. This attempt to position one’s party as defenders of Judaism and soldiers against ‘Islamization’ is not unique to the FN; it has become a commonly used strategy of many far-right populist and extremist parties. Indeed it even led to a delegation of European far-right parties paying a visit to Israel.

These parties—the Austrian FPÖ, Belgium’s Vlaams Belang, the very newly established German Die Freiheit (Freedom Party) and the Swedish Democrats<sup>29</sup>—were signatories to the so-called ‘Jerusalem Declaration’, the best single documentation of the shift on the far right away from antisemitism and towards Islamophobia. These party leaders were invited to Israel by an Israeli businessman named Chaim Muehlstein and welcomed by members of the Knesset and the Orthodox right-wing party Shas, as well as by a deputy minister and member of the ruling Likud party, who later visited the FPÖ in Vienna.<sup>30</sup> David Lasar, a Jewish member of the FPÖ, was part of the delegation.<sup>31</sup> This unique declaration is of great importance as proof of the programmatic shift, and one notably that was not implemented by a single right-wing party but by a group of European right-wing parties reaching out to a right-wing Israel in an attempt to move away from their traditional antisemitism.

The declaration guarantees Israel’s right to defend itself against terror and says: ‘We stand at the vanguard in the fight for the Western, democratic

28 Peter Widmann, ‘Der Feind kommt aus dem Morgenland: Rechtspopulistische “Islamkritiker” um den Publizisten Hans-Peter Raddatz suchen die Opfergemeinschaft der Juden’, *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, vol. 17, 2008, 45–68 (61–8).

29 The latter was headed until 1995 by Anders Klarström, who had previously belonged to the neo-Nazi Nordiska Rikspartiet (Nordic National Party).

30 Theil, ‘Far-right politicians find common cause in Israel’.

31 Claus Pándi, *100 Stunden: Heinz-Christian Strache in Israel*, 3-part video documentary, 22 December 2010, available on the *Krone TV* website at [www.krone.at/Oesterreich/Pandi\\_mit\\_Strache\\_in\\_Israel\\_Hier\\_ist\\_die\\_umstrittene\\_Doku-100\\_Stunden-Story-236594](http://www.krone.at/Oesterreich/Pandi_mit_Strache_in_Israel_Hier_ist_die_umstrittene_Doku-100_Stunden-Story-236594) (viewed 9 September 2014).

community' against the 'totalitarian threat' of 'fundamentalist Islam'.<sup>32</sup> Judaeo-Christian cultural values are described as fundamental to belief and 'Islamist terror' as the common threat to Europe and Israel. The declaration was later welcomed by other right-wing parties such as the PRO movement in Germany. The Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders said in a speech in Tel Aviv that 'Jews need to settle Judea and Samaria', thereby denying not the existence of Israel, like previous antisemites, but of Palestine.<sup>33</sup> These right-wing leaders make common cause with Israel by excluding the Muslim from an exclusively 'Judaeo-Christian' western culture, ready to fight against the Islamic and Islamist threat. Jerusalem is portrayed as a strategic bulwark against the Islamic world, and Islamophobia becomes a force that unifies Israel and the European far right.

The reaction of the Israeli settlers to the far right's visit to Israel is correspondingly positive and, rather than ignoring the antisemitic past of the visitors, they acknowledge their shift as a strategic success for the settlers. Their spokesman David Ha'ivri says:

If these European leaders—with their ties to anti-Semitic groups and their past—come around and declare that Israel has a right to exist securely in all of the areas under our control, and that Europe has a moral responsibility because of the crimes of their past, then I believe that we should accept their friendship.... No skinhead cares what [Anti-Defamation League Chairman] Abe Foxman has to say, but if Filip Dewinter and Heinz-Christian Strache make these statements they will have real impact. For that reason I am considering appearing with them in their countries for pro-Israel rallies. I think that it is worth the risk of being defamed by Haaretz and the like if we can cause a shift in the European nationalist movements, moving them away from their traditional Jew-hatred and bringing them closer to appreciation of Zionism. I don't think that I am naive to feel that this is a revolutionary opportunity.<sup>34</sup>

In saying this, Ha'ivri makes no attempt to deny the antisemitic profile of the European parties. On the contrary, he is very much aware of this link and therefore argues that it would be worth pursuing the relationship in order to

32 'Strache: Jerusalemer Erklärung', 7 December 2010, available on the FPÖ website at [www.fpoe.at/aktuell/detail/news/strache-jerusalem-erklaerun/?cHash=93213baa07ae a35ad22e0af790e87f01](http://www.fpoe.at/aktuell/detail/news/strache-jerusalem-erklaerun/?cHash=93213baa07ae a35ad22e0af790e87f01) (viewed 19 August 2014). All translations, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

33 Geert Wilders, 'Wilders: Israel should build more settlements' (speech in Tel Aviv, 5 December 2010), 3 March 2011, available on the *Politically Incorrect* website at [www.pi-news.org/2011/03/wilders-israel-should-build-more-settlements/#more-4216](http://www.pi-news.org/2011/03/wilders-israel-should-build-more-settlements/#more-4216) (viewed 19 August 2014).

