



**Màster en Relacions Internacionals Seguretat i Desenvolupament (MURISD)**

# Examining the right-wing extremism in the EU: a comparison between the origins and development of far-right extremism in Ireland, Spain, and Romania

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RESUM: L'extremisme de dretes ha tingut una presència important a la Unió Europea en els darrers dos anys. Aquest estudi té com a objectiu analitzar els orígens i el desenvolupament de l'extremisme de dretes a la Unió Europea després de la Segona Guerra Mundial, tot examinant els casos d'Irlanda, Espanya i Romania. Aquesta anàlisi se centra en països amb diferents antecedents històrics, contextos socials i amplituds d'activitat extremista de dretes. Tenint en compte l'heterogeneïtat de l'extremisme de dretes i les seves manifestacions, s'espera una diversitat de criteris d'exclusió (com el nacionalisme, la xenofòbia, el racisme, etc.), configurats dins del context nacional

ABSTRACT: The right-wing extremism has been having a significant presence in the European Union in the last couple of years. This study aims to analyse the origins and development of the right-wing extremism in the European Union after the World War II, while examining the cases of Ireland, Spain and Romania. This analysis is focused on countries with different historical backgrounds, social contexts and amplitudes of right-wing extremist activity. Considering the heterogeneity of the right-wing extremism and its manifestations, it is expected a diversity of criteria of exclusion (such as nationalism, xenophobia, racism, etc.), shaped within the national context.

PARAULES CLAU: Extremisme de dretes, Ideologia d'extrema dreta, Unió Europea

KEYWORDS: Right-wing extremism, Far-right ideology, European Union

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**MÁSTER UNIVERSITARIO EN RELACIONES  
INTERNACIONALES, SEGURIDAD Y DESARROLLO**

**EXAMINING THE RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN THE EU: A  
COMPARISON BETWEEN THE ORIGINS AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM IN IRELAND,  
SPAIN, AND ROMANIA**

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*Declaro, con mi firma al pie, que el presente trabajo es original y que no contiene plagios o usos indebidos de otras fuentes y acepto las consecuencias que podría tener contravenir el presente compromiso.*

## **Abstract**

The right-wing extremism has been having a significant presence in the European Union in the last couple of years. This study aims to analyse the origins and development of the right-wing extremism in the European Union after the World War II, while examining the cases of Ireland, Spain and Romania. This analysis is focused on countries with different historical backgrounds, social contexts and amplitudes of right-wing extremist activity. Considering the heterogeneity of the right-wing extremism and its manifestations, it is expected a diversity of criteria of exclusion (such as nationalism, xenophobia, racism, etc.), shaped within the national context.

Keywords: Right-wing extremism, Far-right ideology, European Union.

## **Resum**

L'extremisme de dretes ha tingut una presència important a la Unió Europea en els darrers dos anys. Aquest estudi té com a objectiu analitzar els orígens i el desenvolupament de l'extremisme de dretes a la Unió Europea després de la Segona Guerra Mundial, tot examinant els casos d'Irlanda, Espanya i Romania. Aquesta anàlisi se centra en països amb diferents antecedents històrics, contextos socials i amplituds d'activitat extremista de dretes. Tenint en compte l'heterogeneïtat de l'extremisme de dretes i les seves manifestacions, s'espera una diversitat de criteris d'exclusió (com el nacionalisme, la xenofòbia, el racisme, etc.), configurats dins del context nacional.

Paraules clau: extremisme de dretes, ideologia d'extrema dreta, Unió Europea.

## **Table of contents:**

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1. Objectives.....	4
1.2. Research questions.....	5
1.3. Hypothesis.....	5
2. Understanding the far-right ideology.....	5
3. Development of the right-wing extremism in the European Union.....	10
3.1. Origins and manifestations of the right-wing extremism in Ireland.....	15
3.2. Origins and manifestations of the right-wing extremism in Spain.....	17
3.3. Origins and manifestations of the right-wing extremism in Romania.....	20
4. Comparison of the right-wing extremism in Ireland, Spain, and Romania.....	22
4.1. Spain and Romania.....	22
4.2. Spain and Ireland.....	24
4.3. Romania and Ireland.....	25
5. Future perspectives on the right-wing extremism in the European Union.....	26
6. Conclusion.....	27
7. References.....	29

## **1. Introduction:**

Europe has a long history in terms of far-right presence, especially in the Post-war era. According to Ong and Pantucci (2020) during the last decades, there has been an increase in the popularity of right-wing extremism and, additionally, of the terrorist violence associated to it. Furthermore, it has been reported by Europol a continuous rise in terms of arrests related to the right-wing extremism, notably after the 2015 migrant crisis.

As reported by Caiani & Kroll (2014) in the past few years the right-wing extremism has been using new means to gain transnational visibility, notably via Internet, which has incremented its supranational targets, and made possible the mobilization and creation of new supranational organizations.

Additionally, these trends have been also influenced by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. According to Ackerman & Peterson (2020), the online presence of the extremist platforms has spiked visibly, while taking advantage of the period of confusion. For example, the scholars highlighted one of the white supremacists' channel whose number of members increased by 800% since the beginning of the pandemic.

In keeping up with Ackerman & Peterson (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic might increment the terrorist activity in all short, medium, and long term. Moreover, there were numerous attempts of blaming for the origin and spread of the virus on various groups such as Chinese, Jews, etc., regarded as "the other".

It is believed by Ackerman & Peterson (2020) that the stigmatization of other groups as during the COVID-19 pandemic resembles to the Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda from the 30's, or to the influenza pandemic which took place in 1918.

Furthermore, the European Union is becoming a more and more culturally diverse space which is generating debate between its decision-makers. According to Eurostat (2021), on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2020 there were 23 million non-EU residents living in the EU territory. In addition to that, there is a significant mobility of the EU citizens inside the EU borders, which is contributing as well to the multiculturalism and cultural diversity of the European Union.

However, there are differences in terms of rates of foreign population between the EU Member States. As described by Eurostat, in 2019 countries like Spain or Ireland have reported a high percentage of non-national residents, representing more than 10% of the total, while other countries registered approximately 1%, as for example Romania, with the lowest rate of only 0.7%.

According to Sprague-Jones (2011, apud Berry and Kalin 1995; Rapley 1998), in the culturally diverse states, the majority groups show a tendency to regard multiculturalism as a possible threat to their cultural and economic rights. Moreover, these arguments are often used in the extreme right narratives in order to gain public support.

These findings offer a possible glimpse of the future unless countermeasures would be taken. From the standpoint of Auger (2020), based on the theory of the “waves of terrorism” elaborated by Rapoport, a fifth far-right international terrorism wave is expected to arrive in the upcoming future. These findings call out for more international cooperation in fighting the transnational right-wing terrorism, possibly by using the same tools as for other forms, such as jihadism.

