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2016
Taylor and Francis Ltd.
http://hdl.handle.net/10138/231152
Wahlbeck, Ö R 2016, 'True Finns and Non-True Finns : The Minority Rights Discourse of Populist Politics in Finland', Journal of Intercultural Studies : an international journal, vol. 37, no. 6, pp. 574-588. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2016.1235020

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Reference to published version:

Wahlbeck, Ö. 2016. "True Finns and Non-True Finns: The Minority Rights Discourse of Populist Politics in Finland" *Journal of Intercultural Studies.* 37 (6): 574-588

DOI: 10.1080/07256868.2016.1235020

True Finns and Non-True Finns: The Minority Rights Discourse of Populist Politics in Finland

Introduction

In the 2000s, multiculturalism has been widely debated by politicians in Europe. It is argued that there has been a general backlash against multicultural policies (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). In this article, the support for a backlash against multicultural policies coming from populist and far-right parties is studied in the case of the minority rights statements of a political party in Finland called the 'True Finns' (or officially the 'Finns Party' since 2011). The study is based on an analysis of the discourse found in the official party programmes and in the explicit political statements on minority rights by Members of Parliament (MPs).

The Finns party constitutes a good example of the new populist parties in Europe. The party has recently received considerable support in elections, receiving almost one fifth of the votes in the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2015. It has explicitly proclaimed that it is 'populist' and for the purpose of this article it is significant that it is

the only party in Finland that has declared an objection to multicultural policies. Of course, it is not surprising to find that a populist party is critical of minority rights. However, this article analyses the rhetoric to find out how the opposition to minority rights is argued and how it is played out in the Finnish context. The backlash against multiculturalism is often understood as an opposition to specific policies, often policies related to immigration and immigrants (cf. Kymlicka 2010). Likewise, studies of populist parties in the other Nordic countries indicate that an opposition to immigration is high on the policy agenda of these parties (Widfeldt 2015; Hellström 2016). In contrast, this article point out that the populist rhetoric of the Finns party relatively seldom mentions or identifies specific policies. Actually, many of the statements about minority rights do not relate to minorities at all, but to the majority and its rights. As this article describes, the Finns party often portrays itself as the defender of a (real or imagined) majority. Furthermore, this defence of the majority is often connected to exclusionary perceptions of the modern welfare state. Thus, this article argues that the populist rhetoric about minority rights has to be understood as related to more fundamental discourses about individual rights and collective group-specific rights.

Finland provides a good example of the possibilities and challenges in implementing minority rights in developed welfare states. Finnish society, as other Nordic societies, is characterised by relatively high socio-economic equality. It is mostly regarded as self-evident that the task of the state is to provide and support equality among all citizens. A universal provision of rights and services constitutes a fundamental part of the Nordic welfare state model, as well as the understanding that it is *the state* (rather than the individuals themselves or their communities) that is the provider of welfare and equality to all its citizens. The challenge facing minority policies in the Nordic countries is

therefore seldom related to an acceptance of equal rights for all citizens, but the challenge is often related to an acceptance of cultural diversity and group-specific rights. In accordance with the Nordic welfare state model, minority policies can only be introduced 'from above' by the state itself. Minority policies are therefore part of the public welfare state structures rather than part of civil society. In this context, the institions and resources on which the minority depend become vulnerable to majority decisions. Thus, minority rights are easily falsely understood as something that the majority society grants to 'its' minorities, rather than rights that minorities inherently possess. As I describe in this article, the rhetoric of the Finns party often seems to presume an oppositional relationship between majority rights and group-specific minority rights.

Minority rights constitute a key feature of multicultural policies (e.g. Kymlicka 1995). Minorities are often located in a vulnerable societal position or have special needs that require group-differentiated rights. Furthermore, minority rights often have to be seen in the context of, and as a response to nation-building and its consequences for the minority: 'While minorities do make claims against the state, these must be understood as a response to the claims that the state makes against minorities' (Kymlicka 2001: 2). The key questions in multicultural policies therefore include aspects about both the nature of societal groups as well as their rights. Firstly, what and who are the minorities that have a right to be recognised, and secondly, what group-differentiated rights and claims can be regarded as legitimate and possible? On the one hand, who can claim to be a *minority* and what are the rights that it can demand, and on the other hand, who can claim to be a *majority* and to what extent has it a right to impose its demands on the minority? Thus, there is reason to also keep in mind the sociological aspects of

minority-majority relations, and not only the political and legal aspects of multiculturalism (cf. May, Modood, and Squires 2004; Gaitán-Barrera and Azeez 2015). The political solutions of multicultural questions often involve finding a balance among collective rights and individual rights. These complexities of multicultural policies are often obscured in public debates, where the voice of the majority and the hegemony of majority rule easily become dominant. As described in this article, the rhetoric of populist political parties can provide a case in point.