34 David Ha'ivri, quoted in Robert Mackey, 'Support for Israel's settlements from Europe's right' (blog), 22 December 2010, available on *The Lede: the New York Times News Blog* website at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/22/support-for-israels-settlements-from-europes-right/> (viewed 19 August 2014).



win a strategic alliance with the far-right camp. This means, on the one hand, that the Israeli settler spokesman is aware of the differences they have with their new allies and, on the other, that he believes a common concern with the 'Islamic threat' is able to bridge the gap between them caused by the Europeans' antisemitic and Nazi/fascist pasts. While the settler spokesman is talking very much from a strategic position, the European far right, despite having a similar strategy in mind, also argues from an ideological, Islamophobic, point of view. Right-wing populist politicians such as Geert Wilders create a religion-based political cleavage by arguing: 'The Islamic ideology simply does not accept the concept of a Jewish state.'<sup>35</sup> To be for or against Islam becomes an ideological criterion. Hence, far-right parties like the FPÖ have included Judaism as a source of European culture in their new party programmes and have long defined 'radical Islam' as a threat to Europe.

When asked about her opinion of this far-right alliance by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Marine Le Pen said: 'The shared concern about radical Islam explains the relationship...' As far as antisemitism was concerned, she went on:

There is no anti-Semitism today in Europe. This expression of hostility disappeared after World War II. The growing [Islamic] anti-Semitism in our territory is related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As I've already declared in the past, today in France there are entire regions where it's better not to be a Jew, a woman, a homosexual or even an ordinary white Frenchman.<sup>36</sup>

Marine Le Pen construes a new 'we' following the dissociation from the alien Muslim enemy, who threatens everyone else. She even breaks with the conservative world-view of the FN to include women and homosexuals as distinct groups within the new 'we'. Antisemitism, for her, is dead and forgotten, while only the new 'Muslim' antisemitism (related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) is relevant. By claiming that antisemitism disappeared after the Second World War, Le Pen not only ignores history, and especially the history of her own party, but tries to achieve exactly what Widmann called 'victim reversal'. 'Islam' thus becomes the cosmic enemy of all, an open threat, an inevitably racialized identity that can't be escaped and that replaces the imagined powerful Jew who used to subvert European societies. Marine Le Pen has also succeeded in recruiting Jewish politicians as electoral candidates for her party. But, as in many other countries, the official Jewish organizations warn their fellow Jewish about being misled by the FN. Nevertheless, the FN tries hard to carve out a place in the Jewish community. After Le Pen was invited and then disinvited by the Jewish radio programme *Radio J* on 13 March 2011, the FN proclaimed its re-establishment of the Cercle

35 Wilders, 'Wilders: Israel should build more settlements'.

36 Marine Le Pen, quoted in Adar Primor, 'The daughter as de-demonizer', *Haaretz*, 7 January 2011.

national des juifs français (National Circle of French Jews).<sup>37</sup> What we see in the FN is a focus on the 'Islamic threat', accompanied by an attempt to institutionalize a liaison between the FN and the Jews.

According to *Newsweek*, the grand figure of popular Austrian right-wing politics Jörg Haider reported being told by his successor Heinz-Christian Strache: 'If the Jews accept us, then we won't have any problems.' And this is the strategy that Strache subsequently seems to have adopted.<sup>38</sup> It is a sentiment shot through with the antisemitic stereotype of the 'powerful Jew' who is in control of politics, and indicates that the far right is also more than flexible enough to collaborate with this 'mighty Jew'. This view seems to be shared by other members of the delegation. Kent Ekeröth, for instance, spoke to the Israeli settlers as follows:

We are here to cooperate ... Part of the problem is that we have a problem with Jewish organizations in Europe. They work against us. They call us racists, antisemites, blah blah blah all that. And I think pressure from Israel can help us in the long-term ... Legitimize our parties in Europe!<sup>39</sup>

This statement by a functionary of the Swedish Democrats does not only reveal the strategic dimension of this alliance, which mirrors the strategy adopted by the Israeli settlers in order to eradicate antisemitism in the far-right camp. Much more than that, the far-right delegate again taps into antisemitic stereotypes of the 'powerful Jew'. According to this logic, the legitimization of the far right in Europe is to be achieved in Israel, the centre of an imagined homogeneous, globally connected, conflict-free Jewish community.

It is important for such a paradigmatic move to be explained, especially considering the longstanding antisemitic profile of many of Europe's far-right parties. During the visit to Israel of the aforementioned European far-right delegation, a journalist asked MEP Andreas Mölzer, a leading intellectual

37 This circle was founded in 1986 by the Jewish FN-member Robert Hemmerdinger, who joined the party in 1985 because Jean-Marie Le Pen was the only politician who 'demanded the closure of the PLO's representation in Paris': Michel Zlotowski, 'National Front reaches out to Jewish community', *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 March 2011.

