



GRAAT On-Line issue #16 - February 2015

**Finding Europe but Losing its Coherence and Purpose: The Rise and Fall of the British National Party, 2009-2014**

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***Introduction***

Against the backdrop of economic recession a growing number of *en vogue* far-right nationalist/populist parties with charismatic leaders including Gert Wilders' Freedom and Anti-immigration Party in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen's *Front National* in France and Gregor Vona's *Jobbik* in Hungary have emerged to question not only the direction and scope of the European Union and its very legitimacy, but are demanding an exit from the EU (BBC, 2013). Actual circumstances and background conditions favouring the rise of such far-right parties vary from state to state, but their existence owes much to the feelings of alienation and uncertainty held by elements of modern society in times of economic difficulty, concerns about continued immigration and growing distrust of the European Union. In the United Kingdom the British National Party under the leadership of Nick Griffin (1999-present) secured its best ever results at the 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections, capturing two seats and 6.5 per cent of the vote. Its success lies in the fact that this was the first occasion when a British far-right party secured seats beyond the local level. Representation in the EP provided the party not only with a potential base from which to build and develop but with a greater degree of legitimacy and semi-respectability.<sup>1</sup>

The narrative of the BNP's rise from 2000 must be seen and analysed as part of a wider European phenomenon where far-right populist parties are emerging as one of the most

striking features of contemporary politics.<sup>2</sup> However, whereas some of these parties continued to develop and polled well at the 2014 EP elections, the BNP vote collapsed and once again pushed it onto the fringes of the political system. Also, the BNP has been supplanted by the populist presence of UKIP. This paper seeks to understand why the euphoria and optimism of June 2009 quickly dissipated as the party edged ever closer to “irrelevance”.<sup>3</sup> It seeks to show how the BNP leadership—and leadership is an all-important factor in far-right circles—squandered the best opportunities for growth since 1945. In focusing on the BNP, this particular paper builds on a growing literature on the party (Copsey, 2008; Copsey and Macklin, 2011) but now adds a new and innovative angle by exploring the BNP’s attitudes and relationship with the European Union.

At the outset, questions about the BNP’s European policy and engagement with the EU might seem somewhat curious. Indeed, the BNP has never concealed its opposition towards all aspects of European integration. This reality finds illustration as a recurring theme in BNP rhetoric and party documentation, which regularly lambasts the pervasive EU creep and reiterates the established myth that some 75% of all UK laws were made by the EU.<sup>4</sup> Criticism is specifically targeted towards the European Commission, the overpaid and absentee MEPs and increasingly the member state governments who are labelled as “collaborating agents” with Brussels. The BNP’s 2010 Westminster election manifesto provided perfect illustration when it reiterated the party’s demand for the UK’s immediate withdrawal from the “European dictatorship” and “Orwellian superstate” (BNP, 2010). In its place the BNP aims to secure “greater national self-sufficiency and looked to restore Britain’s family and trading ties with the Commonwealth nations of Australia, Canada and New Zealand” (<http://www.bnp.org.uk/policies/foreign-affairs> accessed 21 Feb 2011).

The BNP’s opposition towards the EU seems relatively clear, but the picture is considerably more complex than such rhetoric suggests and this paper makes the case for a re-examination of the BNP’s policy on Europe. There is an interesting paradox at play here for while the BNP and other far-right parties may publicly denounce the EU construct, it is this same EU and especially the European Parliament that have propelled far-right parties onto the European political stage from which to expand their visions of a European utopia. It has

also given them the means to pursue pan-European cooperation. In short, the EU has sustained the life of many of these parties.

The idea of a pan-European alliance has been a theme in the UK context since the late 1940s. Oswald Mosley, the former leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) devoted much of his time after his release from prison after the Second World War advocating plans for a new European wide movement.<sup>5</sup> Mosley's own dreams of "European socialism" and a pan-European movement may not have been shared by many of his peers but this did not deter his attempts to establish "Europe a nation". His ultimate objective was the realisation of a common European government for the "purposes of foreign policy, defence, economic policy, finance and scientific development". This interpretation provided an alternative vision to the now familiar process of European integration and very much saw Europe as a third great global power alongside the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Mosley envisaged a clear division of responsibilities between a European government that included a directly elected European parliament (by universal suffrage every four years) and the national parliaments. A conference in Venice in March 1962 marked the zenith of Mosley's European ambitions but he was to be disappointed by the lack of any real substantive outcome. None of the European parties that attended (and not all did) opted to change the names of their respective parties to the National Party of Europe as Mosley had advocated and agreement was only secured on establishing a permanent European liaison office (Thurlow, 1998: 217) as a means of facilitating closer links.<sup>6</sup> Interparty rivalries, individual jealousies over who should be the "leader" of the far-right family, varying party fortunes and limited financial resources prevented the emergence of any meaningful European group in the following decades. There has always been a great deal of ambiguity about the actual depth of links between far-right movements but they have never been as co-ordinated nor as strong as some commentators (*i.e.* usually antifascist groups and freelance journalists) claimed when they wrote misguidedly of "brown networks" (Mudde, 2007: 158). Most established links from the 1960s until the 1980s, however, were far more low-key in nature and simply constituted individual connections with like-minded individuals from other parties, although most of these would have been sanctioned by the party leadership. Such links usually culminated in

individuals attending the conferences of similar groups and giving invited keynote speeches and talks but these were the limits of co-operation.

There is much about Europe that unites the far right. That is to say the far right regularly embraces the concept of European civilisation and shared European values, which it seeks increasingly to protect from Islamic influence and continued immigration. Parties such as the French FN are clear that they “are first and foremost Europeans” and seek to create a “European sentiment” and a European patriotism to defend European values from external threats. Europe forms part of an almost mythical vision of Europe among many sections of the far right. Such visions have expressed support for a “Europe of the Fatherlands” rather than any notion of a “United States of Europe”. Attitudes towards European integration are shared and have changed from a more open-minded approach that prevailed until late 1980s (Mudde, 2007) to one that is now generally hostile towards the European Union construct, its institutions and its policies. The decisive factor in the change of position and the adoption of a much more belligerent anti-EU tone is often placed on the impact and contents of the Maastricht Treaty (Treaty on European Union) of 1993 and their misreading of it. It should be noted that the anti-EU element, however, is not universal and has been largely missing from the Italian far right. Indeed Umberto Bossi, the leader of the *Lega Nord*, criticised the Treaty on European Union on the grounds that it did not grant enough powers to the EP. Ironically it is these EU institutions and especially the European Parliament that have not only propelled many far-right parties onto the political stage but provided them with greater legitimacy as political forces and the EP has offered a base not only for such parties to develop closer links with each other but also secure much needed financial support.