To sum up, in the European Union there has been a significant activity of the right-wing extremism during the last years, with different manifestations and intensities within the Member States. Despite of the general presence of the far-right ideology in the EU, its public support in the national contexts is due to different characteristics, to be investigated in this study.

In terms of structure, the second chapter aims to make an introduction into the far-right ideology and to define and present its main components. The third chapter will follow the development of the right-wing extremism in the European Union’s context and will go more in depth in analysing the cases of Ireland, Spain, and Romania. The fourth chapter will present a comparison of the cases mentioned beforehand and the fifth will aim to reflect future perspectives about the right-wing extremism in the European Union. The last chapter comprises the conclusion and final remarks.

This study follows an academic approach, and the main elements of the methodology will be presented as follows.

### **1.1. Objectives:**

There are two primary aims of this study:

- A. To investigate the different far-right ideology pillars.
- B. To identify the similarities and differences between the right-wing extremist characteristics in Ireland, Spain, and Romania.

## **1.2. Research questions:**

This research seeks to address the following questions:

- A. Which are the main elements of the far-right ideology?
- B. Are there any similarities or differences between the right-wing characteristics between Ireland, Spain, and Romania?

## **1.3. Hypothesis:**

- A. The right-wing extremism will still be an ongoing emerging threat in the European Union in the next years.
- B. The right-wing extremist beliefs are shared but the predominance of the criteria of exclusion is varying between Ireland, Spain, and Romania.

## **2. Understanding the far-right ideology**

The far-right ideology is a topic that has been of great interest among the researchers in the last couple of years, given the rise of a great number of extremist groups and organizations, operating in various countries across the globe. As explained by Holt *et al.* (2020) the main challenge in countering the far-right extremism relies in its heterogenous character, represented by the lack of a unifying ideological agenda between the different groups.

As stated by Campana & Tanner (2019) the concept of right-wing extremism surely has not been defined homogeneously, however some of its characteristics such as authoritarianism, anti-democracy, and exclusionary nationalism are widely accepted as being illustrative by many scholars.

From the standpoint of Mudde (2002), the right-wing extremism can be defined as a mix of five elements which are present in most of the descriptions of the concept over time: nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy, and the strong state. However, they do not necessarily need to be all present at the same time in order to speak about right-wing extremism, and thus their different combination explains the variety of the existing groups.

With regard to the first characteristic and in accordance with Stöss (2017), the right-wing extremism represents a form of nationalism ethnically focused on attitudes and actions. Furthermore, these have as a final goal “to achieve an ethnically homogeneous national

community in a hierarchically structured national state with an authoritarian constitution” (p. 14).

In keeping up with Stöss (2017) the right-wing extremism comprises both nationalist and ethnic elements simultaneously, but in different proportions. From his standpoint, the nationalist component refers to the preservation of the sovereign nation by all means and above all other democratic principles, which are losing priority.

On the other hand, the ethnic component according to Stöss (2017) refers to the central placing of one’s ethnicity while discriminating the others’. On this account, he distinguishes between two dimensions: racism, understood as the explicit or implicit diminishing of other ethnicities as being inferior; and xenophobia, understood as the disadvantaging and exclusion of other ethnicities, but without diminishing them. Both dimensions are inequitable and disrespectful with the human rights.

The anti-democracy is one of the main determinants of the right-wing extremism, as it is related to all its other descriptors. In the light of Mudde (2017) extremism is undeniably opposed to democracy, however he distinguishes between groups considering their positioning on the democratic/extremist actions and ideas. According to his typology, radical right parties do share non-democratic ideas and challenge some ideals of liberal democracy, nevertheless they use democratic methods in order to succeed in their goals.

On the other hand, as explained by Mudde (2017) the true and real extremist groups are composed of those that both hold non-democratic ideas and apply non-democratic methods. On this account, Neo-Nazi groups are defining for such practices in the society of our contemporary times.

Lastly, in relation to the strong-state, Mudde (2002) distinguished between two aspects: the focus of the right-wing extremism on law and order, understood as the need of a strong enforcement of the law, stern personnel and means, as well as hard punishments for crimes. The second aspect refers to the preference for militarism, comprising the ideal of a strong army needed for war, which is regarded as an ultimate goal.

As it can be observed, all these particularities of the right-wing extremism share some common beliefs, still their ways are slightly different. According to Lee (2019), despite of the existent debate over the interpretations of the ideas shared by the extreme right supporters, considering their different standpoints and focus, may be observed different blocs such as: fascists, neo-Nazis, neo-fascists, and populists.

Fascism has been described by Finchelstein (2008) as a “political ideology that encompassed totalitarianism, state terrorism, imperialism, racism and, in the German case, the

most radical genocide of the last century: the Holocaust” (p. 320). Moreover, fascism is thought to have been born from the ideology of the anti-Enlightenment, with the aim of creating a new civilization and a new order.

In keeping up with Finchelstein (2008) the fascism started in the context of the First World War, it has been later consolidated by the visions of Hitler and Mussolini by gaining violent characteristics, and due to the mixture with the extreme right-wing nationalism and imperialism it had been shaped ultimately. As believed by Finchelstein (2008) fascism was opposed to the democracy and the liberal politics and gained public support thanks to its total antagonism with Soviet Communism, which was receiving criticism.

According to Lee (2019, apud. Griffin, 1991) fascism presents some fundamental characteristics such as the need of renewal and rebirth, ultra-nationalism understood as a need of protection of the state from corruption, from internal and external influences and the usage of mass media in politics.

One interesting observation made by Bauerkämper (2007) emphasizes the transnationalism of the fascist regimes in Europe, despite their strong nationalistic narratives: there were periods of continuous interchanges across borders, which made possible the creation of networks that exchanged practices and ideologies. The consequences of the fascist regimes in Europe were dramatic, for this reason it is important to investigate such practices that might lead to anything similar in the present or future.

Another right-wing extremist current that emerged after the Second World War was the neo-fascism. It has been defined by Cammaerts (2020) as “a contemporary political phenomenon, rooted in an unsavoury past, which combines ultra-nationalism with nativism and celebrates racial hierarchy, as well as the desirability of inequality and privilege” (p.1).

As explained by Copsy (2020) the neo-fascism has been born due to the activity of the “nostalgics” who previously experienced the Italian fascism but also due to the “radicals and reflective” who thought about new ways of adapting their fascist views to the post-war context. Moreover, it is considered a diverse political phenomenon in which three major evolution trends have been identified: de-territorialisation, meta-politicisation, and historical revisionism.

The neo-fascism is adapting its practices to the contemporary times and makes use of technology and other means to gain popularity. In agreement with Cammaerts (2020), both the traditional media and the social media are playing a significant role in sharing and normalizing the neo-fascist discourse. As well, he explains how this debate can be compared to the Karl

Popper's Paradox of Tolerance and calls out for the moral responsibility of social media agencies in combating the neo-fascism.