38 Jörg Haider, quoted in Theil, 'Far-right politicians find common cause in Israel'. The Italian Gianfranco Fini is perhaps the best example of a far-right figure who successfully navigated such a journey. A long-time member of the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), he became president of the newly founded Alleanza Nazionale (AN) in 1995, when the MSI was dissolved. As president of the Italian parliament, he met Ariel Sharon, and visited Yad Vashem and Auschwitz to demonstrate his transformation. This led to some members splitting off from AN, and founding La Destra. See Ulrich Ladurner, 'Zollfrei nach Israel', *Die Zeit*, 20 November 2003, and Birgit Schönau, 'Vom Boss enterbt', *Die Zeit*, 4 June 2010.

39 Klaus Ekeröth, in Claus Páandi, *100 Stunden: Heinz-Christian Strache in Israel*.

figure of Austria's FPÖ, how the trip would be explained against the backdrop of the party's history. He answered:

We do of course have a difficult relationship with Judaism, which is a hallmark of this camp [the nationalist camp], looking at our 150-year-old history. Call it by its right name: of course there was antisemitism in the nineteenth century. Today, however, we live in the twenty-first century. And we have long since overcome things like anti-clericalism and antisemitism. And, not only today but for decades, we have been developing a much more relaxed relationship with the Jewish intellectual world and of course with the state of Israel. I believe this trip is an important step because we are here to deal with the problems of Judaism, with the problems of Israel, with the problems of the West Bank.<sup>40</sup>

The way Mölzer argues away antisemitism is to locate it in the past, to recognize its existence but clearly state that it is something that has been overcome. A second visit to Israel was undertaken in February 2011, when members of the far-right delegation met with functionaries from Likud and Shas, but also from the liberal Kadima party. This time, Patrik Brinkmann, who was previously a member of the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD, National Democratic Party of Germany) before moving to the Deutsche Volksunion (DVU, German People's Union) and finally to the PRO movement, also participated.<sup>41</sup> This means that support for the far-right delegation in Europe had been strengthened by other parties. The fact that they also met with parties in power and not only with settlers suggests that they had also gained ground in the political landscape of Israel.

Meanwhile, a German-Israeli conference was organized in April 2011 under the banner 'Islamisierung stoppen—Demokratie durchsetzen' (Stop Islamization—Protect Democracy). The event was organized by Brinkmann with participants from the German far right and also from Israel—including David Ha'ivri, foreign representative of 'Samaria' region (once convicted for defacing a mosque), Hillel Weiss, a professor of literary studies well known for his homophobic views, and Rabbi Shalom Dov Wolpo, founder of the party Eretz Yisrael Shelanu (Our Land of Israel)—demonstrating that the dialogue partner of the European far right is clearly to be located in the ultra-nationalist camp of Israel.<sup>42</sup> The organizer Brinkmann concluded the events by stating:

40 Andreas Mölzer, in *ibid.*

41 Heiko Klare, Bernhard Steinke and Michael Sturm, 'Eine "deutsche Rechte ohne Antisemitismus"?' 27 April 2011, available on the *haGalil* website at [www.hagalil.com/archiv/2011/04/27/pro-nrw](http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2011/04/27/pro-nrw) (viewed 19 August 2014).

42 John Bunzl, 'Der Feind meines Feindes ist mein Freund? Islamophober Populismus in Israel', *Jahrbuch für Islamophobieforschung 2012*, vol. 3, 2012, 17–33.

We hereby underline that a German right without antisemitism has become a reality. It has taken sincere patriots far too long to break away from all these historical entanglements.... We see Judaism as a part of occidental culture. Whoever is an antisemite cannot be a true patriot. We need a right without antisemitism.<sup>43</sup>

This statement clearly expresses the shift from antisemitism to Islamophobia. Against the backdrop of a new Muslim threat, antisemitism has become unpatriotic. A PRO Cologne activist once said: 'I guarantee you that the *Kristallnacht* will return. But this time Christians and Jews will be driven through the streets persecuted and killed by Islamists.'<sup>44</sup> In this clear example of 'victim reversal', the new scapegoat, the Muslim minority, becomes the antisemitic and anti-Christian persecutor, and turns the German majority and those who perpetrated the *Kristallnacht* into the new victims, alongside the Jews.<sup>45</sup>

While there was a time when Jews and Arabs were both seen as 'the subaltern internal "Others" within Europe'<sup>46</sup>—which was not only the case in post-*Reconquista* Spain, but also for the far-right camp in the second half of the twentieth century—this has since changed. It is no longer the Jew who, in contemporary far-right publications, is conspiring against national European communities, subverting indigenous culture and being imagined as 'the eternal Jew', an inevitable, racialized identity that cannot be escaped. It is no longer the Jew who is stigmatized for crucifying Jesus, but the Muslim who is stigmatized for circumcising Christians.<sup>47</sup> The Muslim has become the racialized category that cannot be got rid of:<sup>48</sup> the ultimate opposite to

