Spaces of Right-Wing Populism and Anti-Muslim Racism in Austria

Identitarian Movement, Civil Initiatives and the Fight against 'Islamisation'*

Edma Ajanovic, Stefanie Mayer and Birgit Sauer**

Abstract

This article argues that the current right-wing social movements in Austria are taking part in a right-wing populist hegemonic project relying on anti-Muslim racism, anti-immigration sentiment and xeno-racism (Fekete 2001). Analysing texts and interviews of two right-wing populist social movements, the *Identitarian Movement* and the *Civil initiatives against the building of mosques,* with a critical frame analysis approach, the paper identifies their spaces of political action with the aim of understanding their success. We argue that, rather than competing with the Austrian Freedom Party in the space of national (party) politics, these movements have established their own niches in the Austrian political space. This strategy not only enables them to co-exist with the main right-wing populist actor, the Freedom Party, in a mutually supportive environment, but it also broadens the right-wing populist discursive strategy of constructing a double antagonism between 'us' and 'them' (the Elite) and 'the others'. Hence, while the *Identitarian Movement* is concerned with meta-politics on the level of the 'supra-regional' space which is understood to shape European culture and 'ethnic identity', the civil initiatives' niche is located on the local level and is presented as the space where conflicts between 'us' and 'the other' are experienced. In our approach of analysing spaces of political action, we argue that recent right-wing populism is successful because it manages to 'diversify' spaces of action and to colonize all levels of social life with its idea of antagonistic politics.

Keywords: right-wing populism; right-wing social movements; racism; Austria; frame analysis

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1. Introduction

Right-wing populism in Austria has a relatively long tradition embodied mostly by the FPÖ. The party's success as well as its role as a forerunner in the populist modernisation of

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right-wing extremism in Europe makes Austria an interesting laboratory for the study of right-wing populism. It is therefore noteworthy that independent right-wing populist movements in the country have gained momentum only recently and have until now failed to produce mass support e.g. in comparison to the success of PEGIDA (*Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident/Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*) in Germany or *La Manif pour Tous* in France. One factor explaining this situation is precisely the FPÖ's hegemonic position in the field of right-wing populism, both in terms of discursive hegemony as well as in terms of supporters.

Against this background, our article will elaborate on the specific place of *civil initiatives* against the building of mosques and Islamic centres as well as the place the *Identitarian Movement Austria* (Identitäre Bewegung Österreich, IBÖ) occupy within the Austrian far right political landscape. We want to answer the following question: How can these movements be successful in a political setting in which the *Austrian Freedom Party* (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) is the hegemon of right-wing discourse, i.a. in terms of anti-establishment and anti-Islam issues as well as on issues of migration, security and 'patriotism'? To answer this question we will discuss the discursive construction of political space by these two movements. Our analysis is guided by the assumption that the construction of these spaces of political action is one key factor in explaining the relative success of these movements. Although both movements – as most other right-wing extremist and right-wing populist groups in Europe – articulate anti-Muslim racism (Fekete 2004; Klammer 2013; Müller-Uri 2014), the article argues that this is not a sufficient explanation for the success of these specific movements when compared to the failure of others like PEGIDA. We aim at reconstructing the spaces they define as their peculiar 'spaces of concern' in terms of political developments and perceived threats as well as their 'spaces of action'.

A critical frame analysis of their documents allows us to investigate how – with reference to which discourses, groups, and values – they frame these spaces. Drawing on interviews and texts published by the IBÖ and the civil initiatives against mosques and mapping their discourses, we want to show that these groups construct and occupy spaces other than national party politics. We argue that this is one of the reasons for their success in a setting dominated by FPÖ. We will show that instead of positioning themselves in competition to the hegemonic FPÖ, these movements create political niches that render them part of, and at times even valued partners within, right-wing networks. Hence, while the FPÖ – and parliamentary parties in general – is more concerned with the space of party competition framed by the institutions of the political system such as party competition at elections, right-wing movements construct their political spaces on different local as well supra-national and meta-political levels. This fragmentation of political space allows right-wing populist discourse to reach different audiences, for instance in local neighbourhoods or among young academics, and it strengthens their influence on public discourse. We claim that this is also one of the factors explaining the relative success not only of certain right-wing groups, but of the right-wing hegemonic project.

2. Right-wing populism in Austria

To situate our analysis of two rather successful independent right-wing populist organisations we will give a brief summary of developments in the field of right-wing Austrian populism. The modernisation of the FPÖ, i.e. its turn to populism, started under Jörg Haider, who became party leader in 1986. Broader contextual factors, above all the neoliberal restructuring that began in the late 1970s, allowed for changes in Austrian political culture that fostered populist developments (Heinisch 2012). The slow process of erosion of the social partnership, which involved employers' and workers' organisations closely linked to the two main parties, the *Austrian People's Party* (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP) and the *Social Democratic Party* (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ), turned the political landscape from a consensus-oriented to a more competitive one. From the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards, smaller parties – most notably the FPÖ, but also the new *Green-alternative Party* and a short-lived liberal party – emerged as relevant political players. Although the FPÖ has experienced several crises, most notably the party's split in 2005 when party leader Jörg Haider founded the *Alliance Future Austria* (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, BZÖ) and left the FPÖ with his constituency, today it poses a strong competition to the two parties in government, SPÖ and ÖVP (Heinisch 2012: 372). Parliamentary elections in 2013 resulted in a share of 20.5 % of the votes for the FPÖ, with the SPÖ leading at 26.8 % and the ÖVP at 24.0 %.