Fifty years later the European issue has taken on increasing significance within far-right circles as far-right parties have made renewed efforts with varying success to build pan-European alliances. This paper explores the BNP’s European policy. At the outset the paper recognises the benefits that EP membership brought to the BNP, but it also identifies a series of significant and unfamiliar challenges for the two new MEPs in terms of workload, attendance at EP plenaries, involvement with EP committees, acceptance from their fellow MEPs, securing greater cooperation with like-minded travellers on the far right and most importantly, maintaining a good working relationship between the 2 BNP MEPs over the

course of the parliament. The paper is divided into five subsequent sections that consider these challenges. It looks at the rise of the BNP; the issue of Europe for the far right; the role of the far right in the European Parliament, 1979-2009; the BNP in the EP and the BNP's attempt to create a new European far-right organisation and concludes by investigating the BNP's implosion.

### *The Origins of the British National Party*

The fortunes of the far right in Western Europe after 1945 have been well covered in an ever expanding literature in a variety of single country and comparative studies (Cheles, Ferguson and Vaughan, 1995; Hainsworth, 2008; Ignazi, 2003; Minkenberg, 2002; Mudde, 2000; Mudde, 2007; Von Beyme, 1988) that seek to understand the origins, party histories, ideology, attraction and social composition of such groups. In continental Europe the far right has emerged as an omnipresent political reality from the 1980s onwards as in France with the FN and in Belgium with the *Vlams Blok/Belang*. In other states such as Germany the history of the far right has been characterised by peaks and troughs where small "failed" (Art, 2011) parties have often emerged fleetingly and temporarily threatened to destabilise individual political systems before falling away again (McGowan, 2002; Backes, 2006). Some parties have even managed to enter government as junior coalition partners as with the FPO in Austria and the *Lega Nord* (LN) in Italy (Betz, 2002).

The story of the British far right is a complicated one where a substantial narrative already exists. Generally the British variant has never been able to replicate the successes of their European peers and this has given rise to the "British exceptionalism" thesis (Eatwell, 2000: 172-192). That is not to say that the UK has been immune from the far right. On the contrary, far-right groups can be traced from the late 1940s to the present day (Eatwell, 2004). Until very recently, the story of the British far right for the most part has been one of disappointment and dismal electoral failures. All attempts to revive Mosleyism after 1945 failed and other efforts to reinvigorate the far right in the form of the League of Empire Loyalists, the National Labour Party and the Great Britain movement all came to nothing. The National Front temporarily emerged as a potential vehicle in the mid-1970s, but its impact was limited and it quickly withered. In short, groups have emerged, disbanded and disappeared, reformed and regularly merged with one another. Trying to understand why

the far right has been significantly less successful than its European counterparts necessitates discussions of poor leadership, the strength of the anti-fascist tradition (with fascism itself being deemed a continental European creation – Thatcher, 2003), ongoing internal rivalry within the far right and of course, the particular difficulties confronting any small parties given the peculiarities of the first past the post system. Indeed, proportional systems have worked in favour of the extreme right.

The impact of the far right on the British parliamentary system has been largely negligible but their significance has often lain outside Westminster and especially in local and communal politics where they have a track record of fostering resentment and stoking intolerance towards sections of society. The British National Party is an apt case in point. Established in 1982 by John Tyndall, the BNP (and incidentally the third party to brand itself as such) represents the most successful and longest lasting force on the British far right. For almost two decades, however, the BNP languished on the very fringes of the British political system and despite the odd success (as in the 1993 local elections in Barking) failed to come anywhere close to replicating the surges in support for its brother parties in continental Europe. The BNP's fortunes only began to change after Nick Griffin, a party activist since the mid-1980s, led a successful leadership coup that replaced Tyndall as in October 1999. Griffin's leadership represented a generational change and his style and abilities could not have been much more different than Tyndall's. Griffin's own career path in far-right politics had begun in the late 1980s after his graduation from Cambridge. As leader he was determined to make the BNP much more media savvy, marketable. To that end Griffin steered the BNP away from the old style street confrontations and marches, sought to tone down considerably the anti-Semitic focus that had been particularly pronounced under Tyndall and called for voluntary repatriation and placed emphasis on local community politics.

With hindsight, Griffin's early leadership had provided a new momentum for the BNP following his "crash course in neo-populism" (Griffin, 2011: 197). The BNP machine started to make inroads at the turn of the century as it fielded more candidates, won more votes and retained ever more deposits.<sup>7</sup> In the 2001 UK general election the BNP fielded candidates in 33 constituencies and most notably polled 16.4% of the vote in Oldham West and Royton and had a strong performance in Burnley. It followed this with improved results in the North

West at the local elections in 2002 and 2003 (Blackburn, Calderdale). In spite of efforts to establish itself across the UK, its best results were, however, very much localised (Bottom and Copus, 2011) in certain areas primarily around East London, the North West of England, the West Midlands and increasingly Yorkshire. However, better electoral performances did not translate into seats at the European or national levels. At the 2004 EP elections, for example, the BNP raised its share of the vote from 1 per cent in 1999 to 4.9 per cent (808,201 votes). It polled better in the UK General Elections of 2005 and 2010 (where it stood in 119 and 330 constituencies respectively) and increased its share of the vote from 0.7% to 1.9% but representation in parliament simply eluded the party.

The party won 9.8% of the vote in the 2008 local elections and by May 2010 the BNP held one seat in the Greater London Assembly (with 5.2% of the vote), 56 council seats across England and representation on some twenty-five councils. Such improved results may have suggested that it was time for a reassessment of British “exceptionalism”, but in reality, the party’s fortunes had already peaked. The early promising advances soon stalled as the party came under increased media scrutiny over how it was organised and run. It became steeped in almost constant controversy over its involvement, for example, in court cases on alleged racial hatred and its views on immigration. The darker and anti-democratic side of the BNP was publicised in revelations following the party’s infiltration by a *Guardian* journalist, Ian Cobain, which further damaged the party’s acceptability. Court cases for alleged incitement to racial hatred, public furore over Griffin’s participation in the *BBC*’s Question Time programme, the request from the British Royal Legion to Griffin to stop wearing their poppy symbol and the withdrawing of Griffin’s invitation to the Buckingham Palace tea party also raised issues about Griffin’s abilities and tactical judgement. All these factors damaged the BNP. In fact by May 2010 it seemed that the upward trajectory appeared to be going into reverse with Griffin’s failure to take the Barking constituency – by a considerable margin (some 16,000 votes) in the May 2010 general election – and the loss of all its 12 Council seats in Barking and Dagenham in the simultaneous council elections.