The neo-Nazism was born as well after the Second World War, based on the Nazi ideology. In the opinion of Anderson (1995), neo-Nazi activity is considered as being "the most insidious variant of right-wing extremism in Germany" (p. 40). These neo-Nazi groups are mainly formed by males, usually younger than 30, and, despite the stereotypes, the majority of them are still in school or working as trainees. Even so, the violence of some of their actions can be considered of a terrorist nature.

As explained by Anderson (1995), the neo-Nazis in Germany are organized in groups whose political aims are aligned to their predecessors, oriented towards the Fourth Reich and supporting totalitarian values. They are sceptical about the European institutions' role and intentions, reject the ethnic pluralism and are against democracy, which they perceive as a corrupt system that is not compatible with Germany's historical destiny.

In keeping up with Anderson (1995), neo-Nazi groups challenge Germany's immigration policy and have been violently targeting foreigner residents and other groups such as handicapped people, homeless, Jews, Jewish and Holocaust memorials. Moreover, evidence showed that neo-Nazi groups have been in contact with other terrorist and right-wing extremist groups from many other countries such as: Austria, Denmark, Spain, Finland, the Netherlands, United States, etc.

Another right-wing extremist variety present nowadays has populism as a core belief. In the light of Mudde populism is:

An ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. (2004, p. 543)

According to Bangstad *et al.* the most mainstream ideas shared among the far right and right-wing populists in Europe and the United States are linked to the stereotype of the:

White working class marginalized by globalization and deindustrialization and left with a sense of political disempowerment by the political domination of highly educated technocratic elites in many societies, as well as a sense of being threatened by demographic decline; loss of status and power in the face of immigration, which

populist right-wing leaders across the world have made sure to link discursively to radical Islamist terrorism; and feminism. (2019, p. 100)

As stated by Greven (2016) right-wing populism generally offers a discourse which distinguishes between “us versus them”, while “them” are normally represented by groups such as migrants, claiming that they are being privileged by the elites. In addition to that, the strategies used for communication by the right-wing populists in the opinion of Greven (2016) are being disrespectful, are not compliant to the political correctness, and are making use of emotional language, as well as to conspiracy theories.

Conforming to Greven (2016), despite of the distinction between the right-wing populism and extremism, the extremists are very likely to be at the same time also populists. On the other hand, the intensity of the xenophobic positioning, desire to overthrow democracy and ethno-centric conception of the populists indicates the likelihood of them being also extremists.

In conformity with Campana & Tanner (2019) the concept of far right is being used interchangeably to describe a variety of individuals such as activists, political groups, extra-parliamentary groups, individuals not affiliated to any organization etc. Even though the basis of the ideology they rely on is shared, it has been highlighted how their discourse, actions and structures are different and should not be understood as representing the same phenomenon.

As explained by Lee (2019) the far-right has an unshaped character as it is formed not only by easily recognisable members but also from gangs, pressure groups, political parties, or other movements. Moreover, it has been described as a mixture of different narratives, embodying multiple contextual factors and various actors.

Blee (2007) highlights that the far-right groups appeal to the emotions as part of their recruitment strategy and that they also promote the emotional politics style among their followers. This includes acts such as paramilitary marches, rituals, white power music or wearing symbols on their body. These characteristics are considered by Blee (2007) as part of the far right ethnography. Moreover, the elements of culture were found to be crucial for creating commitment and normalizing ideas and actions, particularly in far-right and racist movements.

By the data of Koehler (2016) the number of lone right-wing attackers has started decreasing, while a new form of collective manifestation of right-wing ideology expression has become more visible and larger, comprising right-wing, anti-immigration and anti-governmental movements across Europe.

Furthermore, the scholar highlights that this new form of terrorism has also an important presence on social media where it spreads ideas and other materials such as manuals or guidebooks on various platforms. For example, as mentioned by Stevkovski (2015) since 2010 the number of neo-Nazi websites has tripled in Germany.

The online presence of right-wing extremism is not exclusively limited to their own websites, but it is also existing on other social media platforms. As mentioned to Conway et al. (2019) platforms like 4chan which initially was not created for right-wing extremist purposes, has become a mean of disseminating extremist and misogynist content under the politically incorrect board (/pol/). 8chan however, a platform created on the same model has been directly associated with 3 right-wing terrorist attacks worldwide.

According to Auger (2020) the collective manifestation of right-wing extremism is based on shared “manifestos” that aim to fight against the “white genocide”:

The use of violence is intended to intimidate enemies and to stop immigration, but more broadly it is intended to “awaken” the white race to the danger it faces. The ultimate goal is to provoke a resolution to the crisis: a race war, leading to an ethnically pure white/Aryan homeland. (Auger, 2020, p. 91)

In the opinion of Koehler (2016), the right-wing terrorism can be interpreted as a form of political violence that manifests traits which can be associated to hate crime and organized terrorism. Moreover, their main purpose is placed in a long-term perspective, while attempting to disseminate fear, just as in other forms of terrorism.

However, referring to Blee (2007), despite the large amount of research made on far-right ideology focused on the right-wing extremism, the findings are based on external analysis, thus more research from inside these structures and groups is needed in order to understand in depth its dynamics.

### **3. Development of the right-wing extremism in the European Union: from Eastern to Western Europe**

As explained by Hainsworth (2008) despite of the fact that after 1945 the fascist regimes were overcome and new democratic political systems took their place, various forms of extreme-right activity still have not disappeared completely, but rather they emerged in a different form. If during the first period after the Second World War, the extreme-right was

playing a marginal role, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century new extreme-right political movements have arisen, some of their narratives reminding of the ideas from just a few decades before.

Negative attitudes towards immigration have been emerging ceaselessly even from the very first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Some illustrative examples of answers to surveys were indicated by Tepfenhart (2011, apud. Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2001): in Austria 37% would not shake hands with a Jew; 56% of French believed there were too many Arabs in the country; in Hungary, 70% of the Hungarians perceived the Roma minority as a threat to society, 60% Slovaks considered that refugees carried diseases, etc.

Scholars like Tepfenhart (2011) suggested that the uprise of the right-wing extremism is related to the increasing lack of confidence in the national governments in many countries across Europe. Her findings also underlined a higher escalation in Western Europe, in countries like Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark or Austria.

However, a growing trend in popularity of right-wing extremism has been observed as well in Eastern European countries. As stated by Stöss (2017), after the fall of the Soviet Union the far-right has started gaining popularity as well in Eastern Europe, surfacing in its various forms such as: nationalist, fascist, separatist groups and organizations, as well as racist, nationalist anti-Semitic attitudes.

In spite of the presence of right-wing extremism in both Western and Eastern Europe, there are many differences between their development process. According to Stöss (2017), the Western right-wing extremism emerged from a systemic shift from industrial to post-industrial societies and globalization, while the Eastern emerged from a systemic transformation from state socialism to democracy.

In keeping up with Stöss (2017) as the process of nation-building in Eastern Europe has not been finished yet and, considering its lack of national identity consensus, the extreme right narrative is based mainly on unsolved national problems. In addition to that, it also comprises anti-Western attitudes, strongly linked to the historical past.