The FPÖ's success has several reasons and is not least due to their discursive strategies (Wodak 2003; Geden 2006; Reisigl 2012) and their flexibility on issues – and therefore their flexibility in addressing different groups of voters. Since the 2000s, anti-Muslim racism became a key issue alongside anti-immigration policies. This development follows a European trend of constructing Muslim immigrants as Europe's 'others' on several levels: First, older anti-immigration discourses that position migrants in competition with the native population in terms of social benefits, the labour market, the educational system and security issues are being re-articulated with regards to religious and cultural differences. Second, these differences are constructed as problematic, as Muslim immigrants allegedly do not share European values. The relationship is therefore transformed from a competition in specific social and policy fields to a fundamental antagonism of values and worldviews which transcends political debate and policy measures. Though not uniformly articulated, elements of this discourse can be traced on different political levels. It pertains to right-wing populist and extremist party politics, where successful examples range from the *Swiss People's Party* (Schweizer Volkspartei, SVP) or the French *National Front* (Front National, FN) to the *British National Party* (BNP) and the Greek *Golden Dawn* (Chrysí Avgí) as well as to non-parliamentary groups including, i.a. well-known PEGIDA in Germany, a number of identitarian groups that started in France and spread to different European countries as well as a lively online-community, aptly termed *Counter Jihad Nebula* (Lee 2015; Ranieri 2016). Even more importantly, the basic rationale of this discourse became part of mainstream political and media discourses that encompass far broader actors and audiences than the right-wing actors who are usually associated with racist discourse (Fekete 2004). In the Austrian case, anti-Muslim racism is most explicitly but by no means exclusively articulated by

the FPÖ (Klammer 2013). In this respect, newly established right-wing populist movements can build on established discourses that construct relations between (Muslim) immigrants and native Austrians as 'naturally' antagonistic. On the other hand, the FPÖ's hegemonic position in right-wing populism in Austria, including its strong influence on right-wing extremist organisations like the German nationalist fraternities ('Burschenschaften'), has been hindering the mobilisation and establishment of independent right-wing groups and movements to some extent.

One case in point is the failure of PEGIDA to establish an Austrian branch. This 'patriotic' movement, which has so far mainly been active and successful in some German cities, tried to organize demonstrations in the Austrian cities of Vienna, Linz and most recently, Graz, but failed completely. Between one hundred and three hundred 'patriots' following PEGIDA's call to take to the streets were blocked by around one thousand (in Graz) and around five thousand (in Vienna) anti-fascist and anti-racist protestors (Der Standard 2015; Müller 2015). Media coverage was also far from favourable. Clearly this failure had more than one reason, among them PEGIDA's inaptitude in communicating with the media. Another reason are the controversies within the political far-right in Austria and its relationship to other actors. One indicator of conflicting relationships can be found in the position the FPÖ took towards PEGIDA. During an interview, FPÖ party leader Heinz-Christian Strache expressed his view that, while he agreed with the positions voiced by the movement, PEGIDA was unnecessary in Austria, since the FPÖ 'is the real PEGIDA' (Strache after News 2015). The movement therefore received little support by the party and, rather than being able to draw broad support, appeared to be mostly confined to right-wing extremists.

On the other hand, we find close cooperation between the district organisations of the FPÖ and civil initiatives against Mosques at the local level, e.g. the speaker of the civil initiative in Vienna's 21st district was a FPÖ functionary. The relationship between the FPÖ and the *Identitarian Movement* (IBÖ) can be described best as rather ambivalent – while e.g. a representative of the Freedom Party's youth organisation (*Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend*, RFJ) in Vienna claimed that members of his organisation were not allowed to be active for the IBÖ (RFJ Interview 1), another regional branch of the organisation in the province of Burgenland cooperated with the identitarian activists and organised a joint event (RFJ Burgenland 2013). However, all in all the FPÖ seems to be supportive of the IBÖ and IBÖ members attend FPÖ nearby events such as a book presentation organized by unzensuriert.at, the blog of FPÖ high-ranking representative Martin Graf (Bruns et al. 2014: 81). In 2015, one of the Freedom Party's high-ranking regional politicians attended a meeting of RFJ and IBÖ in Burgenland (ORF Burgenland 2015). Another indication of relations between the two groups is that, according to antifascist sources, at least two former identitarian activists were among the FPÖ's candidates for local elections in Vienna in October 2015, while others at least participated in the election campaign (Stoppt die Rechten 2015; Antifa Recherche Wien 2015a). These examples show that the FPÖ's relationship to other actors is not necessarily marked by competition and rivalry, but might also be characterised by complementary relations, networking and even support for smaller organisations. They also show that the nature of this relationship has an impact on independent far right organisations' chances of success.