43 Patrik Brinkmann, quoted in Klare, Steinke and Sturm, 'Eine "deutsche Rechte ohne Antisemitismus"?'.

44 Quoted in *ibid.*

45 Some right-wing extremists criticize this shift by the right-wing populist movements, especially when it comes to Israel. A need to counter-balance it may be the reason why, in an interview with the far-right extremist monthly *Die Aula* after visiting Israel, the FPÖ chairman Heinz-Christian Strache emphasized that Israel should not become a member of the EU: see the press release, 'HC Strache in "Die Aula": "FPÖ gegen beitritt Israels zur EU!"', available on the APA-OTS website at [www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS\\_20110415\\_OTS0185/hc-strache-in-die-aula-fpoe-gegen-beitritt-israels-zur-eu](http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20110415_OTS0185/hc-strache-in-die-aula-fpoe-gegen-beitritt-israels-zur-eu) (viewed 9 September 2014). This points to the possibility that the shift away from antisemitism may not be so easy to achieve, and that some of the older party members still feel committed to the antisemitic profile of their parties. Leaders of right-wing extremist parties, such as Strache, therefore, have to walk a tightrope with respect to the extreme right-wing camps within their parties.

46 Ramon Grosfoguel, 'The multiple faces of Islamophobia', *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, Fall 2012, 10–33 (11).

47 Meer, 'Racialization and religion', 388.

48 In a seminar on Islam organized by the Austrian FPÖ, Elisabeth Sabbaditsch-Wolff, the organizer of the European far right's first trip to Israel, replied to a question asking how, as a member of the FPÖ, she would deal with a Muslim man of Turkish origin, by saying that he would only try to save himself, and that 'Muslims lie to our faces every day ... the Qur'an instructs them to do so (*Die Moslems lügen uns allen tagtäglich ins Gesicht. Es steht im Koran, dass sie das tun müssen*): 'Undercover in Straches Hass-Schule:

western enlightenment and progress, the antipode of western civilization.<sup>49</sup> He is the imagined enemy that wants to destroy western culture by means of a 'demographic jihad', the over-population of Europe with Muslims, in collaboration with EU fat cats and 'cultural Marxists'.

### **No stable European fraction ... but European coordination**

Even before the first direct elections to the European parliament took place in 1979, the first example of transnational cooperation among the European far right had occurred in 1978. Eurodestra was founded in that year by the Spanish Fuerza Nueva, the Italian MSI and the French Parti des Forces Nouvelles, but attempts to build the fraction were hampered by poor election results. In 1984 the first formal right-wing grouping was institutionalized by MEPs from the Italian MSI, the Greek Ethniki Politiki Enosis (National Political Union, EPEN) and the French FN, joined later by the Ulster Unionists. But, as early as 1989, the grouping dissolved because of a disagreement between the German Republikaner and the Italian MSI over the status of South Tyrol and other issues arising from Le Pen's claim to leadership. It was succeeded the same year by the Technical Group of the European Right, which lasted until 1994 and was home to the MEPs of the French FN, the German Republikaner and the Belgian Vlaams Blok. The name 'Technical Group' itself showed that it was less about ideological agreement than about technical cooperation. After the Republikaner MEPs failed to be re-elected in 1994, the grouping was reduced to 22 seats in parliament (11 each for the Italian Alleanza Nazionale (formerly the MSI) and the French FN), and therefore fell short of the necessary minimum for forming a fraction. If anything, the situation worsened in 1999 when many of the far-right parties, including the FN, lost seats. In the 2004 elections, however, after a great showing for the far right, a new fraction called Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN) was established, comprising only a few far-right parties (among them the Alleanza Nazionale and Dansk Folkeparti), and continued until 2009.<sup>50</sup>

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NEWS-Reporter in Dolna in FPÖ-Parteiakademie', *News*, no. 48, 2009, available on the *news.at* website at [www.news.at/a/undercover-straches-hass-schule-news-reporterin-dolna-fpoe-parteiakademie-256322](http://www.news.at/a/undercover-straches-hass-schule-news-reporterin-dolna-fpoe-parteiakademie-256322) (viewed 9 September 2014).

49 Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, 'For "Jewish" read "Muslim"? Islamophobia as a form of racialisation of ethno-religious groups in Britain today', *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, Fall 2012, 34–53 (38–45).

50 Martin Schulz, 'Kooperationsbestrebungen rechtsextremer und rechtspopulistischer Parteien im Europa-Parlament', in Stephan Braun, Alexander Geisler and Martin Gerster (eds), *Strategien der extremen Rechten: Hintergründe—Analysen—Antworten* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2009), 474–87 (483–4).