Furthermore, according to Melzer & Serafin (2013) the nation building process in Eastern Europe explains the different basis of the extreme right narrative compared to Western Europe: considering their dependence on the multinational empires and the relations of *risorgimento* type, in Eastern Europe was very common the existence of “external homelands”.

As explained by Melzer & Serafin (2013) the Eastern European xenophobia is to a great extent linked to these external homelands and to the minorities living there. That being the case, the main difference between the Eastern and Western Europe in terms of xenophobia is that in Western countries may be observed a defensive ultra-nationalism oriented towards

immigrants and multiculturalism, while in Eastern countries it is rather offensive, and oriented towards neighbour-countries and long-time resident minorities.

Moreover, referring to Melzer & Serafin (2013) the Eastern European far right parties defend the idea of recovering their territories lost after the World Wars and tend to show more tendency towards racism and anti-Semitism, rather than Islamophobia. For example, the Greater Romania Party often calls out for readjusting the borders to the way they were in the interwar period and for the annexation of Republic of Moldova.

However, there are also common factors that increased the right-wing extremist sympathy across the European Union. In accordance with Stöss (2017) a similarity of Western and Eastern right-wing extremism is the anti-Muslim discourse, highly popular after the Islamist terrorist attack from 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001. Furthermore, Islamophobia has become a new dimension of racism, eventually contributing to the increase in the popular support of right-wing extremism.

Another factor highlighted by Tepfenhart (2011) that contributes to the surge of right-wing extremism is the economic discrepancy between the members of the European Union and the animosity of some Eastern European states towards the EU supranational institutions. Thus, reaching more economic prosperity and equality between the European countries should decrease the intensity of right-wing extremism.

Furthermore, Alvares & Dahlgren (2016) agree that one of the explanations of the ascension of the right-wing populism in the European Union is related to the economic crisis of 2008 which has significantly accentuated the inequalities between the different regions (North/South; West/East) and brought out to light old stereotypes. In addition to that, immigration, and the assimilation of diversity within the different states have also contributed to the creation of social dilemmas, often used by the populist right-wing in their discourse.

As determined by Mierina & Koroleva (2015) some of the factors that are influencing towards negative attitudes on immigration are the spread of ethnic nationalism, but also the group conflicts generated by other factors such as status, money, or jobs. On this account, it has been determined that poverty was strongly associated to the increase of xenophobia, exclusionism, and welfare chauvinism, particularly in countries with high immigration rates.

As explained by Knabe *et al.* (2013), the public opinion on immigration has been worsening in many countries in Europe in the last couple of years due to the unemployment and rigid welfare systems. As a result, native populations have started perceiving the immigrant minorities more as an economic burden, rather than as a possible benefit. These ideas have been partly also incremented by the right-wing xenophobic political attitudes.

The young immigrants are the most vulnerable within this social context as they were targeted by right-wing populist supporters who have pledged against the freedom of movement within the European Union's borders. As explained by Kaya (2020) many of the European youngsters are facing pessimism and material deprivation, especially in countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece, Romania, Lithuania, Cyprus, Latvia, or Italy.

According to Knabe *et al.* (2013), the life satisfaction of immigrants is significantly affected by the right-wing extremism of their host country, and this effect is even more significant in the case of high skilled immigrants compared to low skilled immigrants. Higher vote for the extreme right correlated with lower subjective well-being for non-national residents. The same study highlights that in the case of non-European immigrants the life satisfaction is even lower, and directly related to the perception on discrimination.

According to Mierina & Koroleva (2015) the views of young Europeans towards immigration are very different, even on a national level. Moreover, their findings highlighted that the visions towards immigration in the case of youngsters from post-socialist countries and Greeks, despite their low immigration rates, tend to be more xenophobic and less inclusive than the Western young people.

Likewise, Stevkovski (2015) suggested that young people are highly vulnerable to be recruited into right-wing extremist groups, due to the professional difficulties and rising unemployment among their age, which also generates culprits against foreign immigrants, who are considered as a threat.

On the other hand, in the light of Mierina and Koroleva (2015) the liberal welfare regimes are the most prone to generate strong xenophobic attitudes compared to the conservative regimes due to their approach, which also highlights the impact of the political ideology on the views about immigration. This perspective reflects the complexity of the phenomenon of xenophobia.

With regard to the profile of the extreme right voters, as per the findings of Arzheimer and Carter (2006), the most common traits were being a young male under 25, manual worker. The same study highlights that the least likely supporters of extreme right parties were professional middle-aged females. However, the socio-demographic factors were not found to explain consistently the voters' support for extreme right parties.

According to Arzheimer and Carter (2006), some of the reasons that better explain the support of the voters for the right-wing extremist parties in Western Europe are the unemployment level, the disproportionality of the electoral system, the presence of a major coalition government and the position of the major party of the mainstream right.

At the same time, in accordance with Mierina and Koroleva (2015, apud. Ishiyama, 2009), in the case of the East-Central Europe, the prevalence of far-right ideology is not related to the socialist past or post-socialist period, but to other conditions as for example the resource stress, lack of political trust, low social status, ethnic nationalism, or lack of cultural diversity.

As per the data of Koehler (2016), 39 European countries were having nationalist and extreme right-wing groups in their Parliaments. Some of the reasons that seem to have contributed to their increase in popularity and public support were the refugee crisis, which is still an unsolved topic, as well as the Islam related terrorist attacks which took place in various European countries in the last decades.

The political support of far-right ideas is related to a certain extent to the public attitudes on immigration. As described by Koehler (2016), there is a relationship between the right-wing parties' narratives and the increase of public racism and xenophobia, which might turn out into violence or terrorism in some specific, extremist groups.

During the last couple of years, more and more violence is finding its way in the right-wing extremist practices. As explained by Koehler (2016) there is an increasing trend of violence associated to the right-wing that has been recorded in the last decades, both in the United States and Europe: TWEED's archives from 1950 to 2004 listed 648 right-wing related attacks, comprising almost 6% of the total.

Koehler's (2016) comparison of data registered by the University of Bergen and official Europol data highlighted another important aspect related the comprehension of right-wing violent attacks: there is a national variation in understanding the nature and characteristics of these attacks and, in addition, the national legal systems also contribute to them not being computed by Europol.

According to Pauwels (2019) the right-wing counter-terrorism efforts are influenced by the lack of investigation of right-wing networks, creating difficulty of prediction and vulnerability against new attacks. Moreover, considering these attacks as isolated incidents also minimises prospects for international cooperation to fight right-wing terrorism.

Referring to Ravndal (2018) a dataset of right-wing violent and terrorist attacks from 1990 to 2015 from Western European countries highlights variances between them: countries like Luxemburg or Portugal have barely registered any events within this timeframe, while others such as Italy or Greece experienced considerably more non-lethal incidents than the rest. With regard to the lethal right-wing terrorist or violent acts, Sweden, Germany, the UK, and Spain registered the highest number of events of such type. These findings have been supported

also by reports from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the European Network Against Racism.