3. Cases: anti-muslim civil initiatives and the *Identitarian Movement Austria*

Civil initiatives against the building of mosques or Islamic cultural centres already, especially in the Eastern part of the country, began to be organized in 2007. These initiatives were mainly active in several districts of Vienna and in Wiener Neustadt, a city south of Vienna, and they focused their work on the respective neighbourhoods where mosques or Islamic centres were planned. Although mostly small in terms of the number of activists, these single-issue citizens' movements were temporarily able to draw support from broad and diverse groups of the population and were fostered by (local branches of) political parties, mostly by the FPÖ.

The Austrian version of the *Identitarian Movement*, which was originally founded in France, has been active since autumn 2012. Though this self-proclaimed youth movement is far from commanding a mass basis, it is active in terms of many small-scale activities, including for example, disturbing events that they perceive as fostering multiculturalism. The IBÖ also organizes aggressive sarcastic or ironic (street) performances as well as demonstrations and debates and takes part in discussions on 'new-right' politics in respective media. In contrast to more traditional right-wing extremism the movement presents itself as modern and makes use of new (online) technologies as well as of elements of globalized pop-culture (Bruns et al. 2014: 58, 207ff.). One prominent activist of the Vienna group was formerly active in the most notorious Austrian neo-Nazi group centred around Gottfried Küssel but claims to have since undergone important developments in terms of ideology (News 2014). It comes as no surprise that identitarian activists such as e.g. the spokesman of PEGIDA Austria, Georg Immanuel Nagl, who used to be an identitarian activist, are also in contact with other right wing groups. On the other hand right-wing extremists, including skinheads and neo-Nazis have taken part in identitarian demonstrations, but systematic research into these connections is still lacking. International contacts, i.a. with identitarian activists from different European countries, German *New Right*-thinkers and the Italian *Casa Pound* are documented online by IBÖ (Bruns et al. 2014, 68 ff., 87 ff.). The organisation also 'shares' activities of activists in different countries – including Czech Republic – on its Facebook page, and claimed as early as in 2014 that one of its demonstrations had been supported by activists from France, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic and Switzerland (Patrick 2014; see also Schmidt 2014). In February 2015, the so-called *Forum for European Diversity* (Forum für Europäische Vielfalt) took place in Vienna, where activists from the Czech *Generace Identity* as well as the Slovenian *Generacija Identitete* gave speeches (Markovics 2015; see Identitäre Generation 2015 for a transcript of the speech by Czech activist Adam Bercik in German).

It is difficult to estimate the number of activists who identify with the Austrian group, as the movement does not disclose such information. An official from Styria estimated the Vienna group at 70 people and the Styrian group at 30, which corresponds to estimates by antifascist groups (Schmidt 2014); other newspapers at the same time mentioned 30 activists in Vienna and as many in Graz (Wetz 2014). As far as can be told from photos of activities published by IBÖ the movement appears to be even smaller in terms of activists

participating in their activities (Bruns et al. 2014: 78). Also, the movement claims to have regional branches in eight of Austria's nine states, plus one in Northern Italy/South Tyrol. An interesting fact in this regard is that regional branches were formed before the nationally operating IBÖ. This regional emergence can be explained by the fact that the organisation emerged within the milieu of fraternities which operate locally; this generally speaks for a connection between the IBÖ and the academic right-wing fraternities (Bruns et al. 2014: 77). In October 2015, its main Facebook-page showed nearly 11,500 'likes', which is a lot when compared to the youth organisations of political parties in the country (e.g. the aforementioned RFJ had at the same time about 3,100 'likes', the *Social Democratic Youth* less than 6,400 and the *Young Greens* 6,900). This relative success and longevity is noteworthy as Andreas Peham, expert on right-wing extremism from the *Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance*, predicted that the *Austrian Identitarian Movement* would not be a long-successful phenomenon because the FPÖ allegedly 'covers the right-wing extremist potential' in Austria (Peham after Drexler 2015; see also Peham in Progress Online 2013). However, as Peham's prophecy has not come true (yet), it can be expected that the IBÖ will remain active in the future. Hence, with the emergence, durability and relative success in terms of media attention of local civil initiatives against mosques and the IBÖ, we are witnessing two very different kinds of right-wing populist movements taking hold in the country. It appears that the 'right-wing extremist potential' in Austria is indeed not fully covered by the FPÖ, but that non-competitive relations to the party are a key factor for the relative success or failure of independent organisations.

In a nutshell, the IBÖ was selected for analysis as an independent and relatively new right-wing movement organized by young people and targeting academic youth while presenting a modernisation of right-wing activism in Austria both in terms of content as well as rhetoric and style. It is oriented towards the ideologies of the 'new right' and tries to influence discourses on Islam and migration, especially through the use of online media and social networks. The second case also represents a non-institutionalised actor, albeit one with a more restricted profile: a number of sinlge issue civil initiatives against the building of mosques or Islamic centres on local and community levels. In April 2011, these initiatives united in the *Movement Pro Austria* (Bewegung Pro Österreich, BPÖ), however – in contrast to the initiatives themselves – this umbrella organisation has not shown much activity since.