The “modernisation” drive that aimed to purge all traces of neo-Nazism was purely to avoid electoral ruin but this switch in emphasis always had its detractors and they became increasingly critical about Griffin’s style as the decade progressed and the breakthrough

failed to materialise. Opposition even led to a breakaway movement called the “Real BNP” in December 2007. It is tempting to speculate how much more of an in-road the BNP might have actually made in British electoral politics, had it not been for the growth of the United Kingdom Independence Party especially when under the leadership of Nigel Farage. This strongly Eurosceptic party campaigned primarily for the UK’s exit from the EU and as a populist party attracted voters from all walks of life, but for many was a much more acceptable form of protest than the BNP. The arrival of the English Defence League (EDL) in 2009 who deliberately staged the very same style marches and demonstrations that Griffin’s BNP had left behind further alienated hard-core BNP members. In short, the BNP found itself being caught in a vice between UKIP and the EDL and as the early promises of a meaningful electoral breakthrough under Griffin’s leadership began to dissipate, so tensions within the party intensified and came to a head in the autumn of 2011.

It is against this backdrop that the BNP’s performance at the 2009 EP elections needs to be understood. The strategic decision to contest the EP elections for the first time in 1999 had been taken as an opportunity to raise the party’s profile and potentially as a source of funding. It was a case of third time lucky for the party as in the two previous contests the BNP had only secured 1.13% and 4.9% of the vote in 1999 and 2004 respectively and had not won any seats. The 2009 result seemed to offer a potential springboard from which to revitalise the party at home and to dampen lingering criticism of Griffin’s leadership. There was certainly a potential reservoir of support (YouGov) for the anti-EU and anti-immigration message. But could such support be sustained? Did the 2009 EP result represent a real breakthrough for the BNP or was it a blip and the high watermark of BNP fortunes?<sup>8</sup> The EP success took the BNP into new territory and much effort was going to be exerted by Griffin and Brons to ensure it could be seen to be working in Europe, alongside other MEPs and building a network of ultra-nationalists. Griffin needed to find purpose in the EP and was being observed by party colleagues. Europe simply had to deliver and Griffin had five years to affirm his strategy of EU engagement and immediately set about creating links.



### *Defining the Far Right's Approach to Europe*

Exploring degrees of co-operation among the far right necessitates discussions of not only how such parties in Europe are tied together in terms of formal and informal party links but also consideration of commonalities in terms of ideology, approach, method and categorisation. There is no universal definition on what constitutes the far right among a “thesaurus-like” proliferation of terms and typologies (Eatwell, 2000: 410). That said, the overwhelming majority of academic works today refer to the extreme right but it is somewhat of a rather “slippery” term (Hainsworth, 2008: 8). Minkenberg (Minkenberg, 2009) in contrast deploys the term radical right to capture those movements which espouse an ultra-nationalistic ideology and oppose liberal democracy. In order to understand what he deems a growing trend across Europe, Minkenberg helpfully argues that it is best to categorise the players according to their organisations on the one hand and their ideology on the other. In other words, it is necessary to make distinctions between political parties, movements and the sub-cultural scene and as regards ideology to categorise different forms of the far right, that is to say the extreme right, the populist right, the ethnopluralist right and the religious fundamentalist right.

Existing contributions on the study of the far right (Mudde, 2000; Mudde, 2007; Ignazi, 1992; Kitschelt, 1997) have sought to categorise such parties to distil core characteristics by exploring party ideology, party programmes and speeches. These usually include a strong nationalist message, which usually incorporates an exclusionist element that often surfaces in ethnopluralist, racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric. As well as holding strong xenophobic tendencies, groups such as the FN and the VB also express a belief in the need for a strong state, espouse anti-democratic credentials and place an increasing emphasis on welfare issues where they resent immigrants being given housing, jobs and money. Immigration has emerged as the one constant theme among all far-right groups although it does surface in different guises as part of either a race-centred ideology or as part of a broader populist critique on the very structure and priorities of the governing elite. Many far-right parties project themselves as “outsider” or “anti-establishment” forces who are determined to defend and protect the lives and rights of the average citizen. Some parties openly display a revisionist agenda (such as *Jobbik*) especially in relation to borders whereas others clearly hold

more positive attitudes towards fascism and National Socialism while often incorporating elements of racism as part of the party's core beliefs (Carter, 2005). Newer works have sought to introduce new labels such as "New Radical Right" to apply to those parties that espouse racist and authoritarian values while others concentrate on newer debates surrounding party attitudes towards economic policy and how far low tax and pro-market policies are signs of a modern far-right ideology (Kitschelt, 1997). Some far-right parties are considerably more opportunistic in their approach and demonstrate considerable flexibility when it comes to softening their approach in the hope of entering government as in the case of the Austrian Freedom Party and the Italian *Lega Nord*.

Europe is one theme that resonates amongst all right-wing extremist parties. Most express support for a "Europe of the Fatherlands" or a looser confederation of European states and commonly reject their country's membership of the EU.<sup>9</sup> This, however, has not always been the case. The decisive moment when attitudes really hardened towards the EU centre was when the 1993 Maastricht Treaty came into force (Mudde, 2007) but even here some caution is required because the anti-EU element is not universal. Umberto Bossi, the leader of the *Lega Nord*, criticised the Treaty on European Union on the grounds that it did not grant enough powers to the EP. Some authors have ambitiously attempted to provide a more nuanced analysis on this issue by seeking to categorise these parties, for example, as euro-enthusiasts, euro-pragmatists, euro-rejects and Eurosceptics. This makes for fascinating reading but it might be queried just how much value these headings provide especially as positions are particularly time sensitive. Most of the general literature on the far right places these parties in the Eurosceptic/Euroreject camp, but should many more actually be classified as Europragmatists?