Finally, yet importantly, right-wing extremist manifestations are emerging along the European Union, however the causes are different and also the criteria of exclusion and far-right ideology assumptions combine diversely within the states. The regional European context, strongly linked to the historical past, offers important guidelines in understanding the diversity of the right-wing extremism.

Despite no fix definition about the concept of “West”, the Global Terrorist Index (2019) includes Spain and Ireland in this category, along with other countries like France, Italy, Germany etc., based on where the concept of far-right terrorism is the most politically applicable. The further references about Western and Eastern Europe in this study will be made according to this definition.

The selection of the cases for this analysis aims to help identify the variance on right-wing extremism in the European Union. By comparing Spain and Ireland, as Western European countries, with Romania, an Eastern European country and one of the last to join the EU, it is aimed to explore better the particularities of the national context and the development right-wing extremist attitudes and manifestations. Moreover, by comparing EU countries that registered relatively low rates of right-wing extremist manifestations like Ireland and Romania to countries with a higher incidence like Spain, it is aimed to explore further factors that might explain the variety in intensity of such acts.

### **3.1. Origins and manifestations of the right-wing extremism in Ireland**

The extremism in Ireland is associated, historically, to the actions of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the other organizations like the Provisional IRA or Official IRA that followed. Their activity was motivated by the desire of unification and creation of the Republic of Ireland. The terrorist actions undertaken along the 20<sup>th</sup> century in achieving this goal were thus nationalist/separatist based.

In contemporary times, Ireland is one of the European Member States with relatively low right-wing extremist activity, however this is still a subject of interest. In Ireland as Arlow (2019) highlights, even though the right-wing extremism is not as powerful as in other European countries, there is an intense activist movement against fascism, which, as stated by the scholar, indicates the concern of the society against the right-wing extremism.

As explained by Arlow (2019) despite the fact that Ireland meets the conditions to have a powerful extreme right, considering factors like its increased immigration, rapid socio-economic change and its electoral system that supports new joiners, there is no significant extreme-right political party in Ireland. Moreover, in 2018 the Anti-Fascist movement AFA Ireland declared that the biggest right-wing extremist threat for the country came surprisingly, from Eastern European migrant workers.

The two main reasons behind the lack of far-right parties in Ireland have been identified by Arlow (2019). First, the two hegemonic parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, provide an ethnically homogenous political narrative and support the liberal immigration policies. They are making it difficult for other parties to have popularity and are restraining the surge of right-wing extremism. Second, another factor relies on the so-called progressive nature of Irish nationalism.

According to O'Malley (2008) the high rates of immigrants in Ireland have not been perceived as a cultural threat by the Irish society. Furthermore, in terms of economic aspects, he points out that the unemployment rate did not grow as much as in other European countries and that overall, the Irish living standards have increased and the wellbeing along with it.

At the same time, other scholars like Von Beyme (2013) claim that while most of the other European voters identify themselves with the left or right, there are also certain differences in admitting their support for the extreme right. On this account, the right-wing extremes were most strongly accentuated in Ireland, along with other countries such as Belgium or Luxemburg.

Goldstone (2012) highlights however that many racially motivated violent attacks are not being reflected in the official reports in Ireland. She mentions two of the incidents that took place in 2008 when 2 Polish people were stabbed to death in Dublin by a gang of youngsters and in the same year and city a Brazilian woman that was severely beaten in similar conditions.

In the opinion of Goldstone (2012) "the official statistics still paint a picture of Ireland as a place with low levels of racist crime" and believe the reason of that is the lack of political will in establishing an adequate legislative framework. Moreover, the under reporting of attacks has been revealed also by an analysis of Amnesty International in which 79% Blacks and other minorities in Ireland accused being victims of racist abuse (Goldstone, 2012).

In outline, Ireland comes across as being one of the European countries with relatively low right-wing extremist manifestations and no significant far right political representation. Even so, alternative sources state the need of more accurate reporting of racist and xenophobic incidents in Ireland so that measures could be taken accordingly.

### **3.2. Origins and manifestations of the right-wing extremism in Spain**

As explained by the Spanish Government (2021) the right-wing extremism had a long tradition in Spain, considering the fact that after the World War II the state was not rebuilt on the defeat of fascism, like in other Western countries. Moreover, the Francoist regime in Spain has still not fallen into oblivion, and in the present times there are still traces of its heritage and other symbols across the country.

According to Garcia (2020), in Spain, between the 70s and the 80s there have been identified 7 Spanish right-wing terrorist groups and many others coming from other countries like Italy, Portugal, Argentina or France. However, this terrorism termed “tardofranquista” is barely known nowadays as it has received very little public attention lately.

As explained by Garcia (2020) the most important terrorist organizations of this type were the: Spanish Basque Battalion (BVE), Anti-Communist Apostolic Alliance or Triple A, Anti-terrorism ETA (ATE), Spanish Armed Groups (GAE), the Guerrillas of Christ King. Some other less popular were the Anti-Marxist Commands, the Nationalist Intervention Group (GIN), Spanish National Action (ANE) or the Trade Union Action Groups (G.A.S.). In addition, there were reported also other small groups and commandos that mostly focused on bombing, extortion and beating.

In keeping up with Garcia (2020) between 1974 and 1982 no less than 74 right-wing terrorist claimed attacks took place, leaving behind at least 66 victims. Many others have been produced but not claimed or not even registered in official reports. Their modus operandi mostly consisted in kidnapping, murder, blackmailing and requests of redemption of other fellow convicts of terrorist attacks. These practices were similar to other terrorist groups like the ETA or the jihadists.

The following years maintained the same tendency. As determined by Garcia (2019) after the 90s until now almost a dozen political parties: Spain 2000 (E-2000), Spanish Phalange of the JONS (FE-JONS), Authentic Phalange (FA), Spanish Alternative (AES), etc., and more than 30 social movements of extreme right, fascist or Nazi (the Spanish Social Movement, the National Democracy, the movement Unity of Spain and many more) have stepped up in the political and social scene.

In accordance with Rodriguez-Jimenez (2012), the Spanish extreme right had to find new ways and to renew its program in the years that followed after the Francoism. The major forms in which this conversion was made were the neo-Francoism and neofascism. In the

present climate, the extreme right votes are mostly gained thanks to the xenophobic discourse of the Spanish extreme right new political parties.

Nowadays, just like in the other European countries, the right-wing extremism in Spain is increasing significantly. As described by the Spanish Government (2021, apud RAXEN, 2019), racist and xenophobic groups are present in all Spanish territory and, in addition, there have been registered at least 10000 neo-Nazi individuals in Spain. Moreover, the football hooliganism is strongly associated to the right-wing extremism, as it has been identified as a suitable place for new recruitments.