4. Sample and methods

Our material consists of three interviews as well as 22 texts (partly including accompanying images) published online by the two right-wing populist movements. We collected the material during 2013 and 2014 for two EU co-funded projects.[1] We chose the texts according to the organisations' publication strategies in order to grasp the arguments the organisations want to feed into public discourse rather than focussing on intra-organisational communication or on programmatic texts only. We selected material in order to cover a broad range of different genres ranging from news and public statements, to programmatic declarations,

speeches (i.e. videos, so-called 'vlogs' posted on YouTube) and interviews. In some cases, images were analysed alongside the text in order to include visual communication strategies as well (see table 1).

Table 1: Analysed material

	IBÖ	Civil Initiatives	Total
Published Texts total	**12**	**10**	**22**
a) Programmatic Texts	4	2	6
b) News	3	3	6
c) Public Statements	2	3	5
d) Speeches, Interviews	3	2	5
Images	**3**	**0**	**3**
Video	**1**	**0**	**1**
Interviews	**0**	**3**	**3**

Source: Authors, based on their own data.

Our analysis of the interviews and online material is based on a critical frame analysis (Verloo, Lombardo 2007; Verloo 2005) that understands frames to be social 'constructions that give meaning to reality' (Verloo 2005: 20). In political discourse, these processes of meaning-giving or framing not only include the construction of specific 'problems' but also provide 'solutions' to these identified problems. Hence, frames are an 'organizing principle that transform[s] fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included' (Verloo 2005: 20). Our frame analysis of interviews and documents of right-wing movements identifies these problems and solutions. For the present paper, we focused especially on references to and constructions of different 'spaces', e.g. on instances in which the movements legitimized certain claims by referring to 'our' and 'their' space or in which spaces are referred to as the particular movement's space of political action.

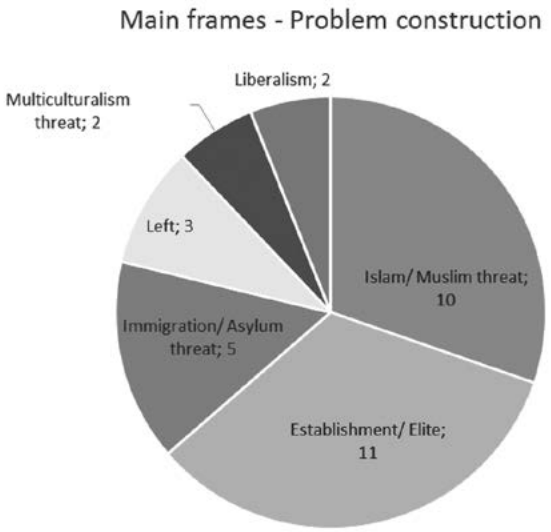
As mentioned above, the frame analysis focuses on the construction of problems and solutions in the texts, hence our first analysis of the documents and interviews provided an overview of the most prominent topics and concerns in right-wing populist discourse. The second step focussed on the actors. Here, the construction of problems mandates that there is somebody responsible for a problem (an active actor) and someone who is perceived to be affected by the problem (a passive actor). A third line of inquiry identified discursive references that legitimate specific constructions of problems and solutions, e.g. references to norms, values, to common sense, and history. In a first analytic step we identified 'main frames' by following these questions, i.e. identifying what was constructed as a problem or a solution, who was represented as responsible or as affected and which legitimation was offered for the specific interpretation. These first results provided the basis of further analysis with regard to constructions of and references to (political) spaces. In the following we hence give a short overview of the identified main frames and then continue with our argument in regard to the different spaces of right-wing populism.

5. Current right-wing populists concerns

Before we start our discussion of the different spaces the social movements shape, interpret and negotiate, we want to make some general remarks on right-wing populist discourses. In line with right-wing groups and parties more generally, the analysed movements mainly articulate anti-Muslim racism and broader anti-immigration sentiments in order to construct the relevant spaces as threatened by the 'other', i.e. by an 'external enemy'. Nevertheless, these racist appeals take a distinctive shape within the logic of right-wing populism that rests on the creation of a double antagonism. All populist appeals to a 'we'-group, most commonly to 'the people' (Canovan 2004), rely on the construction of an enemy that opposes the people and which is commonly defined as 'the elites' or 'those above'. However, this general definition of populism as relying on an antagonism of (common) people and elites needs to be refined with regards to *right-wing* populism, which transforms the 'common people' into an ethnicized category and opposes them not only to elites but also to 'external enemies' (Canovan 2004: 248–249; Pelinka 2012: 16; Reisigl 2012: 41) in order to construct the 'we'-group these populist movements wish to address. It is precisely through the interlinking of these two distinct 'others' that right-wing populism constructs 'the people' as permanently threatened as e.g. elites are suspected to foster immigration with the aim of a 'population exchange'. The rhetoric of 'population exchange' is also a prime example of the right-wing populist strategy of 'calculated ambivalence' (Engel, Wodak 2013) because it can be read as a reference to changes in the ethnicity of the population or as a reference to the electorate of SPÖ and ÖVP, who are allegedly trying to broaden their electoral base through immigration. In the case of current European right-wing populist movements, the external enemy is most often defined as the 'Muslim other' although e.g. feminists or LGBTs are also pictured in opposition to the 'we'-group. In other words, anti-Muslim racism has become one of the central nodes of right-wing populist discursive constructions of chains of binary oppositions that oppose different (dangerous) 'others' to (a threatened) 'us'. This trend is especially pronounced in our two cases due to the mono-thematic orientation of the civil initiatives, but it is in line with broader comparative findings (Ranieri 2016). As we will show, this alleged danger is to a large extent pictured as a threat to 'our' spaces, which are 'invaded' and 'taken over' by 'others'. Hence, among the identified main frames, the following (see also figure 1) were most often named in the texts and constructed as problems: the establishment/elite, Islam/Muslim threat and immigration/asylum threat.