Indeed, beyond the rhetoric and denunciation of the EU-Europe there have been regular echoes of Mosley's original aims about the need for European cooperation. For example, even the FN 1993 party manifesto called for "a coherent political project" that should comprise foreign and defence policy, common immigration controls, a common currency and a common European border agency.<sup>10</sup> Most far-right parties now recognise the importance of the EU as a political arena. The European issue is far from being as divisive as it might initially seem. That is to say the far right regularly embraces as a starting point the

concept of European civilisation and shared European values which it seeks increasingly to protect from Islamic influence and continued immigration.<sup>11</sup>

By its own actions, aspirations and agenda the BNP constitutes a right-wing extremist force although the party rejects all such suggestions (Griffin on Murnaghan, 27 May 2009) and seeks to portray itself as a traditional conservative force (BNP, EP election broadcast, 4 June 2009) and a defender of British values and traditions. The party has even taken to providing constant references to the Second World War by using clips of the 1940 Battle of Britain, citing Winston Churchill as a key role model and portraying the EU as the evil Nazi inspired totalitarian European superstate (Griffin on Murnaghan, 27 May 2009). Questions must surround the genuine nature of the party's modernisation efforts, which have been more about enhancing its electability than any real change in policy positions. Griffin has not been trying to change the core of party ideology and convictions but merely enabling a "recalibration of fascism" (Copsey, 2007).<sup>12</sup> As such the BNP continues to house anti-democratic sentiment, remains an anti-system party and possesses an ideology that is incompatible with a liberal democratic political system (Copsey, 2004). icib

The BNP's vision of nationalism assumes an exclusionary form in that it does not include all British citizens. So many of the television appearances and media interviews have all too often centred on how the BNP defines Britishness, issues of race and immigration. The BNP has clearly moved away from its more racist overtones of the early 1990s and under Griffin has espoused "ethno-nationalism" that expresses concern for the well-being of the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish nations within the UK. Interestingly, the BNP was the only British party to field candidates in the local and Council elections that were contested in many parts of the United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) in May 2011.

The party still possesses xenophobic and increasingly Islamophobic tendencies and strongly objects to the UK giving foreign aid to states in the developing world. It rallies against globalisation, urges economic protectionism, calls for the UK's withdrawal from the EU and strongly opposes Turkish accession to the EU. It purports to be the "only true Green party" (BNP, 2010: 24) and espouses support for Britain's green belt which can be protected by ending immigration. The BNP fits Kitschelt's categorisation as evoking both "racist

authoritarian” and “welfare chauvinist” positions. It is not alone in this regard as we can uncover similar parties across the EU. However, the overtly nationalist stance adopted by these far-right parties raises another interesting question about the extent to which they can work easily with others to advance their own interests when rivalries persist and disputes continue to fester over borders and minorities.

### *The Far Right in the European Parliament*

Far-right and overtly nationalistic parties may seem the least interested in and least suited to transnational co-operation. Indeed, despite the staunch opposition towards European integration from many far-right parties, it is ironically the EU that has provided the best vehicle to foster greater cooperation among the far-right family. The European Parliament has offered the most accessible opportunities not only to build a European wide visibility but also secure funding for further activities. Consequently, many such parties have made a strategic decision to contest EP elections. On reflection, progress to date has been limited and this owes much to the fluidity of the situation as national parties have come and gone and the weakness of the European party system. Both have hindered any lasting stability, but there have been other factors at play, notably ongoing rivalry, inter-personal disputes and a number of strategic miscalculations. That said, the far right has been represented in all the directly elected EPs since 1979, beginning with four MEPs from the Italian Social Movement (MSI). However, the far-right family has only managed to constitute an EP party group on three occasions and only one of these groups, the “Group of the European Right” proved cohesive enough to endure the life of an entire parliament (1984-9). A successor “Technical Group of the European Right” was established in 1989 with 19 MEPs but it proved very short-lived and internal tensions between the newly elected West German *Republikaner* and the Italian *Alleanza Nazionale*/MSI and especially over the issues of the South Tyrol and immigration (Fennemann Pullam, 1998; Stoess 2001; Veen, 1997) led the Italian group to abandon the party group. Tensions between group members quickly surfaced once again over the role of regionalism between the FN members and the sole MEP from the Belgian *Vlaams Blok* and led to practical demise of the Technical Group by 1991. These tensions and rivalries should not be underplayed and impacted on coordination. Indeed,

despite securing enough mandates to form a party group in the 1994 EP elections, divisions were all too apparent when the Italian National Alliance's (which embraced the MSI and other smaller forces) 11 MEPs refused to cooperate with the 11 FN MEPs, the 6 *Lega Nord* MEPs and the one two Belgian MEPs from the *Vlams Blok* and one from the FNb. Interestingly most of the non-attached members of the 1994-9 EP "were members of the far-right family" (Lord, 1998: 130). Divisions and bitterness between the groups made cooperation difficult, but internal party rivalries also damaged the national parties, most notably a split in the FN in 1999. In short, persistent animosity and divisions among the far right prevailed, prevented any further re-alignment and ensured that the far-right family remained divided and homeless after the 1994, 1999 and 2004 EP elections:

**Table 1: The history of a far-right transnational group in the European Parliament**

Year	A European Parliament Group Formed	Reasons
1979	No	insufficient number of MEPs
1984	Yes - lasted duration	
1989	Yes - but collapsed by 1991	The group collapsed owing to disagreements between the Italian and German far-right MEPs
1994	No	insufficient number of MEPs
1999	No	insufficient number of MEPs
2004	Yes - in January 2007 but collapsed in November 2007	Following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU in January 2007, the far right was able to create an EP party group. However, this group had collapsed by November 2007 following tensions between the Italian and Romanian far-right MEPs
2009	No - insufficient number of MEPs	
2014	No - insufficient number of MEPs	

The arrival of Bulgaria and Romania as new EU Member States in January 2007 provided a glimmer of possibilities for greater far-right cohesiveness. The combination of 6 MEPs from the Greater Romania Party and 3 MEPs from the Bulgarian National Union Attack enabled the then existing 13 far-right MEPs – spearheaded once again by the FN – to establish the Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS) group under the chairmanship of Bruno Gollnisch, a FN stalwart, by the end of January 2007. Immediate opposition to the group’s existence within the EP from other party groups prevented the ITS members from assuming the roles of chairs or vice chairs of the EP’s committees (culture and transport, respectively). However, even amongst themselves, group solidarity proved difficult and the ITS dissolved in November 2007 when four of the Romanian MEPs left the group following tensions with Alessandra Mussolini over her comments on Romanian criminals.<sup>13</sup> The EP has provided a platform for the far right in Europe but these same parties have found it difficult time and time again to anchor themselves securely. The election of members from the BNP and *Jobbik* (alongside a smaller FN cohort) to the successor EP in June 2009 offered some renewed hope that the far right could be reactivated as a more vibrant entity, but the task was going to be problematic.<sup>14</sup>

