COST STSM Scientific Report: André Krouwel
COST Action: IS1308
'Populist Political Communication in Europe: Comprehending the Challenge of Mediated Political Populism for Democratic Politics'

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COST Action: IS1308
          Populist Political Communication in Europe

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STSM type: Regular

STSM Applicant: Dr. André Krouwel

STSM Topic: Voter-party agreement of populist versus mainstream parties

Location: Aristotle University
          Department of Political Sciences
          Thessaloniki
          Greece

Host: Dr. Ioannis Andreadis

Previous collaboration between the participants

I have previously collaborated with Dr. Wall and Dr. Andreadis, particularly in the emerging field of Voting Advice Applications (VAAs). Next to cooperating on the content development and design for such tools on several occasions, we have also worked on a number of co-authored papers on the topic, focusing particularly on the "demand side" of VAA research, that is, the effect these tools have on voters. Last year we have presented a paper at the 2014 European Consortium for Political Research General Conference (ECPR) in Glasgow entitled 'Internet Penetration and Voting Advice Applications'. Our understanding that VAA tools have proven useful for voters and the comprehension that the data they generate is not only useful for individual-level analyses, but also for providing reliable data on political parties' ideological positioning has driven us to explore under-addressed topics in VAA research. The Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) has proven a perfect opportunity for this endeavour.

Upon filing our request for STSM funding, we have had a number of online discussions where we outlined the focus of the project and the prospects for collaboration. During our stay in Thessaloniki, we have had meetings on a daily basis, during which we outlined the theoretical drivers of our research, reviewed newly published literature on VAAs, and performed some initial analyses for our new co-authored project (details below). Next to this, we have also recapped on our previous paper (presented in ECPR) and planned prospective steps for improvement and journal submission. In addition, we took the opportunity to discuss prospective improvements of a conference paper co-authored by Dr. Andreadis entitled "Using Surveys to Measure the Populist Attitudes of Political Elites and Voters: A Greek Pilot Study of Supply and Demand", and available at https://populism.byu.edu/Pages/Conference-papers.aspx. In particular, we focused on VAA use in Southern Europe, in the context of measuring populist attitudes in times of crisis and austerity, using data from the Greek VAA "HelpMeVote". Given that Dr. Andreadis is involved in developing "HelpMeVote" we have also exchanged experience related to VAA design and data use. Most importantly, the STSM has enabled us to work on a new project on populist party politics utilising the VAA party placement data which we are also planning to publish.

Purpose of the visit

The initial aim of this STSM was to explore the levels of party-voter agreement on issue positions for populist parties versus voter-party agreement for mainstream political parties. Our main focus is on the difference between 'traditional mainstream' parties and 'populist' parties with the latter having a less rounded correspondence between their policy positions and those of their core supporters and a greater reliance on strong leadership evaluations. This line of research is being worked out along the lines described in the proposal. Particularly we are exploring quota-sampling methodologies to make the data more representative, while at the same time keeping a lot of the marginals.

While discussing this line of investigation, however, rather than focusing only on the user data (party-voter agreement), we also analysed the party placement datasets (policy congruence of political parties). We have put a particular focus on far left and far right parties' issue-position congruence on matters related to economic policy and European integration. While this research will serve as a basis of comparison between radical, populist political actors, it will also allow for comparing the degree of congruence between the populist and mainstream, moderate political parties.

Description of the work carried out during the visit

The Data Utilised

We utilise two VAA party placement datasets from the pan-European VAAs EU Profiler (2009) and EUvox (2014). The two VAAs contain the policy positions of more than 200 European political parties from each EU member-state on a battery of 30 salient issue-statements derived from the European political debate. Almost every party that currently has a seat in the European Parliament or national parliaments and that is polling to win at least one seat in the EP was included in the VAAs. The statements chosen are relevant to the politics of the day and are related to topics of economic policy, support for European integration and moral/cultural beliefs. They cover a range of policy areas that illustrate differences between the parties involved. To answer these statements the following answer options at used: "Completely agree", "Tend to agree", "Neutral", "Tend to disagree", "Completely disagree", and "No Opinion". Early VAAs relied heavily on the parties

themselves to decide which issues should be presented. This left the creators open to pressure from parties with an interest in highlighting or de-emphasising certain issues. After analysing the risks of such an approach, we developed an alternative method that is more immune from manipulation and more likely to guarantee neutrality. The statements were only shown to the parties after their positions were determined.

