

Abstract

This master's thesis, titled Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and its Approach to European Integration 1986–2007, analyses an era of twenty-plus years in which the party, led by Jörg Haider, underwent a major ideological shift. The FPÖ abandoned its original liberal pro-European position and, in the 1990s, became a Eurosceptic populist movement akin to the far right. This work aims to assess whether these shifts can be described using the theories formulated by Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak and by Nick Sitter – who postulate that a party's participation in government is among the factors influencing the degree to which it is Eurosceptic. They suggest that a party's rhetoric regarding the European Union tamps down if the party participates in the government, becoming a part of a coalition government or supporting a minority government. During the period examined in this thesis, the FPÖ was a part of three governing coalitions. It was also a period of significant events which enable us to analyse the FPÖ's conduct – in particular, the Austrian accession to the EC/EU, the adoption of treaties modifying the functioning of the EU, the Austrian presidencies of the Council of the EU in 1998 and 2006, the European Parliament elections and their representative's activities in the EP, the process of enlargement of the European Union and the party's attitude towards it. The thesis demonstrates that there was indeed a certain calming of the party's rhetoric when it was a part of the government, while a return to the opposition ushered in more radicalisation. It is interesting to note, however, the differences between the national and the European spheres: characterised by pragmatism, the conduct of the EP members is not influenced by the party's positions in domestic politics.