Arguably the task of constructing a transnational party group comprising the far right is always going to prove somewhat problematic given the overtly nationalist beliefs and views of the parties involved. Past efforts at facilitating greater cooperation have proven fraught and when agreed, have been short-lived. The case of EURONAT (the European National Union – Nationalists of all Countries Unite) offers an apt example of the far right’s inability to create a meaningful alliance. This effort to both establish and steer a pan-European association of populist radical right parties was led by the FN in 1997 but was effectively moribund from its creation. In 2005 the FPO took the initiative and organised an international meeting of fellow popular radical forces in Vienna. Initial developments were encouraging as agreement was quickly reached on establishing a contact forum/office for European patriotic and national parties and movements and on an 8 Point Programme. This “manifesto” espoused the establishment of a European confederation of free and independent nations that would protect Europe from terrorism and growing waves of Islamism as well as

demanding an immediate stop to further immigration. It also advocated a pro-family policy that envisaged Europeans being encouraged to have more children. Common themes may have brought the parties closer but very little actually emerged in the way of follow-on events to add substance to the rhetoric. Thus, in retrospect, the prospects of establishing a new far-right pan-European group following the successes of the BNP and the FN at the EP elections in 2009 were not good.

### *Strategic Engagement: the BNP in the European Parliament*

Having spent the previous two decades attacking the workings and institutions of the European Union, the election of the two BNP candidates to the EP in 2009 posed a number of questions about the degree to which the party would now involve itself in the routine activities such as attending plenaries, becoming members of EP committees and participating in fact-finding groups?

The European question or rather the anti-EU question had surfaced as a core aspect of BNP party policy, especially its critique of unelected officials and its own state centred vision of a “Europe for the Europeans”. The BNP has strategically invested in the EP arena as a means of enhancing its profile, securing funds and building links but to reap such potential benefits it needed to become a proactive force. In seeking to make an impact, Brons and Griffin opted to engage from the moment of their arrival in the EP in mid July 2009 with all aspects of the EP life cycle. Neither man had ever contemplated the abstentionist route. Both acknowledged the challenges and the steep learning curve ahead in terms of logistics, planning and presentation and expressed determination to find the best ways to maximise their influence<sup>15</sup> (BNP, 2011).

Once in the EP, BNP European policy was encapsulated into four immediate and more medium term objectives. Firstly, Griffin sought to distance the BNP from the other “Europhile” and “out of touch” British MEPs, to present the party as the only British force that truly recognised the “threat of Europe” and to resist all moves towards a “fascist European superstate” (Griffin on Andrew Marr Show, 12 July 2009). Secondly, Griffin pledged to immediately place BNP researchers in the EP’s library to uncover the truths about European integration and to show the way in which the British political elite have spent the

last fifty years damaging the economic and industrial bases of the UK and handing power to unelected bureaucrats. Thirdly, Griffin was also keen to identify the potential opportunity structures within the EP and finally, he aimed to establish closer links with other like-minded anti-EU and anti-immigration parties across the EU.

However, there were limits to what two MEPs could do. There were a number of issues, both external and internal, that came to shape BNP activities and its longer term fortunes in Europe after 2009. The external issues centred on how best to engage within the EP with other MEPs while the internal challenges centred on growing opposition within the party to Griffin's leadership and ultimately Brons's defection to a new party, the British Democratic Party in 2012. Let us consider both challenges. Any hopes of founding a new far-right party group with the EP were dashed following the poor performance of the far right in many other European states. With the arithmetic against them the two BNP MEPs had no other choice but to sit alongside the other 28 non-attached (*non-inscrits*) members. These 28 MEPs can be divided into two main sections: in the first sit the 16 ultra-nationalists (including FN (3), *Jobbik* (3), the Austrian Freedom Party (2), Flemish interest (2), the Bulgarian National Union Attack (2), the Greater Romanian Party (2) and the BNP's two members). The other 12 non-attached come from a diverse mix of regional and national based parties including UKIP(1), a former member of UKIP and one member from Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (1). Without a party group the BNP was at a disadvantage from the outset.

Both BNP MEPs had to adjust quickly to the workings and workload of the EP experience. Brons readily admitted to finding the job both demanding and tiring, described life very much like "a rollercoaster" of meetings, plenary sessions, mountains of mail, emails, attending committees and preparing short speeches (usually one minute under EP rules). In terms of participation both men spent the first two years acclimatising and regularly attended plenaries in Strasbourg as well as mini-plenaries and committee meetings in Brussels. They engaged in debates and used the opportunities to fight for the UK and resist various "wicked" pieces of legislation that Griffin identified as either power grabs or unwarranted interference by the Commission on issues ranging from the security of gas supplies to new rules on the internal market, e-commerce and biodiversity. He was able to pursue BNP priorities such as migration and his own growing interest in the composition of the



Commission, the criteria for becoming a director general in the Commission, sought clarification on how many Commission officials had once been members of Marxist parties across Europe.<sup>16</sup> Griffin made 28 speeches during this period which focused on climate change, energy security and nuclear safety. Griffin's interest in these themes led (rather surprisingly) to his participation in the EP delegation to the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Brons, likewise, engaged from the outset. In the period from July 2009 until June 2011, he tabled some 35 questions on issues ranging from the cost of Turkish membership to asylum policy and from the European arrest warrant to the working time directive. He showed interest in the European Commissioners past and present and Commission expenditure. Brons took part in some 81 debates within the EP, covering issues such as fisheries and agriculture, the state of EU/US transatlantic relations and the situation in Iran, Yemen and Afghanistan.

The selection of EP committee membership was always going to be driven by strategic needs as much as by personal choice alone. Both Brons and Griffin appreciated the need to select high-profile committees where they could more readily make their presence felt. Of the twenty potential committees, Brons opted to become a member of the Constitutional Affairs committee. The selection of this committee and its focus on further treaty reform, issues of governance and in particular the creation of new institutions made this committee choice a pertinent one. Moreover, his decision to become a substitute member of the Civil Liberties and JHA committee reflected the BNP's concerns with immigration and provided a venue for the BNP to oppose the possibility of Turkish accession or any other deal that allows Turkish citizens the right of entry into the EU. Brons has long been a staunch critic of liberal immigration laws and maintains that immigration from the developing world must be curtailed on the grounds that it actually damages such third states because it removes educated and trained professional (e.g. doctors) from the employment pool. Griffin selected one of the EP's most widely recognised committees when he chose to sit on the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety which allowed him to present the party as an environmentally conscious force.