While parties were given the opportunity of 'self-placement' (in EU Profiler), in order to respond to the survey themselves, their final responses were determined by a team of country-based experts with access to all of the relevant documentation and information that the parties offer, such as manifestos and statements.

Each position has been very carefully researched by the political scientists, who decided on the final positions by referring to a hierarchy of sources – the top being the party's own EP election manifesto. In instances where the party has not provided any opinion, the researchers referred to other (older) party manifestos, party websites, statements in the media and other secondary sources.

When the party self-placement and the expert coding were completed, the two results were compared. Where there were discrepancies, the party was asked to provide more support for its declared position, and a final answer was settled upon. While the parties themselves were consulted throughout, the final decision lay with the country team, offering a better chance of complete impartiality.

We have calculated the within-party consistency measures for each of the three main dimensions (economic, European, cultural). Here, we took into account the positions of each separate party as well, as for some parties, the dimension average score was based on only 1-2 statements (particularly in the EU Profiler dataset).

The Research Implemented

First, we have ensured cross-country comparability, by disregarding country-specific issue-statements, so that all parties we compare are placed on the exact same statements. Thereafter, we have identified the far left and far right parties in both the EU Profiler and EUvox datasets. While we acknowledge that not all parties on each pole are completely ideologically identical, we cluster together parties that are generally classified as radical populists in the political science literature. Thus, parties classified as far right, for instance, include political actors such as the Danish People's party, which has currently moderated its ideological stances, as well as extreme, openly racist parties such as the Greek Golden Dawn. We determined whether far left and far right parties differ from the rest by assessing

if they hold extreme positions on some issues (i.e. if they are the only parties which completely agree or disagree with a certain statement), and whether they occupy a unique side as an answer category (i.e. if they are the only parties which hold an 'agreement' or 'disagreement' position on a certain statement). In some countries where both types of parties compete, we also control for duality, that is, if both (or more) populist parties employ an extreme position or occupy a unique side.

Early Findings

We find that far right populist parties lack a coherent economic policy agenda and seem to be approaching each issue separately, aiming for the most popular position among the public. For example, far right parties support increasing the taxation on bank and stock market gains and relaxing EU austerity policy, which are leftist policy proposals. On the other hand, they also support cutting government spending, reducing the number of public sector employees and are against maintaining social programmes at the cost of higher taxes, which are rightist policy proposals.

Conversely, the far left populist parties, have very coherent positions on the economic dimension, but diverge on issues related to European integration. Far left parties are mostly negative about the EU, but in some cases they adopt clearly pro-EU positions. For instance, all left-wing populist parties agree that the EU should redistribute resources from richer to poorer EU regions". Far left parties agree with this, although they are very sceptical towards the common currency, the strict budgetary policies demanded by Brussels, and the decline of nation state sovereignty.

Thus, it is evident that both populist party types we analyse are ambivalent in their policy proposals: whereas the far right tends to have ambiguous positions on economic issues, the far left is inconsistent on matters related to European integration. While these findings are very relevant for the comparison of radical, populist parties, in future developments of this research line we will also analyse the policy congruence of mainstream parties occupying the political centre. Having studied the congruence within each EU parliament party groups (or families), we will be able to outline their coherency in a comparative manner.

Financial Report

Travel	500 EURO
Subsistence (hotel/meals)	800 EURO

TOTAL   **1300 EURO**

André Krouwel

Signature, Date