Figure 1 gives first insight into the practices of meaning making in Austrian right-wing populist discourse, but it also illustrates the mentioned discursive strategy of right-wing populism, namely the creation of a 'double antagonism' of a group of 'we', which is threatened by 'the elite' (from above) as well as the 'others' (from outside). With this strategy, an imminent threat is produced which legitimizes radical measures as a means of self-defence, quasi 'allowing' or even calling for racist discourse and practices of the 'we'-group as a reaction to this massive threat. Hence, it is not surprising that the main frames either refer to 'problems' caused by the elite and the establishment working against 'the people' or problematize (Muslim) immigration and rely on ethnicized and racialized constructions of meaning. Since our choice of texts was obviously limited, we cannot argue that our results

Figure 1: Problems constructed



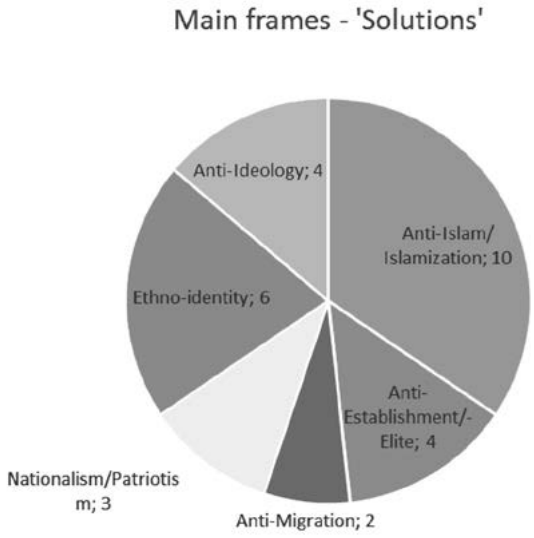
Source: Authors, based on their own data.

are numerically representative for right-wing populist discourse in general – even more so as these discourses evolve quickly in response to changes in the political context – rather they are indicative of strong tendencies within these discourses. However, as our more limited aim was to analyse how these movements construct spaces of action and political niches in order to legitimize their claims with regard to the constructed problems, these first results on general tendencies provided a valuable point of departure.

Furthermore, critical frame analysis is not only concerned with the analysis of what is represented as a problem but also seeks to find the solutions embedded in these problem constructions. This also enables an analysis with regard to actors: Who is perceived to profit from solutions, and who is made responsible to make these positive changes happen? A glimpse at the main frames regarding solutions (figure 2) gives us an even clearer picture of the racialized and ethnicized patterns of meaning making in right-wing populist discourse.

As illustrated in figure 2, two prominent frames, which occur 12 times in our texts, are directly concerned with the construction, exclusion and discrimination of 'others' (anti-migration, anti-Islam/islamization). Furthermore, the rather positively formulated frames of 'ethno-identity' and 'nationalism' present different ways of constructing a demarcation between 'us' and 'others'. The call for ethno-identity, in particularly formulated by the *Identitarian Movement*, is derived from the ideology of 'ethnopluralism'. This calls for the separation of different 'ethnic groups', which are based in biology as well as culture and history. Ethnopluralism claims that only the separation of ethnic groups can guarantee the preservation of particular cultures and identities. In pluralist immigration societies, this idea necessarily plays out as a call for exclusion and discrimination. Within the identitarian

Figure 2: Solutions to the problems constructed



Source: Authors, based on their own data.

discourse, ethno-identity has more or less replaced nationalism as the leading paradigm for the construction of the 'we'-group. While straight-forward anti-establishment frames play a certain role in right-wing populist discourse, a more specific variant of these are frames demanding an end to ideologies, which in turn present right-wing populist claims as non-ideological and based only in common sense and rational thinking. This discursive strategy makes it considerably harder for political opponents to present alternatives to right-wing populist constructions of political problems and respective solutions.

Having outlined the dominant discursive patterns of the *Identitarian Movement*'s and civil initiative's texts, we turn to our results with regard to spaces of othering.

6. Spaces of othering

As we already argued above, references to spaces also serve the construction of binary oppositions between 'us' and 'them'. The mechanisms at play here work in two directions: right-wing populist groups on the one hand construct the threat of the 'other', arguing that 'our' spaces are 'invaded' while, on the other hand, references to spaces and to their accessibility for and their belonging to certain people is a means to construct group boundaries, i.e. to define who is and who is not part of the 'we'-group. People, who 'misuse' spaces, render them dirty, hostile or unsafe for 'us' can thereby be stigmatised as 'others' without reference to more easily discernible – and therefore less acceptable – strategies of racist othering. It

is also because references to spaces imply borders that clearly distinguish between insiders and those not-belonging that space references are particularly suitable for right-wing populist discursive strategies of constructing antagonisms. Furthermore, referring to particular spaces allows a substantiation of the 'we' the respective populist group is talking about and therefore those spaces 'better' mobilize the intended constituency.