Of course, successful BNP engagement was also dependent on how other parties reacted to the party. Not all parties have been willing to work with the BNP and some are not even prepared to sit next to the BNP.<sup>17</sup> Although many MEPs find the presence of their far-right peers in the EP as problematic, most demonstrate a pragmatism that sees them tolerate rather than openly shun both Brons and Griffin. Indeed, many MEPs remain concerned about the hold of right-wing extremist parties across Europe. The Socialist Group within the EP, in particular, has advocated a co-ordinated response across Europe against the spread of xenophobic and anti-Semitic parties (Schulz, 2009) but has also called for these parties to come under much closer scrutiny. With such critics pouring over far-right activities, the BNP can find itself receiving unwanted attention on such sensitive areas such as party expenses when the party remains desperately short of resources following a series of recent court cases including the Marmite debacle.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, both Brons and Griffin have been deemed once again to have provided insufficient information on their expenses (up to £500,000) and this comes on top of questions that have surrounded BNP income over the last decade.

Griffin greeted the onset of the financial crisis as clear evidence of the failings of the political and economic order. He welcomed the crisis that surrounded the single currency, stating that:

The euro, in particular, is unlikely to survive. While we'll of course be delighted to see such a hammer blow to the undemocratic Europhile project, that doesn't alter the fact that its death-throws will cause all sorts of damage in the real economy as well as the world of high finance. (BNP: Deadline 2014).

For Griffin the plan to "create and impose the EU superstate is so far advanced" that it needed a European wide movement to dismantle it and he cited examples of the necessity for mass mobilisation as had occurred during the 1848 revolutions and the 1917 Russian revolution. All these positive signs of engagement with the EU arena came at a price and in retrospect, a very high cost for the BNP. Put simply, the more time that was spent in Brussels, the less time Griffin had to devote to the BNP grass roots at home. His personality and style of leadership had already been arousing resentment prior to 2009 over his choice of favourites, but this was only further exacerbated in what some held as an "absentee" leader.

Griffin needed to identify BNP successes in Europe, and one clear objective was closer attachment with other nationalist forces.

### *Building a New Pan-European Far Right: the Alliance of European National Movements*

The task of building more structured co-operation among far-right groups had not become any easier and initiative after initiative simply floundered. More recent examples have included the FN orchestrated EURONAT (the European National Union – Nationalists of all Countries Unite) and the FPO's effort from 2005 to foster a pan-European association of populist radical right. Despite an initial media splash these initiatives failed.<sup>19</sup> Trying to create, develop and give meaning to any new working relationships with like-minded “patriotic parties who were devoted to preserving European civilization” (Griffin) was always to be nothing less than difficult. Brons had long been an advocate of closer links, but even if established, the challenge was to sustain them. The BNP's first serious forays took place in 2008 when the BNP leadership held their first meetings with *Jobbik* to discuss possible cooperation. This led to further contacts throughout 2009 and paved the way to establishing another new pan-European far-right association, but had circumstances changed in any significant way – in terms of timing and interparty solidarity and vision – to expect anything substantial to emerge?

As a vehicle the “Alliance of European Nationalist Movements” appeared to have potential. It was established on 24th October 2009 at the *Jobbik* party conference in Budapest. Its original members included (alongside *Jobbik*), the French FN, the *Flamma Tricolore* (from Italy), the National Democrats (from Sweden) and the National Front (from Belgium). All five parties strongly supported this European initiative whose objectives, outlined in the Budapest Declaration of 20 January 2010, echoed the now familiar slogans including the aspiration for the creation of a “confederation of sovereign nation states” that retained the power to take their own decisions; the rejection of a EU superstate; a strong conviction in the importance of Europe's diversity and its languages; the introduction of pro-family policies; the identification of the threats posed by Islamic inspired terrorism and the search for a solution to the immigration issue. Griffin had sympathised strongly with these developments and formally committed the BNP to the AENM on 12th November 2009. For Griffin the AENM was a

vehicle for alerting the public to the dangers posed by mass immigration, globalisation and the European superstate (London Patriot, 2011).

The idea of forging an effective pan-European group presented its own challenges and none more so than being able to secure support from all or many like-minded parties across Europe. The agreement of the MEPs from the BNP, the FN and *Jobbik* to commit to working together and to sit informally under the AENM banner in the EP was a first step forward, but there were difficulties. Firstly, other non-attached nationalist MEPs from the Austrian Freedom Party (2), the Flemish *Vlams Belang* (formerly *Blok with 2*) and the Greater Romania Party (3) declined all overtures of any potential AENM involvement. This left the remaining 8 MEPs (from the BNP, the FN and *Jobbik*) falling far short of the number of MEPs required (then 25 from seven member states) to qualify for party group status. The AENM was largely doomed as a force within the EP from its inception but was duly recognised as a grouping (but not an EP group) and managed to secure some £300,000 in 2012.

However, beyond a much publicised launch event and its first ever annual AENM conference in Strasbourg in June 2010, the AENM never really materialised as an effective force and longstanding rivalries and perceptions within the far right not only prevented any meaningful coordination, but accentuated divisions among the group's members. Marine Le Pen's decision to pull the FN out of the AENM (under her leadership of the FN from January 2012), as an attempt to distance her party from the more extreme and racist elements of the BNP and *Jobbik* in favour of closer ties with the Dutch ultra-nationalists of Gert Wilders, effectively marked the end of the AENM and yet another abortive experiment from the far right. Griffin, as an original architect of the AENM, was left searching for new partners and aligned himself with the more extremist and racist forces of *Jobbik* and Golden Dawn. In doing so, he was reinforcing the extremist nature of the BNP which drew even more criticism and reduced his stock at home.

### ***Conclusions: The Road to Oblivion in 2014?***

The BNP's breakthrough at the 2009 EP elections offered a new platform from which to establish its credentials as a credible force as well as securing much needed revenue sources. Representation in the EP was undoubtedly a bonus for the BNP, but the party's engagement

at this level has been a double edged sword for it brought challenges as well as opportunities. The decision to actually take their seats arguably damaged the BNP brand as it ushered in a degree of absentee leadership within the UK. In pursuing EU engagement, the BNP leadership also lost touch with its base and fuelled resentment as Griffin came to be seen as simply seeking to feather his own bed and look after his own interests rather than caring about the BNP's future. Any suggestions that the party could use the EP as a means to anchor itself as a political force within the UK after 2009 were, in retrospect, totally misguided. The EP results from 2009 did not so much mark a turning point in BNP fortunes but rather proved to be the high water mark for the party.