As explained by Alvarez-Benavides (2019) the “fascism of the third millennium” is a new form of national and international extreme right organizations that is different from the previous forms. The Spanish organization of such type, Social Home Madrid, combines elements of traditional fascism and Francoism with the social action, describing themselves as anti-capitalist, anti-globalization, anti-establishment and socialist.

As demonstrated previously in this study, the socio-economic factors are highly important for the surge of right-wing extremism. In Spain, as explained by the Spanish Government (2021) the unemployment among young people is still a worrying aspect as in 2014 more than 50% of the population under 25 was unemployed. Furthermore, the poverty increased after the 2012 crisis, placing Spain second in the EU ranking on child poverty.

As highlighted by the Spanish Government (2021), the rise of the right-wing extremism seems to be more linked to the economic consequences of the crisis, rather than with other factors like the immigration. In addition, it has been observed no correlation in the increase of right-wing extremism and the jihadist terrorist attacks of Madrid (2004) and Barcelona and Cambrils (2016).

Whereas, according to the data provided by the Generality of Catalonia (2020), in the Province of Barcelona in only two years, between 2015 and 2017, there has been recorded an increase of 110% of court penalties for acts motivated by hatred and discrimination. Moreover, only in 2016/2017 reasons behind these acts that escalated the most were: the political orientation reasons (increase by 124%), and religious (increase by 162%).

The Generality of Catalonia (2020) highlights the different facets of the right-wing and far-right manifestations in Catalonia: racism and xenophobia (respectively in the city of Barcelona these were the main reasons of discrimination in 2018), Nazi propaganda, anti-Catalanism. These acts were manifested in both violent and non-violent ways: from physical attacks, to intimidation, insults and threats, vandalism and other aggressive actions.

In addition to that, referring to Sanchez and Rodriguez (2011) in Spain there are hundreds of online platforms right extremists that manage to diffuse racism, xenophobia, prejudice and inciting to violence through skin music, football groups or Nazi esotericism. Moreover, the same scholars highlighted how the social media platforms, which are supposed to restrict the content through their terms and conditions, sometimes allow such content on their sites without applying any filter: as for example Facebook groups in Spain with xenophobic names like: “In my town there is an invasion of roundabouts, Romanians and Chinese”.

According to the Spanish Government (2021) the definition of right-wing extremism is strongly related to the hate speech. Even though hate speech is not exclusively limited to the right-wing extremism, it is one of the main components that is used to dehumanize minority groups.

Conforming to the European Commission (2017) in Spain, there are fascist and xenophobic organizations in all the Autonomous Communities, which increased substantially the hate speech and the xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, also due to all the neo-fascist events that are taking place every year along the country.

In outline, the right-wing extremism in Spain has taken various forms after the Francoist regime and has continuously adapted to the context of the times. Just like in other European countries, the ethnical aspect is central, but not restricted, to almost all its forms and manifestations. Despite its long tradition within the Spanish state, its recent rise in popularity is due to other factors as well, like the economy and unemployment. Alongside, the right-wing extremism in Spain is highly active both in online and offline.

### **3.3. Origins and manifestations of the right-wing extremism in Romania**

In Romania, the most intense period of right-wing extremism leads back to the first half of the 20th century, specifically to the Legionnaire Movement and the Iron Guard. Nevertheless, despite the multiple political changes and the lack of Parliamentary representation until 2020, the right-wing extremism has been represented in various forms. In the opinion of Cinpoes (2012), “the landscape of extreme right-wing groups and organisations in Romania is abundant and diverse” (p. 4) nowadays.

Despite the existence of other fascist movements in Romania after the First World War, the most important was the “Legion of Archangel Michael” founded by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in 1927. Just like the other European fascist movements, the Romanian one was nationalist, anti-communist and anti-semitist.

However, as described by Ioanid (2004), the element of uniqueness of the Romanian fascism was the strong religious component. The Christian-Orthodox values were fundamental for the “Legionnaires” and the Romanian Orthodox Church was closely associated to them and then to the other totalitarian movements from 1938 to 1989.

According to Buščíková (2018) the extreme right politics in Romania mostly rely on the ethnic and language breaches, just like in other Eastern European ethnically pluralistic society, where parties of such type go against large ethnic groups. In the case of Romania, extreme right parties were found as successful in attracting public support and voters since the early 1990, right after the Revolution.

As explained by Corbu *et al.* (2016), the first years after the Revolution in Romania were very unstable both socially and politically: there was a lack of institutionalization and also violent miners’ riots were occurring often, contributing to the political chaos. The years following only increased the society’s disappointment and lack of trust with politics, which later became a fertile soil for populist narratives.

The Romanian right-wing extremism outside the political spectre as Cinpoeş (2012) highlights, is composed of revisionism, extreme nationalism and intolerance towards many groups such as ethnic Hungarians, the Roma, and the sexual minorities, all present in institutionalised and non-institutionalised form.

Cinpoeş (2012) points out to another important aspect in understanding the far-right extremism in Romania, which is the “casual intolerance”. According to him, it indicates the prevalence of the racism and intolerance in the public and private speech of the Romanian society.

In terms of far-right Romanian parties, the most visible according to Cinpoeş (2012) were the “Greater Romania Party” (PRM) lead by the controversial Corneliu Vadim Tudor, dead in 2015, the “New Generation Party – Christian Democratic” (PNG-CD) and the Party “Everything for the Country” (TPȚ). Another party, the “Alliance for the Union of Romanians” (AUR), has joined in 2019, and after only one year since its creation, managed to receive 9% of the votes on the Parliamentary elections of 2020.

In terms of non-political right-wing extremism, various groups were identified by Cinpoeş (2012) such as organizations promoting extremist activities and racism, football

hooligans displaying racist messages towards the Roma and even the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR), which has been showing nationalistic tendencies mixed with authoritarian tendencies and involvement in public and political life. However, no skinhead groups have been identified in Romania so far.

The ethnical prejudice is part of the Romanian everyday reality inside and outside the national context. As explained by Nesbitt-Larking *et al.* (2014), Romanian nationals are facing exclusion in the European context and are often negatively categorized by Western mass-media as “felons, beggars and prostitutes”. On the other hand, within the national context, Roma ethnics are being highly rejected.

As per the surveys analysed by Nesbitt-Larking *et al.* (2014) 64% of Romanians associated Gypsies with violence and 74% with crimes; almost 32% agreed with segregation in school for Gypsies and almost 54% would not accept a Gypsy in their family. Moreover, as described by Nesbitt-Larking *et al.* (2014, apud. Tileagă, 2005), Romanian non-Gypsies mostly regard Gypsies as not being Romanian nationals, while claiming biological and cultural reasons.

According to Corbu *et al.* (2016) the New Right right-wing extremist organization is the one of the most representative forms of right-wing extremism in Romania. It has been sharing its narrative in the online space, and which is popular especially among young, educated individuals. Their messages have been considered extremist, nationalist, fascist, racist, and xenophobic.