In terms of political spaces – i.e. those spaces the right-wing populist movements reference in their political claims and/or wish to shape through their activities – we were able to identify three main levels in our material: the national, the local, and the European. In the following, we discuss discursive references to each of these levels, arguing that their focus or niche building in terms of spaces of action ('Gestaltungsraum') is one reason for their success – since they are not competing with but complementing each other and the main right-wing populist force in Austria, the Freedom Party.

6.1 The nation: space of culture and identity

The national space is not perceived as a space of political action by the two social movements, but rather as a symbolic space of identity, culture and tradition – the space where 'our' values come from. Both social movements perceive Austria as a homogeneous space characterised by freedom (e.g. freedom of religion), tolerance and order, and often portrayed in contrast to 'chaotic' countries characterised by Muslim traditions as the following statement shows:

> [Lebanon] was one of the richest countries in the Arab world. Really modern, French type of democracy. (…) With the Palestinian refugees this has changed. (…) And then they [referring to 'the Muslims'; comm. by the authors] bloodily fought their way to government power. And today – a torn country. A beautiful country has been ruined and that's what I am afraid of in Austria. (BI Interview 2)[2]

For both analysed groups, the nation as a space of identity and culture is simultaneously constructed through this strategy as valuable and as threatened. Immigration, i.e. immigrants as dangerous 'others' with their different cultures, are importing chaos and threatening the Austrian – and as we will see further down also the European – identity, culture and tradition (see i.a. IBÖ 2012a). Though national politics is not the space they are able to or even want to shape, both movements know and claim that the last thing they want in 'our country' is 'a sneaky nationalism of a foreign country' as one of our interview partners stated in reference to Turkey (BI Interview 2).

While in the case of the civil initiatives their orientation towards different – and as we will discuss in a moment, much more local – spaces is a result of their locally bound activities; the case of the *Identitarian Movement*, which does not have a singular clear goal like the prevention of a specific mosque or cultural centre, needs more explication:

> We recognise and affirm the national [principle], freed of racist perversion and chauvinist nationalism, as an incontestable and eternal political factor. With the identitarian notion

> we embrace our local belonging to a regional culture, our belonging to our people as well as our self-conception as Europeans. (IBÖ 2012b)[3]

Identitarian activists do not position themselves against the nation as an important political space – on the contrary they even grant it an 'eternal' status – but their political self-definition as 'identitarian' points to a different logic that diminishes the nation to one aspect on a scale reaching from the local to the European level. We will discuss later on the advantages of such a flexible self-definition for a right-wing movement especially in the Austrian context, where right-wing extremism's allegiance to German nationalism has been one of the factors hindering such movements from gaining respectability and political influence.

6.2 The 'Grätzel': civil initiatives' local spaces

While both social movements refer to the national space in a similar way, they seem to define different spaces of (political) activity for themselves – spaces they wish to intervene in and shape with their political actions. The civil initiatives mainly refer to the so-called 'Grätzel'[4] whose peculiarity is perceived as threatened by the 'invasion' of 'foreign cultures', solidified in the building of mosques and Islamic centres. Hence, the Islamic centre is seen as an alien object in terms of local culture and identity, which also poses a very concrete threat to the daily lives of the local inhabitants. One member of an initiative, for example, claimed that the centre would attract 200 people at the same time, thereby letting 'this small street turn into chaos' (BI Interview 3). The 'small street', the concrete living space of the 'concerned citizens' is the space the civil initiative refers to as the space they wish to shape – or rather to maintain as their imagined calm and peaceful 'Grätzel'.

In an interview with another representative of the civil initiative (BI Interview 1), Brünner Street – a street in the Vienna district where the initiative is active – serves as an example for a similar depiction of threatening chaos. The speaker identifies an 'awful lot of Turkish shops' in this street, which 'do not have clear opening hours.'

> Yes, this is Saturday, Sunday, the hairdresser has the towels on the sidewalk to dry, mothers, who push prams have to give way and walk on the street. (BI Interview 1)[5]

This description creates the image of an occupation of public space that is not tolerable for the representatives of the civil initiatives. They want to keep these spaces neat and calm, with a certain order, and most of all as spaces 'naturally' belonging to the native Austrian population. Those who shall 'shape' the space are not 'the others' but 'we', as 'we' are 'by nature' more calm and neat[6] and follow the rules:

> The problem [with the Islamic Cultural Centre; comm. by the authors] is disturbance (…). Accordingly (…) partly aggressive behaviour, when the people are requested to be less loud. Then there is no peace, but it comes to offensive behaviour and therefore people feel threatened. (BI Interview 2)[7]

All interviews with representatives of these Civil Initiatives show a similar concern with such concrete, everyday problems in the neighbourhood, the threatened space of their daily lives (e.g. noise, dirt, aggressive behaviour and loss of parking spaces were regularly mentioned). All these problems were interpreted in a way pre-structured by their anti-Mosque or more generally anti-Islam agenda, so that every little conflict in the 'Grätzel' is discursively turned into a clash of cultures and simultaneously into a problem which concerns the society as a whole. This structure of argumentation gives the FPÖ the opportunity to take up the issue and transform it to the level of 'high' politics.