Meanwhile, another loose umbrella organization, the EuroNat, was established in 1997 by the French FN. Its current members are the Swedish Nationaldemokraterna, the British National Party (BNP), the Italian Fiamma Tricolore, the Spanish Democracia Nacional and the Dutch Nieuw Rechts. In all, twenty-one parties had been involved with EuroNat by March 2011. The FN is also part of a grouping called the Alliance of European National Movements, formed in 2009 in order to establish a European political party. The Alliance is also home to far-right parties like the Hungarian Jobbik, the BNP and another seven parties, although only three have elected MEPs. A fraction called Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS) existed between January and November 2007. It was composed of twenty-three MEPs from eight countries, but soon fell apart after the MEP Alessandra Mussolini said that 'breaking the law had become a way of life for Romanians. Not petty crimes, but horrifying crimes, that give one goose bumps.'<sup>51</sup> This statement was unacceptable to the Romanian contingent within the ITS, as she made no distinction between Romanians and Roma. While MEPs from the FPÖ, Vlaams Belang, FN and Ataka did not belong to any fraction for some time, those from Lega Nord, Dansk Folkeparti, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and others were organized as the Europe of Freedom and Democracy group (EFD). Even though Islamophobia was part of the political programmes of some of these parties, the common cause of the members of the EFD was more to do with Euroscepticism than any link to traditional fascism. This focus changed, however, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as Islamophobia became more important in election campaigns. In the 'Salzburger Deklaration' (2006), the youth wings of a number of far-right parties spoke about European identity being threatened by 'a powerful alliance of opposing enemies, ranging from liberals relativizing values (*liberale Werterelativierer*), to exclusively profit-oriented economists and Marxists, to fundamentalist Islamists'.<sup>52</sup> Hence, the imaginary of the Muslim has become an enemy on a global scale, connected to leftist thought (Marxists) as well as to capitalism. Subsequently, this construction of the powerful, conspiratorial Islamic threat has become a regular feature in far-right ideology. And Islamophobia—like antisemitism in its *völkisch* variation—has become a *Weltanschauung*, an explanation of how the world works, as demonstrated by the manifesto of Anders Behring Breivik, which is a conglomerate of various Islamophobic publications.<sup>53</sup>

The speakers at a September 2008 'No to Islamization' demonstration in Cologne were listed beforehand as representatives from the German

51 Alessandra Mussolini, quoted in *ibid.*, 486.

52 Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend, 'Salzburger Deklaration: Europe und der Islam', 10 December 2006, available on the *Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend* website at [www.rfj-sbg.at/pages/SbgDeklaration.html](http://www.rfj-sbg.at/pages/SbgDeklaration.html) (viewed 10 September 2014).

53 Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London: Zed Books 2014).



PRO-Sachsen, the Flemish Vlaams Belang, the German PRO-Nordrhein-Westfalen (PRO-NRW), the French FN, the Italian Lega Nord and the Austrian FPÖ.<sup>54</sup> In the event, Jean-Marie Le Pen did not appear and even denied being asked to participate. Months earlier, in January 2008, the Austrian FPÖ had been invited to a meeting to lay a foundation stone for a European fraction of right-wing parties that included the FN, the Bulgarian Ataka and Vlaams Belang. Later, in October 2010, the FPÖ organized a meeting to 'coordinate' their EU-related policies and it included the Lega Nord, Vlaams Belang, the Dansk Folkeparti, the Swedish SD, Slovenská Národná Strana (SNS) and the Schweizer Demokraten (Swiss Democrats, SD).<sup>55</sup> Jean-Marie Le Pen was not invited, because some parties would otherwise not have participated on account of the FN's extremist image; Ataka and the Serbian nationalist party were also missing. At that time, the Austrian MEP Andreas Mölzer said that it was a 'meeting of moderate parties able to govern'.<sup>56</sup> This does not mean that there was no further contact with those parties that had a far-right image. When the Japanese far-right movement Issuikai invited like-minded European parties, the FN was again alongside the BNP and the Austrian FPÖ, as well as representatives from Belgium, Spain, Hungary, Portugal and Rumania.<sup>57</sup> The press declared that the meeting was an opportunity to discuss the future of far-right parties in Europe.<sup>58</sup> This demonstrates that far-right parties have much in common and that they do participate in coordinated activities, despite avoiding formal cooperation because of concerns about negative press (as the resistance of many to the French FN shows).<sup>59</sup> After failing to establish formal membership of the EFD grouping because of the nationalist sentiments of the Dutch Calvinist party Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP), Andreas Mölzer said that 'a fraction is a formal mechanism in parliament, nothing more'.<sup>60</sup>

54 Diana West, 'Yes or no to Islamization?' (blog), 14 September 2008, available on the *Diana West* website at <http://dianawest.net/Home/tabid/36/EntryId/455/Yes-or-No-to-Islamization.aspx> (viewed 10 September 2014).

55 Austria Presse Agentur, 'Wien als Treffpunkt für Europas Rechte: Türkischer EU-Beitritt soll verhindert werden', 23 October 2010, available on the *news.at* website at [www.news.at/articles/1042/12/280263/wien-treffpunkt-europas-rechte-tuerkischer-eu-beitritt](http://www.news.at/articles/1042/12/280263/wien-treffpunkt-europas-rechte-tuerkischer-eu-beitritt) (viewed 21 August 2014).