As highlighted by Fofiu (2011), based on the activity of the New Right in online, their two biggest “fears” are “the Hungarization of Romania” and “The Gypsification of Romania”. In both of these two perspectives the minorities are seen as an ethnic threat:

While the Hungarization of Romania is a political and symbolic process that impedes on Romanian values and symbols, the Gypsification process is a question of numbers, sustained by political manoeuvres, which leads to discrimination against Romanians. A symbolic question of the resemblance of the names of the two ethnicities, Romanian and Romani or Roma, is very much denounced by the New Right. (Fofiu, 2011, p.166).

As shown by Bogdan (2014) the New Right organization has strong ties with other European organizations of such types such as the Forza Nuova (Italy), Frente Nacional (Spain), Renouveau français (France) etc. These findings confirmed the idea that the right-wing extremism in Western and Eastern Europe is shifting towards more networking, while finding

a common opponent that could be the Muslims, Roma or the common identities as white persons.

In agreement with Cinpoeş (2012), the intolerance of sexual minorities in Romania is also well-spread. As reported by Nesbitt-Larking *et al.* (2014), the gay minority is the most marginalized, with 90.5% of Romanians answering in a survey that they would not accept a gay or lesbian as a spouse of kin (apud. INSOMAR, 2009).

In short, the Romanian right-wing extremism is a diverse phenomenon, comprising political narratives but also non-political such as groups and organizations, mostly present in online. The Romanian “casual intolerance” describes a series of general right extremist ideas present in the society, focused mostly against some minority groups. The origins of the right-wing extremism in Romania are linked not only to the historical past fascism of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also to the development of the process of nation building after the Revolution of 1989 and the switch to a new political system.

## **4. Comparison of the right-wing extremism in Ireland, Spain, and Romania**

### **4.1. Spain and Romania**

Many aspects need to be taken into consideration while comparing Spain and Romania’s right-wing extremism. In terms of similarities, it can be observed that in Spain, just like in Romania, the far-right ideology has political and Parliamentary representation. As the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2017) explains, the political speech against immigrants and Roma augments racist and xenophobic feelings within the society.

Another similarity relies in the fact that both countries have an important minority of Roma people, that has been targeted on many occasions by right-wing extremist organizations, while also being generally discriminated. In Romania, as described previously, the New Right organization places on the top of its narrative themes the “The Gypsification of Romania”, understood as the replacement of the ethnic Romanian majority with Roma minority (Fonfiu, 2012). In Spain, the Roma minority as well “suffers important negative prejudices and rejection by the non-Roma Spanish population and are systematically excluded from social and economic resources” (SOS Racisme, 2018, p. 14).

Another common characteristic of the right-wing extremism in Spain and Romania consists in the homophobic attitudes towards the LGBT minority. As mentioned beforehand

by Cinpoes (2012) sexual minorities in Romania are victims of the casual intolerance, which on certain occasions ended up in violent events. In Spain, as per the findings of ECRI (2017) for 2015, almost 19% of all the physical assault crimes registered on that year were LGBT related and 60.5% racist/xenophobic motivated. In 2014, only 18.5% of the total hate crimes were related to racism while almost 65% were against LGBT individuals.

From the religious perspective, right-wing extremism is manifested differently in Romania compared to Spain. As previously explained along these lines, the Orthodox Church in Romania has been linked historically to the fascist regime. Nowadays, the religious Orthodox values such as traditionalism, nationalism, conservatism, are used by the extreme right in their discourse.

For instance, as explained by Ciobanu (2017) in November 2017 the Romanian Orthodox Church started the campaign “Coalition for Family” which was meant to convince the voters to approve in the referendum a change in legislation to explicitly offer the right to marriage only to heterosexual couples. Members of the New Right supported the initiative and participated in the marches.

In Spain, the religious aspect of the right-wing extremism takes the form of Islamophobia. According to Ali (2020), 82.8% of the respondents to a survey admitted there is a high level of Islamophobia in Spain, and that they are being discriminated when searching for housing or jobs. Moreover, numerous acts of vandalism to Muslim religious establishments along Spain have been reported, “by far-right groups leaving their posters with their logo in the corresponding place and publishing it online afterwards” (p.17).

In outline, in both countries the right-wing extremism is based on racism and also shares Anti-LGBT rhetoric. In Spain, in addition to these, the xenophobia is also of great importance in understanding its extreme right narrative. In Romania, right-wing extremism is based to a great extent also on nationalism and religious beliefs.

## **4.2. Spain and Ireland**

Similarities can be identified also between Spain and Ireland’s right-wing extremism. Just as in Spain and Romania the Roma community is facing discrimination and harassment, the Irish Travellers minority is experiencing the same in Ireland. According to a survey of FRA (2020), 52% of Irish Travellers in Ireland reported hate-motivated harassment. ECRI (2019) reported hate speech against Irish Travellers and Roma in Irish social media, like for example a Facebook group created “to expel gypsy criminals”, proposing “to burn the cockroaches”.

Another similarity between Spain and Ireland consists in the existence of Islamophobic acts. According to ECRI (2019) vandalism and aggressive acts have been reported in 2017, as for example the attack on a mosque in Galway City in Ireland during prayers or the various cases of aggression against Muslim women in public places who had their veils removed, were slapped or spat at.

In terms of difference, it can be claimed that the Afrophobia is less significant in Spain compared to Ireland. On this account, in accordance with the EU MIDIS II survey (ECRI, 2021), Ireland scored among the highest in the of hate-motivated harassment against the immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite the existence of such attitudes in both Spanish and Irish societies, Spain has been having more right-wing extremist activity and more data about these acts. So far, in Ireland most of the incidents were not attributed to right-wing extremist groups but were rather regarded as individual acts. In Spain, there are plenty of well-known right-wing extremist groups that take ownership of these acts and incite racism, xenophobia, fascism, neo-Nazism and other hate attitudes.

Lastly, as described by Eurostat, in 2019 Spain or Ireland have reported a high percentage of non-national residents, representing more than 10% of the total. Considering the significant proportion of non-national residents and the multicultural component of these societies, it is important to apply proper policies in order to reduce and prevent the escalation of right-wing extremism.

### **4.3. Romania and Ireland**

In regard to Romania and Ireland, both are European countries that register low rates of right-wing extremist incidents and arrests in the official records. However, both of them have been receiving recommendations from the specialized European agencies to improve and amend their legislations in order to include more acts based on hate speech and violence.

To illustrate, in 2019 the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) advised Ireland to introduce in the Equal Status acts to incorporate “segregation, inciting another to discriminate and aiding another to discriminate as forms of discrimination” (p. 13), and to ensure that parties receiving benefits “respect and promote a policy of non-discrimination” (p. 13).

Another similarity between Romania and Ireland relies in the fact that both of them have been admonished for under-reporting hate crimes. This category of crimes includes activity motivated by right-wing extremist beliefs such as racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Roma hatred, among others.