6.3 Europe and its common enemy

While the civil initiatives are mainly concerned with the 'Grätzel', the *Identitarian Movement* 'fights' on a different level to preserve 'homeland, freedom and tradition' (Sellner 2013), as one of their main spokespersons put it. They claim to preserve the purity of cultural spaces (IBÖ 2012a) threatened by the immigration, globalisation and 'islamisation' haunting Europe (Sellner 2013). Emphasis is put on Europe as a space of shared traditions and values which, however, have different expressions in the shape of national, regional and local spaces of distinct 'cultures and identities' marked by inner homogeneity and clearly drawn boundaries. However, this European orientation is combined with sharp criticism of the European Union, which – in the words of Alexander Markovics, national leader of the *Identitarian Movement* – is 'a centralised Moloch' trying to 'rape the diversity of the European peoples' (Markovics 2013). The idea of a 'Europe of Fatherlands', a federation of sovereign peoples including Russia is set against the existing European structures (Markovics 2013).

Europe is perceived as a space of closely connected traditions, which should however remain distinct (in the form of different folk-nations). This corresponds with the ideology of ethnopluralism, which forms the core of the identitarian world-view and informs their counter-narrative to what is perceived as the dominance of multiculturalism (IBÖ 2012c). In spite of their frequent claims to grant equal value to all peoples, the activists very clearly distinguish between enriching and threatening forms of cultural exchange:

> We do not see the [ethnically defined; comm. by the authors] people as a static factor and affirm cultural exchange with our European neighbours. Immigration has always existed and will always exist. But today's demographic decline and mass immigration from non-European countries are not an enrichment anymore, but amount to a total change, which destroys our identity. (IBÖ 2012c)[8]

This framing emphasizes the homogeneity of the 'own' space, which is threatened by the mixing of cultures and traditions through immigration, globalization and 'islamisation'. As this is perceived as a common threat to all European nation states and European peoples, the common European space is mostly constructed in negative terms by the *Identitarian Movement*:

> Not only Austria abolishes itself. Nearly all peoples of Europe today have the same problems of demographic and cultural decline. Just like there were no real winners in the 'European civil wars' of the 20th century, today there is no European nation that profits from the other's decline. We share the same destiny and decay. (IBÖ 2012b)[9]

This common threat motivates the IBÖ's claim to represent the 'indigenous European youth' which is 'defending its common heritage' (IBÖ 2012b). Unsurprisingly, Islam, whose values are perceived to be incompatible with European values, again represents the most dangerous 'other'. On a more concrete level, Muslims living in Europe are depicted as aggressive, dangerous and criminal while allegedly being favoured by European elites, who work against the people they ought to represent. Following their orientation towards 'meta-politics' rather than party politics, identitarian activists do not aim at directly influencing actors in the Austrian political system, but strive towards hegemony in the public debate.

In terms of right-wing extremist alliances, the *Identitarians*' shift from nationalism to the more flexible concept of 'ethno-cultural identity' presents a number of advantages: most importantly it allows activists to 'let inherited enmities rest and work towards a common European solution' (IBÖ 2012b). In the Austrian case, this allows for meetings and cooperation between Austrian and Italian, Slovenian and Czech activists, which would have been unthinkable due to revanchist sentiments within a more traditional nationalist framework of right-wing ideology. It still remains to be seen whether these new alliances, formed against non-European and most obviously Muslim 'others' will develop into lasting networks; however, at least on the ideological level, we are witnessing a Europeanisation of right-wing extremism. The second issue is more specific to the Austrian context, where right-wing extremism has traditionally been German-nationalist and hostile to the idea of an Austrian nation. In the decades following WWII, German nationalism became less and less acceptable in Austrian society. This was one of the factors which hindered successful agitation by right-wing extremists.[10] The flexible identitarian concept circumvents this problem by downplaying national in favour of local, regional and European, and above all, biologically defined ethnic identities.

7. Conclusions

Our analysis shows that a focus on constructions of political spaces and spaces of action provides fruitful insights into different (discursive) strategies of right-wing populist actors. We argued that in the specific Austrian context, the construction of movements' political spaces, beside and complementary to the space of national party politics, is one key element for an explanation of the relative success of the two right-wing movements: the civil initiatives and the *Identitarian Movement*. The specific spaces they claim for their political action position them not in competition, but rather in complementary relation to the *Freedom Party*, which is without a doubt the most important player in the field of Austrian far-right politics. Therefore, the assessment that the FPÖ 'covers the right-wing extremist potential' in Austria quoted in the introduction to this paper (Peham after Drexler 2015; see also

Peham in Progress Online 2013) needs some qualification: While it appears to be quite likely that the FPÖ controls the field to a large extent, the party tolerates and even supports other actors if their activities can be seen to support and complement the party's agenda rather than compete with it. One could assume that one important reason for the failure of PEGIDA in Austria is due to the fact that its relationship to the FPÖ can be described as more competitive because PEGIDA did not create a specific political space complementary to the FPÖ, but made the general claim to be 'patriotic' and anti-Muslim.