On reflection, signs of the BNP's transitory nature (and ultimate demise) were arguably all apparent at the EP election result night in 2009, because the BNP should have won more than two seats. Predictions during the campaign had been as high as 6 seats. To explain the failure to make a more decisive breakthrough, its inability to maintain this level of support and ultimately, the reversal in BNP party fortunes thereafter we need to understand both the Griffin and Farage factors. Internal rivalries and increasing hostility from rank and file BNP members towards Griffin and his style of leadership proved ever more damaging and became increasingly bitter as frustration grew against his appointment of advisors, his selection and de-selection of candidates, his readiness to bar party members whom he did not agree with from political meetings and his decisions to suspend party membership for minor indiscretions. Court cases for alleged incitement to racial hatred, public furore over Griffin's poor "amateur" performance on the *BBC's Question Time* programme (October 2009) where some thought "he had let them down", the request from the British Royal Legion to Griffin to stop wearing their poppy symbol and the withdrawing of Griffin's invitation to the Buckingham Palace tea party also raised issues about his abilities and tactical judgement.

Griffin's failure to make any breakthrough for the party at the 2010 UK General Election despite contesting over 300 seats, his own dismal performance in Barking, financial difficulties and a number of costly legal disputes (e.g. Marmite case) only added to further disquiet within party ranks and by early 2011 the BNP was fast dissolving into fratricidal warfare. These tensions precipitated a leadership challenge from Andrew Brons in the early summer of 2011. The leadership contest proved divisive and further soured relations between

the two men. Ultimately, Brons's candidacy fell short by just nine votes (from a total of 2,316 votes cast) of unseating Griffin but severely damaged the working relationship. Griffin's assertion that the BNP was over its "rocky patch" at its annual party conference in Liverpool in October 2011 was to prove widely optimistic and his decision to remain as leader until 2015 (when he had earlier promised to step down in 2013) only fuelled resentment and ultimately led Brons to walk away from the BNP in October 2012, leaving Griffin as not only a lone and isolated voice within the EP, but also within the far-right scene in British politics.<sup>20</sup> Griffin had become a polarising figure and a pariah and 2014 proved particularly damaging for his stature. He was declared bankrupt in January (*Herald Scotland*, 4 January 2014), became embroiled in another public relations mistake after he sought closer relations with the extremist Golden Dawn in Greece in February (*The Spectator*, 10 January 2014) and most damaging of all, lost his EP seat in May. One of Griffin's key aspirations as BNP leader had been to transform the BNP into a populist radical-right force, but his style of leadership, his proneness to gaffes, an inability to counter the appeal of both UKIP and the EDL and a hostile media always ready to identify Griffin's miscalculations led the BNP instead on the road to ruin. The steady rise of UKIP definitely hurt the BNP. In contrast to Griffin, Farage is a charismatic and media savvy leader who, not being associated with a darker racist past, presents a much more acceptable face to the public.

By the start of 2014 the party lay in tatters and it was clear by February 2014 that support for the party in the forthcoming EP elections had all but collapsed (*Guardian*, 11 February 2014) in favour of an ascendant UKIP. Griffin's task of maintaining media interest in the BNP became ever more difficult as the election drew closer. Undaunted, Griffin launched his party's manifesto "Out of the EU" in April 2014, which identified the EU as "the most arrogant, costly and unworkable empire in European history" and an entity that "costs British taxpayers some £55 million every day". The EU was denounced as a "dysfunctional bureaucratic tyranny" that was destined to collapse. Alongside its anti-EU rhetoric the manifesto pledged to ban the burka, which it labelled as "threatening and offensive". It called for an end to immigration and demanded that "British jobs should be given to British workers". The manifesto was highly critical of the EU's "shameful record on animal welfare" and promised to preserve "our Christian heritage" and protect Britain from "creeping

Islamisation". In short, the EU was being held responsible for many of the perceived woes facing modern Britain that related to trade policy, environmental policy, the state of the National Health Service (which was being misused by "health tourists" and the need to restore English law and monetary sovereignty). Aware of the growth of UKIP, Griffin went on the offensive against Nigel Farage's "plastic patriots" (*BBC News*, 21 May 2014) but the tide had clearly turned against the BNP and the UK media increasingly ignored Griffin and focused more on the rising force of UKIP and the seeming likelihood of a political earthquake with UKIP emerging as the largest British political party in the European Parliament.

The 2014 elections to the European Parliament saw UKIP's triumph and the first time since 1920 when neither the Conservative Party nor the Labour party had topped a national poll. With 23 seats (11 more than in 2009) in the EP, and the success of populist and Eurosceptic parties across Europe, it will be interesting to see how UKIP participates in the EP. In stark contrast to UKIP, the BNP was once again relegated to an also-ran and a footnote in the same EP elections. Nick Griffin not only lost his seat, but saw support for the party plummet. Nationally, the BNP's share of the vote fell to 1.14% (down over 5% from the 2009 figure). The scale of the BNP's defeat was even more evident with the collapse in Griffin's own support base as he polled just 1.87% or 32,000 of the votes cast (down some 6.13% since 2009) in the North West England region. Griffin's appearance at the count in Manchester city hall was greeted with the usual scuffles and name-calling and he had to be escorted into the building by the police. Griffin's running mate in the Yorkshire and Humber constituency, Marlene Guest, only managed to secure 1.55% or 20,000 of the voters and the party recorded an even greater slump in its support, losing over 8% since 2009.<sup>21</sup>

There is little doubt that the BNP has suffered a heavy blow to its image and moral but it is still far too early to write the party's obituary. Griffin argued that UKIP's popularity hurt the BNP and that Farage had stolen many of the BNP's core policies on immigration and the EU: "We're out tonight but we'll be back. We set the agenda, we're the ones who broke the taboo about immigration—we've allowed UKIP to do what they've done but when people see they don't deliver their votes will crumble".<sup>22</sup> Time, however, was against Griffin and amidst growing internal opposition he stepped down as BNP leader in July 2014. He was immediately replaced by the much more hard-line figure of Adam Walker who is much more

moulded like John Tyndall than Griffin. How far the BNP can regroup and recover under its new leader is very questionable. Griffin's role in the BNP is certainly over following his expulsion from the party in September 2014. For many observers of the far-right scene in Britain, Griffin will be remembered as arguably, the most gifted but also the most divisive leader of the British far-right scene since 1945.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Griffin was elected as one of 8 MEPs (and took 8% of the vote) for the North West region of England. Andrew Brons was elected as one of the 6 MEPs (on 9.8% of the vote) in Yorkshire and the Humber.