For instance, ECRI (2019) states that in Ireland only half or a third of the hate crimes happening are recorded in official reports, compared to the data collected by NGOs. In Romania's case, ECRI (2019) highlights discrepancies in the data reported on these crimes, also emphasizing the lack of legal concepts to permit the record of racist incidents. As a result, no data on racism has been collected in Romania before 2018.

While in Romania and Ireland there is high resemblance with regard to the right-wing extremism, as for example the prevalence of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, there are also many differences between the two in terms of criteria of exclusion.

First, in Romania, the ethnic components that are generating extremist acts are based on tensions between the long-time resident Hungarian minority and the ethnic Romanians. For instance, the terrorist attack attempt from 2015 when two Hungarian extremist members of a movement promoting Neo-Nazism, racism and xenophobia tried to detonate an explosive device (ECRI, 2019).

In Ireland, these extremist acts are rather targeting immigrants, Muslims and Black people. As highlighted by ECRI (2019) various incidents of racist graffiti have been reported: sprayed swastikas, stickers distributed along the city of Dublin with racist messages like "Muslims out", "White pride" or "multiculturalism is genocide". Other incidents against Black people were registered as well.

As it can be observed, in both cases of Ireland and Romania plenty of actions right-wing extremist based are occurring on a regular basis, despite they are not being always reflected in official statistics. Whilst in both the ethnic element is central to these actions, in Romania it takes more a nationalistic form, while in Ireland is directed towards the immigration and multiculturalism.

## **5. Future perspectives on the right-wing extremism in the European Union**

The fact that right-wing extremism will be an ongoing emerging threat in the European Union also in the next couple of years can be expected by looking at data trends, but also considering other factors. Data provided by Europol (2021) indicates more crimes associated

with right wing extremism in the European Union: 34 individuals arrested in 8 Member States compared to 2019 when only 21 were arrested.

An argument that supports the first hypothesis about the right wing extremism's present and future threat in the EU relies in its transition from offline to online propaganda. Europol's (2021) data revealed that "COVID-19 and the containment measures taken by governments in Europe have drastically accelerated this trend towards the spread of right-wing extremist propaganda through the Internet." (p. 90)

In some of EU Member States the lockdowns and curfew have been prolonged for months in a row and most of the activity such as schooling or working moved to online, in addition to the social gatherings with friends or family that were not allowed. In this context, as stated also by Europol (2021) more young and vulnerable individuals increased their time spent online which led to a "risk of exposure to right-wing extremist propaganda and online right-wing communities increased, increasing the risk of radicalisation" (p.90).

New ways of propaganda have been adopted by the right-wing extremists in the EU. In keeping up with Europol (2021), the video games and gaming platforms are highly popular currently for recruitment by the right-wing extremists. Along with that, it has been observed how now memes and sarcasm are linked to the "chan culture".

These findings highlight how it is very likely that the right-wing extremism will continue this emerging trend in the next years, considering that now it is making usage of online tools that are very popular among the young generations, which, as it has been previously explained, are the most prone to radicalisation.

Another important aspect that supports the first hypothesis is the fact that the right-wing extremism is continuously adapting to the characteristics of the present times. To illustrate, as it can be seen in the Spanish case, after the fall of the Francoist regime, the right-wing extremism undertook various transformations and still found its way to manifest in different narratives and groups along the historical and recent times.

Moreover, the same trait can also be observed in the case of Romania, especially after the Revolution that marked the end of the communist regime. Right-wing extremist attitudes and manifestations have arisen in the context of nation building, profiting from national unsolved problems (Cinpoes, 2012).

In summary, the need of rebirth (Lee, 2019), the capacity to adapt in time while taking advantage of the historical context are important assets of the right-wing extremism that might indicate the continuation in the future of its growing trend. These findings are relevant in the elaboration of counter-terrorism policies.

## 6. Conclusion

The right-wing extremism remains popular and most likely will continue to be also in the next couple of years. As previously determined by Europol (2020) the trend in utilizing online platforms is strengthening transnational links among right-wing extremists. Thus, the online activity has been greatly increased by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns applied.

One of the most important assets of the right-wing extremism is its adaptability, trait that contributed to its longevity over time and its uprising in various forms after the Second World War. From this standpoint, on the cases analysed in this study it has been observed how in Spain the right-wing extremism has crystallized in numerous forms and groups after the Francoist regime, how in Romania emerged again after the fall of the Communist regime, and how in Ireland is being shaped in the context of increasing immigration.

This analysis of the right-wing extremism in Spain, Ireland and Romania supports previous findings. Based on Mudde's (2002) definition, elements of nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy and the strong state have been identified in all of them.

From the three cases examined, the nationalist component was found to have the greatest importance for the right-wing extremism in Romania. The nationalist discourse appears in antithesis with the long term resident minorities: especially the Hungarian and Roma. The right-wing extremists do not consider them as nationals and thus fight against "the threat" of their replacement of the ethnic Romanians.

Although present in all three countries, xenophobia has been found to be more characteristic for the Spanish right-wing extremism. As seen before, it takes the form of Islamophobia, but it is also targeting other groups such as Chinese or Romanians. In Ireland have been reported also many incidents of xenophobic violence and harassment, however these have often not been noted in official statements.

Racism is as well a component highly characteristic for the right-wing extremism in Spain, Ireland and Romania. In all three countries has been reported continuous discrimination, in addition to right-wing extremist activity, against the Roma and Irish Travellers minorities. In Spain and Ireland, the Black people are also targets of such activity.

Moreover, the anti-democracy and the strong state are present as well in the right-wing extremism's actions in all three countries examined. The concentration in groups based on anti-

democratic beliefs and usage of violence against other individuals are very representative in the case of Spain.

Other characteristics have also been observed. The right-wing extremism often shares anti-LGBT rhetoric, as for example in Spain and Romania, and appeals to traditional and religious values in its attempt to gain public support, as depicted again in the case of Romania.

Although the right-wing extremism in the European Union is sharing the same beliefs, its characteristics vary between the Member States, taking a specific shape in the national context. Factors like the economy, unemployment, immigration, general dissatisfaction with politics were found to constitute the starting point of right-wing extremist ideas.

Given the circumstance and the heterogeneity of the concept, it can be claimed that the right-wing extremism manifests in a variety of forms. In Spain many such organizations and groups have been created, offering more visibility for the right-wing extremism. In Ireland and Romania at first glance it might seem like the right-wing extremism is less present, considering the insufficient reporting of such activity. However, in Ireland, as demonstrated before, many incidents based on right-wing extremism do occur in reality. In Romania, many right-wing extremist attitudes are highly-spread along the society, comprising the “casual intolerance” (Cinpoș, 2012).

To conclude, the right-wing extremism is in growth in the European Union, fact which is putting in danger the democracies and the individuals, victims of these actions. Further research is necessary in order to understand all its diverse dynamics, so that more effective counter-measures and anti-radicalisation strategies can be enforced.

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