56 Andreas Mölzer, quoted in 'Treffen der Rechtsparteien in Wien', *Der Standard*, 21 October 2010.

57 Saskia Jungnickl, 'Mölzer am Yasukuni-Schrein', *Der Standard*, 20 August 2010.

58 'Europäische Rechtsextreme besuchten umstrittene Gedenkstätte', *Der Standard*, 14 August 2010.

59 The Italian Lega Nord did not want to cooperate officially with the BNP due to the latter's 'controversial image'. The leader of the BNP, Nick Griffin, said in July 2009 that he would try to cooperate with his colleagues from the FN and Vlaams Belang through 'informal' networks (Schmid, 'Extreme Rechte im Europaparlament').

60 Andreas Mölzer, quoted in Austrian Press Agentur, 'FPÖ stellt Partnersuche im Europaparlament ein', 16 January 2012, available on the *Der Standard* website at <http://derstandard.at/1326502859934/FPoe-stellt-Partnersuche-im-Europaparlament-ein> (viewed 21 August 2014).

While a stable far-right fraction in the European parliament has failed to emerge, and formal cooperation between different national far-right parties has proved so far impossible due to divergent national interests and ideologies, the transnational sharing of information has always been there. To give but one example, the original slogan of the French FN 'Les Français d'abord!' ('The French First') was subsequently copied by the Austrian FPÖ ('Österreich zuerst') and others. Although there are many commonalities between the far-right parties in different European nation-states (being against Europe as a supranational institution, for example, and against multiculturalism and immigration), a strong grouping of the European right as a relevant political actor at EU-level has always been stymied by the lack of a common ideology, an authoritative structure and an international organizing principle. Instead, differing nationalist views, controversies about leadership,<sup>61</sup> and the negative image of some far-right parties have prevented pragmatic cooperation.

But Islamophobia has played a significant role in strengthening the unification process. Instead of emphasizing various nationalist ideologies, it has been able easily to connect the different national far-right parties without needing to discuss national origins. This becomes increasingly evident as more and more local and national parties adopt Islamophobic policies as part of their protests and election campaigns.<sup>62</sup> Cooperation in Islamophobic activities is on the rise. As 'Islamophobia threatens to become the defining condition of the new Europe', as Matti Bunzl put it,<sup>63</sup> it has the potential to unify Western and Eastern Europeans within the far-right camp who were formerly divided by xenophobic attitudes towards each other and worries about reputational damage. The opening of the labour market of Western European nation-states to new members of the EU from the East brings with it the potential for manifestations of xenophobia. But, because Islamophobia is there, a new – imagined – Muslim enemy can be defined as the real 'enemy within'. As the 2011 report *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination* with which I opened this essay points out, Islamophobic attitudes also exist in the Eastern European countries.<sup>64</sup> These attitudes are evident when the European far right calls for a referendum against the accession of the 'Muslim country' Turkey to the EU. In this way, the newly established European Alliance for Freedom (EAF) has managed to bring together various political parties that have all tried to join the mainstream by leaving their antisemitism behind and embracing Islamophobia, as well as by avoiding any association with the antisemitic pasts of other parties.

61 Schulz, 'Kooperationsbestrebungen rechtsextremer und rechtspopulistischer Parteien im Europa-Parlament', 487.

62 Taras, *Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe*, 109–92.

63 Bunzl, 'Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia', 499.

64 Zick, Küpper and Hövermann, *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination*, 161.

Members of the FPÖ, the FN, Vlaams Belang and the Swedish Democrats have joined ranks in the EAF, which has become a pan-European alliance of MEPs that aims eventually to constitute a formal grouping in the European parliament. In its short five-page 'Manifesto' for the European elections of 2014, Islam is clearly being defined as an enemy when it calls for: 'An enhanced protection of secularism in Europe whose Christian and humanistic roots are threatened by the rise of radical Islam within the European Union and, in general, by the affirmation of people's identity and nations that make up Europe.'<sup>65</sup>

Before the European far-right delegation visited Israel to demonstrate its rejection of antisemitism and its attempt to win the support of the Israeli far right for future cooperation, many right-wing parties had already borrowed from each other's campaigns with regard to Islamophobia. The protest against mosques and minarets, for example, seems to have played a special role as a common project among European far-right parties, and it has become a general socio-political issue.<sup>66</sup> Mosques, as material entities, can be much more easily portrayed as a concrete threat in most European countries, despite their very heterogeneous and diverse Muslim populations. The mosque has become a metaphor that makes visible the imagined Muslim 'enemy within'.

There are three levels of cooperation. First there is the exchange of ideas. The proposal of a minaret ban was originally put on the agenda by the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP, Swiss People's Party). Such a ban was implemented in Austria in two of the country's nine regional *Länder* soon after the issue entered into public discussion, although this occurred in a juridical and less obvious manner,<sup>67</sup> and local campaigns against the building of mosques were fought in several European countries.<sup>68</sup> The campaign against mosques was taken up by the French FN, the Polish citizens' movement *Europy w przyszłości* (Europe for the Future) and German PRO parties, as well as Austrian local movements, the Spanish *Democracia Nacional*, the German NPD, the British BNP and the Italian Lega Nord. This reveals a transnational learning process that takes in both right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties.