<sup>2</sup> In the last three years alone established parties such as the French National Front performed well in regional elections. The Italian *Lega Nord* polled strongly and captured the regions of Piedmont and Veneto and made greater inroads in northern Italy in general, which for many years was one of the real strongholds of the left. Newer groups such as Geert Wilders' anti-immigrant Party for Freedom in the Netherlands captured 15 per cent of the vote in the Dutch parliamentary elections in June 2010 shortly after the Austrian Freedom Party's candidate for the Austrian presidency (Barbara Rosenkranz) captured almost 16 per cent of the vote in April 2010. Opposition to immigration and deeper EU integration proved pivotal factors in the unexpected success of the True Finns Party when it captured 19% of the vote in Finnish general election in April 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See Matthew Godwin, "Nick Griffin supports the Golden Dawn in Athens as the BNP falls apart", *The Spectator*, 10 January 2014.

<sup>4</sup> This percentage has often been presented by critics and supporters of the EU and become almost taken for granted. It owes much to the speech given by Jacques Delors at the annual TUC Congress in 1988 when he claimed that 80% of legislation would be made by the EU within 10 years. It is important to note that his assertion only referred to economic legislation. Although later European treaties have brought new and amended older EU competences the amount of actual legislation that emanates from Brussels is much lower than usually assumed. An analysis of UK legislation between 1997 and 2009 reveals that only 6.8% of primary legislation (statutes) and 14.1% of secondary legislation (statutory instruments) were in response to EU obligations. See House of Commons Library, "How much legislation comes from Europe", *Research Paper*, 10/62.

<sup>5</sup> The Union Movement (UM) was established by Oswald Mosley in February 1948 as a vehicle to promote the wider union of Europe. It constituted some 51 separate organisations and groups. This group even produced a monthly (and pretty impressive) magazine called *The European* between 1953 and 1959 which sought to be a "journal of opposition" (Skidelsky, 1981: 493). Mosley sought to persuade the UM's members to see beyond their individual patriotisms and to establish greater co-operation. It led to the European Declaration agreed in Venice in 1962 that read: "We being European conscious of the tradition which derives from classic Greece and Rome, and of a civilisation which during these three thousand years has given thought, beauty, science and leadership of mankind; and

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feeling for each other the close relationship of a great family, whose quarrels in the past have proved the heroism of our peoples but whose division in the future would threaten the life of our continent with the same destruction which extinguished the genius of Hellas and led to the triumph of alien values, now declare with pride our European communion of blood and spirit in the following urgent and practical proposals of our new generation which challenge present policies of division, delay and subservience to the destructive materialism of external powers before which the splendour of our history, the power of our economy, the nobility of our traditions and the inspiration of our ideals must never be surrendered" (Mosley, 1968, pp. 434-5).

<sup>6</sup> Other parties present included representatives of the West German *Reichspartei* (and forerunner of the NPD), the Italian MSI and the Belgian *Jeune Europe*.

<sup>7</sup> In 2001 the BNP contested 22 seats and saved 5 deposits. In 2005 they contested 119 seats and retained 40 deposits. In 2010 the BNP stood in 338 constituencies and retained 73 deposits.

<sup>8</sup> A YouGov 2009 survey on the attitudes of BNP voters produced a number of interesting facts. BNP voters tended to be working class males, former Labour voting households and feeling increasingly insecure in more unfavourable economic climate.

<sup>9</sup> Die Republikaner, *Parteiprogramm 1990*, Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1990, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Front National, *300 mesures pour une renaissance de la France*, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Parties such as the French Front National have been stressing that they "are first and foremost Europeans" and seek to create a "European sentiment" and a European patriotism to defend European values from external threats since the 1980s. See: Jean Marie Le Pen, *Les Francais d'abord*, Paris : Carrere-Lafon, 1984.

<sup>12</sup> Griffin has rejected any suggestion that he is a fascist on the grounds that he does not seek to use political violence to pursue party objectives and he is not advocating the "worshipping" of a state that imposes its will on the people (Griffin, 12 July 2009).

<sup>13</sup> In 2007 the rules required for group status necessitated 20 MEPs from 5 states. Mussolini antagonised and outraged her Romanian allies when she stated in response to the murder of an Italian by a suspected Romanian of Roma origin that "Breaking the law has become a way of life for Romanians. However, it is not about petty crimes, but horrifying crimes, that give one goose bumps." The Romanian members of the group reacted with fury to the statement, seemingly also because Ms Mussolini did not distinguish between Romanians and the Roma, the minority community towards which the Greater Romania party has been accused of racism in the past. "The straw that broke the camel's back," said Romanian MEP Eugen Mihaescu, according to AFP, was the "unacceptable amalgam" Ms Mussolini made "between criminal gypsies and the entire Romanian population."

<sup>14</sup> The elections also illustrated the continuing decline of the FN from its heyday in 2002 as Nicolas Sarkozy took over debates in areas such as immigration, law and order as well as Le Pen's age (Camus, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Initial logistical concerns about how to travel to Strasbourg (being on the "wrong side of France") and the monthly travel between Brussels and Strasbourg were seemingly resolved by both Brons and Griffin opting to drive from England and avoiding many of the special security problems they encountered at airports.

<sup>16</sup> The question posed by Griffin which resurfaced a few months later was "how often does the issue of negative British public opinion arise during internal Commission discussions on the progress of European political, social and economic integration" on 26 October 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Diane Dodds, one of Northern Ireland's three MEPs, refused to sit next to the BNP representatives at the opening session of the new parliament on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2009 (*Times*, 15 July 2009).

<sup>18</sup> In December 2010 a court ordered Griffin and his BNP associate, Simon Darby, to pay £385,000 in legal fees to four former employees who took the party to court over unfair dismissal. More bizarrely

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the party was ordered to pay Unilever some £170,000 for using without authorisation the trademarked product Marmite.

<sup>19</sup> Eight parties from seven member states participated in the FPO event in Vienna and reached agreement on establishing a contact office for European patriotic and national parties in Vienna and also managed to adopt an 8 Point Programme: this advocated the creation of a European confederation of free and independent nations to protect Europe from terrorism and the growing threat posed by Islam in Europe and also called for an immediate stop to further immigration.

<sup>20</sup> For further discussions see *New Statesman*, "A fatal blow? The latest split within the British National Party", 17 October 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Marlene Guest replaced Andrew Brons (following his resignation from the party in 2012) as the BNP's candidate in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Guest has been associated with the BNP for over a decade and stood for the Rotherham constituency in the general elections of 2005 and 2010. She also stood in the by-election in 2012 and captured some 8% of the vote.

<sup>22</sup> BBC News. "BNP leader Nick Griffin loses North West Euro seat", 26 May 2014.  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-27572347>

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