In terms of the analysis of right-wing populism in general, and anti-Muslim racism more specifically as one of its key components, our analysis points to the disconcerting tendency of right-wing populism's success in colonizing all levels of social life, i.e. all spaces from the very local to the supra-national scale (Krzyzanowski 2013). In contrast to a parliamentary party that mostly focuses its action on the (local, national and European) political institutions, some right-wing extremist and populist movements concentrate on politicizing people's everyday lives as well as rather abstract notions of (European) identity in a way that fits with an agenda set by anti-Muslim racism. Even though the nation remains an important element in this setting and provides a background for the definition of values and identities, it is far from being the only or even the most important space for right-wing populist activities. The populist logic of binary oppositions of 'us' and 'them' works just as well in the space of the local neighbourhood, where everyday conflicts become culturalized in an essentialist manner as it does in the space of an imagined European community, where a common enemy is called upon in order to construct European unity. Rendering each and every conflict as an antagonistic 'clash of cultures' presents them as much harder to be solved. Then, in every little quarrel over children playing or a lack of parking lots, the survival of a whole 'culture' against the threat posed by the (Muslim) 'other' is invoked by a right-wing populist rhetoric. This threat – perceived as a threat to every single European nation – also appears as the main reason for a construction of commonality on a European level.

We want to conclude that right-wing populism today presents anti-Muslim racism as the main narrative to explain problems on all political levels and in all political and social spaces. It is thereby constructing Islam as the source of all these problems and Muslims as *the* problematic group. Taking into account that a framing of Islam and Muslims as problematic is also wide-spread in mainstream and even left-wing and feminist discourses (Fekete 2006), it appears to be especially important to deconstruct these monolithic right-wing populist constructions. In doing so, we also wanted to deconstruct the working of hegemonic anti-Islam strategies.

Footnotes:

1. RAGE – Hate speech and populist othering in Europe (Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme; grant number JUST/20 12/FR AC/A G/2861); e-Enagement Against Violence – e-EAV (DAPHNE Programme, grant num ber JUST/20 11/D AP/AG/ 3195).
2. All quotes have been translated by the authors. Original: '[Libanon] war eines der reichsten Länder im Arabischen Raum. Ganz modern, französische Demokratieformen. (…) Mit den Palästinenser-Flüchtlingen hat sich das umgeschlagen. (…) Und dann kämpften sie ['die Moslems', Anm.:

Autorinnen] sich blutig an die Regierung. Und heute ein gespaltenes Land. Ein wunderschönes Land ging kaputt und davor habe ich in Österreich Angst.' (BI Interview 2).

3. Original: 'Wir erkennen und bejahen das Nationale, von rassistischer Perversion und chauvinistischem Nationalismus befreit, als unanfechtbaren und ewigen politischen Faktor an. Mit dem Wort identitär umfassen wir unsere lokale Zugehörigkeit zu einer regionalen Kultur, unsere Zugehörigkeit zu unserem Volk, sowie unser Selbstverständnis als Europäer.' (IBÖ 2012b).
4. Grätzl is an Austrian expression for neighbourhood, i.e. the living area of the active citizens. Grätzel is also a notion for a small part of a district in Vienna, which is perceived as a space of local identity.
5. Original: 'Ja, das ist Samstag, Sonntag, der Frisör hat die Handtücher am Weg draußen zum Trocknen, die Mütter mit den Kinderwägen müssen auf die Straße ausweichen.' (BI Interview 1).
6. In another interview it was explicitly stated that 'they' are 'innately louder, gesture more and stand together in groups more often", because 'they' come from Southern, Mediterranean countries (BI Interview 3).
7. Original: 'Das Problem [mit dem Islamischen Kulturzentrum, Anm.: Autorinnen] ist Ruhestörung (…). Dementsprechend (…) teilweise aggressives Verhalten, wenn die Leute aufgefordert werden, nicht so laut zu sein. Dann ist keine Ruh', sondern dann kommt es zu einem offensiven Verhalten und dadurch fühlen sich Menschen bedroht.' (BI Interview 2).
8. Original: 'Wir sehen das Volk als keine statische Größe und bejahen kulturellen Austausch mit unseren europäischen Nachbarn. Zuwanderung gab es immer schon und wird es auch immer geben. Der heutige demographische Verfall und die außer-europäische Massenzuwanderung sind aber keine Bereicherung mehr, sondern kommen einer Totalveränderung gleich, die unsere Identität zerstört.' (IBÖ 2012c).
9. Original: 'Nicht nur Österreich schafft sich ab. Fast alle Völker Europas haben heute die gleichen Probleme des demographischen und kulturellen Verfalls. So wie es in den 'europäischen Bürgerkriegen' des 20. Jahrhunderts keine echten Sieger gab, so gibt es auch heute keine europäische Nation, die vom Niedergang der anderen profitiert. Wir sind alle in das gleiche Schicksal und das gleiche Verwehen gestellt.' (IBÖ 2012b).
10. I.a. the rise of the FPÖ in terms of election results the first half of the 1990s can be partly attributed to the party's change of strategy from German nationalism to a pronounced Austrian 'patriotism', which was part of the populist re-orientation under party leader Jörg Haider.

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BI Interview 3 – Interview with a civil initiative's representative, held on 5th June 2013 in Vienna.