Beside the exchange of ideas, there is also cooperation between individuals. The Swiss anti-mosque campaign leader, who is himself a far-right activist, worked not only for the Swiss far right, but also for the Austrian FPÖ. While cooperation between the SVP and the FPÖ was obscured by the professional

65 European Alliance for Freedom, 'Political party manifesto: European elections 2014', 11 December 2013, available on the *European Alliance for Freedom* website at [www.eurallfree.org/sites/default/files/eaf-manifesto-eng.pdf](http://www.eurallfree.org/sites/default/files/eaf-manifesto-eng.pdf) (viewed 22 August 2014).

66 Stefano Allievi (ed.), *Mosques in Europe: Why a Solution Has Become a Problem* (London: Alliance Publishing Trust 2010).

67 Farid Hafez, *Islamophober Populismus: Moschee- und Minarettbauverbote österreichischer Parlamentsparteien* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2010).

68 Häusler (ed.), *Rechtspopulismus als 'Bürgerbewegung'*.

campaign leader, mutual support between the parties was also obvious. The third level of cooperation, a formal show of support between parties, can be seen, for example, in the transnational demonstrations against local mosques organized jointly by the Austrian FPÖ, Vlaams Belang and the two Pro parties in Cologne and North Rhine-Westphalia. Members of these parties have regularly come together in recent years to protest the so-called 'Islamization of Europe'. This cooperation also exists at the youth level: meetings by the youth branches of the FPÖ, Sweden Democrats, FN and Vlaams Belang led to the founding of the Young European Alliance for Hope (YEAH) on 4 April 2014. In Paris a meeting was held in 2011 with activists from Vlaams Belang, the Swiss SVP, Bloc Identitaire, the German Die Freiheit and Austrian networkers to discuss issues of Islam and antisemitism. Such meetings lead to specific activities. For instance, at a closed book launch of *Hoer noch slavin: vrouwen en islam* (Whore or slave: women in Islam) written by a Vlaams Belang politician and edited (in German) by an FPÖ politician, organized by the FPÖ and Vlaams Belang on 19 February 2013, the book in question was presented, discussed and distributed.

The three levels of cooperation overlap with each other. The exchange of ideas, experiences and strategies is based on a personal network of party functionaries. Formal cooperation is undertaken to demonstrate the strength of the European far right. And this cooperation extends the European (and Israeli) borders.

### **Transatlantic cooperation**

The aforementioned meetings were not only attended by European members of the far right, but also by players from the other side of the Atlantic. During the so-called 'march for freedom', which was organized in Germany on 7 May 2011 to protest against the building of mosques, members of student fraternities (the traditional *Burschenschaften*), PRO parties, the Belgian Vlaams Belang, the Austrian FPÖ, the German Republikaner, the French Bloc Identitaire, Italian activists and the transnational initiative Cities against Islamization marched in support of freedom of speech together with the US-based Youth for Western Civilization (YWC) and Tea Party representatives.

In the United States, Islamophobic rhetoric used by political movements was first only noticed on a state or local level. In 2004 Islamophobes tried to stop the construction of Islamic centres in various locations by linking them to extremism.<sup>69</sup> The 2008 dispute over the inconveniently named 'Ground Zero mosque', however, successfully initiated a nationwide debate.<sup>70</sup> Islamophobic conspiracy theories were adopted as a strategy by some Republican politicians

69 Max Blumenthal, *Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party* (New York: Nation Books 2010).

70 Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* (London: Pluto Press 2012).

campaigning against Obama, alleging not only that he was a Muslim, but that he was aiming to re-establish the global caliphate together with the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>71</sup> A national survey by the Pew Research Center in 2010 found that 18 per cent thought that Obama was a Muslim, demonstrating the success of Islamophobic discourse in the United States. The result of the radicalization of some Republican politicians after pressure applied by Tea Party members was evident in the 2010 mid-term elections. In that year, Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich supported an anti-mosque rally at Ground Zero on the ninth anniversary of 9/11, and thus helped in making anti-Muslim sentiments a national issue. These campaigns, including the network Stop Islamization of America (SIOA), are noteworthy for the degree to which they imitate the already successful Islamophobic strategies of Europe's far right.

Meanwhile, many Republican politicians have supported local efforts to protest against the Muslim presence in the United States. New York Republican Congressman Peter King held congressional hearings into the domestic radicalization of Muslims in 2011 following the publication of the report *Shariah: The Threat to America* (2010) by a conservative Washington think-tank represented a new high point for Islamophobic policy.<sup>72</sup> This shift towards Islamophobia on the right wing of the Republican Party was welcomed by the European far right. Geert Wilders was invited by the SIOA to speak at the 2010 Ground Zero rally, where the slogans on display, such as 'No mosque here!' and 'New York ... will never become New Mecca',<sup>73</sup> were clearly inspired by European slogans like Austria's 'Vienna will never become Istanbul'. The English Defence League was also forging links with America's Tea Party. It was also present with its banners at the Ground Zero mosque protest in New York, and in 2011 invited the Qu'ran-burning pastor Terry Jones to address planned EDL demonstrations in 2011. In addition, various people from the FPÖ have met with Republicans from the Tea Party movement.<sup>74</sup> On an ideological, personal and political level, there is clearly even more wide-ranging exchange and cooperation in spreading Islamophobic discourse.

71 Farid Hafez, 'Islamophobe Weltverschwörungstheorien ... und wie Obama vom Muslim zum Muslimbruder wurde', *Journal für Psychologie*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2013, available online at [www.journal-fuer-psychologie.de/index.php/jfp/article/view/263/293](http://www.journal-fuer-psychologie.de/index.php/jfp/article/view/263/293) (viewed 22 August 2014).

72 Center for Security Policy, *Shariah: The Threat to America* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Security Policy 2010).

73 Willemien Groot, 'Wilders at Ground Zero: no new Mecca', *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, 11 September 2010, available at [www.rnw.nl/africa/article/wilders-ground-zero-no-new-mecca](http://www.rnw.nl/africa/article/wilders-ground-zero-no-new-mecca) (viewed 23 August 2014).

74 Tom Heneghan, 'Europe far right courts Israel in anti-Islam drive', *Reuters*, 20 December 2010, available at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/12/20/us-europe-islam-far-right-idUSTRE6B37120101220> (viewed 23 August 2014).

## Europe's Islamophobic far right

Analysing the processes of cooperation in the exchanging of Islamophobic discourse strategies and campaigning reveals a new unity within the far-right camp, not only in Europe but also in the United States and Israel. This development runs parallel to shifts in strategies concerning antisemitism. Far-right parties with former historical links to fascism or National Socialism have been attempting to distance themselves from their previous antisemitism by positioning themselves as pro-Israeli, while their reliance on the epistemic essence of racialization has only moved from a Jewish to a Muslim subject. The 'Muslim' in the Islamophobic paradigm becomes a shining embodiment of the culturally inferior, yet powerful and threatening 'enemy within', who lies in wait to conquer western civilization. This strategy is designed to make the far-right parties appear more attractive to the mainstream since Islamophobic claims are regarded as much less 'problematic', and a much more widely held form of racism in western societies, than antisemitism. Without dealing critically with their own antisemitic pasts, far-right politicians use the strategy of 'victim reversal', branding Muslims as the new fascists and Nazis, and themselves as the 'new Jews'.<sup>75</sup> To them, antisemitism in European societies is dead and the only antisemitism that exists and has to be fought is the new antisemitism of the Muslim enemy within European societies. While antisemitic stereotypes remain alive within the far-right camp, the racialization of Jews has become insignificant (and taboo) in public campaigns. By contrast, the essentialization of the Muslim Other has become commonplace to the broad masses of western societies.

In the history of Europe's right-wing extremist and right-wing populist parties, there have always been frictions between different nationalist camps. German nationalism, for instance, has always contradicted the Italian version of nationalism, and vice versa, due to various historical questions. In the past, these frictions exacerbated that problems that stood in the way of any coming together in formal European parliamentary groupings. Nevertheless, transnational cooperation in the spheres of discourse, mobilization strategies and election campaigns is plain to see throughout the far-right populist and extremist camp. With the shift from antisemitism to Islamophobia, anti-Muslim prejudice seems able to play a crucial role in allowing parties to come together, as the recent establishment of the EAF has shown. While the FN was often *persona non grata* for many right-wing populist parties, on the grounds of its extremist image, it has now become more acceptable as a formal partner, and Marine Le Pen has even become the leader of the EAF.

75 The FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache once called his party the 'new Jews', quoted in 'FPÖ are the new Jews claims cartoon', *Austrian Times*, 5 February 2014, available at [www.austriantimes.at/news/General\\_News/2014-02-05/50431/FP%D6\\_are\\_the\\_new\\_Jews\\_claims\\_cartoon](http://www.austriantimes.at/news/General_News/2014-02-05/50431/FP%D6_are_the_new_Jews_claims_cartoon) (viewed 23 August 2014).



The exchange of ideas and experiences between the far-right parties and camps leads to transnational cooperation, both ideologically, in the sense of borrowing discourses from each other, and organizationally, in the sense of building personal networks that can lead to the development of more formal networks and activities. The overcoming of internal and intra-party frictions allows for more forward-looking agendas and more promising electoral strategies. The outcome of the European elections of May 2014 has already allowed parties with historical links to fascism and new right-wing populist parties, such as the Dutch PVV, to form a fraction in the EU, namely, the EAF. Although the EAF has not succeeded in reaching the minimum requirement of having MEPs from seven parties represented in the European parliament, it has been able to bring together right-wing populists and extremists with different historical backgrounds. The fact that the FN refused an alliance with MEPs from the Polish Kongres Nowej Prawicy (Congress of the New Right, KNP) because of their antisemitism demonstrates again the programmatic shift of the far right from antisemitism to Islamophobia.

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