A Theory of Minority Rights: Individual and Collective

The analytical framework for this article is provided by the theory of multicultural policies outlined by Will Kymlicka (1995, 2001, 2010), which involves a developed typology of group-specific minority rights and their acceptance in western liberal democracies. Individual rights can be perceived as difficult to combine with collective rights of specific groups and minorities. In a liberal society that emphasises the equal rights of all *individuals* it can be seen as a challenge to take into account collective social structures and group interests. An important contribution to bridge this gap is provided by Kymlicka (1995) in the widely influential book *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights,* which provides an overview of the discussion regarding multicultural policies and minority rights in western liberal democracies. In the book, Kymlicka argues that some forms of collective rights are fully compatible with liberal democratic principles. Group rights can be viewed as admissible within liberalism and even essential for freedom and equality. Therefore, some forms of group-specific rights are not only possible, but a necessity in a democratic society. In many of

his publications, Kymlicka (e.g. 1995, 2001, 2012) outlines examples of multicultural solutions and minority rights protection that can be found within the framework of western democratic political systems. He argues that there are no simple models of multicultural policies that can be applied to all societies. According to Kymlicka, there are significant diffeerences between different minority groups and different claims for minority rights. Nevertheless, a general trend towards greater acceptance of minority rights can be found in western liberal democracies.

Social scientists have in many ways expanded Kymlicka's perspective on minority rights and have outlined various ways of finding political solutions that provide minorities with cultural protection and minority rights. Minority policies cannot be defined by the majority for the minority, but policies have to be defined in a true dialogue involving the groups in question (e.g. Parekh 2000). Multicultural policies often depend on the possible to create forums and institutions where compromises can be found between divergent interests (e.g. Rex 1996; Modood 2013). Yet, political negotiations do not automatically take into account the differential power relations of minorities and majorities and a stronger emphasis on the defence of the minority perspective might be needed to enable a true dialogue.

Kymlicka (1995: 10–11) explicitly distinguishes between indigenous peoples and 'national minorities' on one hand, and immigrant 'ethnic groups' on the other. This general dichotomy has been widely used, but also critically debated in the literature on multiculturalism (cf. Modood 2013). The dichotomy reflects two different modes of incorporation into national society, which affect the nature of the group and the type of relationship they desire with the larger society. Kymlicka's own work has largely

focused on national minorities in so called ‘multi-nation states’, especially in Canada (e.g. Kymlicka 2012), but his dichotomy actually relates to a more general and universal distinction between different types of minorities. According to Kymlicka (1995: 10–17), national minorities typically wish to maintain themselves as distinct societies alongside the majority culture, and the minority demands various political solutions to ensure the survival of their distinct culture. Immigrants, however, typically wish to integrate into the larger society, and to be accepted as full members of it, but their demands relate to a modification of the mainstream society to make it more accommodating of cultural difference. Kymlicka (1995: 10–17) argued that demands for group-specific rights often have more legitimacy if the minority group in question has a long history in the nation. As a consequence, claims for specific group rights made by indigenous peoples and old national minorities are often considered more legitimate than claims made by new immigrant groups (Kymlicka 1995, 2001).

Most studies of multicultural policies agree that there has been a clear trend in western democracies towards multiculturalism and minority rights from the 1970s until the 1990s (Kymlicka 1995, 2001). After this period, some observers argue that the trend has shifted towards a backlash and a retreat from multiculturalism, especially visible in Europe (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Adamson, Triadafilopoulos and Zolberg 2011; Joppke 2014). This retreat includes an emphasis on a more unitary citizenship, based on common values and identity. One expression of the backlash is the rise of nationalist and populist parties, but there is also a more general belief in the failure of multicultural policies and a de-facto abandonment of specific policies in some states. However, Kymlicka (2010) argues that the narrative portraying a general rise and fall of multiculturalism is not a correct one. According to him, much of the debate about the

retreat of multiculturalism has mischaracterised the nature of multiculturalism policies in western democracies, as well as exaggerated the extent to which the policies have been abandoned. He explicitly argues that the abandonment of multiculturalism has mostly occurred relating to immigrant groups, while the fundamental multicultural issues relating to indigenous peoples and national minorities have not been disputed (Kymlicka 2010: 40). The nature of these political developments are the object of debate among political scientists. Among other issues, there is reason to differentiate between changes in political rhetoric and actual policy changes, although the former of course might contribute to the latter. This article focuses on discourses, but I will also point out possible political implications of the rhetoric used in populist politics. In the following, I will briefly outline the Finnish context of minority rights to provide a framework for my analysis of the rhetoric of the (True) Finns party.

Minority Rights as Collective or Individual Rights in Finland

At a formal level, it can be argued that multicultural policies exist to a relatively large extent in Finland, but the policies are not always implemented in practice (Saukkonen and Pyykkönen 2008). As an assessment of multicultural policies we can, for example, take a closer look at the three different forms of group-differentiated rights identified by Kymlicka (1995: 26–33): *self-government rights, special representation rights and polyethnic rights.* As I have outlined elsewhere (Wahlbeck 2013), all these three types of rights can in various ways be found to be implemented in the Finnish case. The country is not a federal state and self-government rights are only implemented in the case of the autonomous region of the Åland Islands. Representation rights, however, are found in attempts in Finland to provide cultural and ethnic minorities with

representation rights by the establishment of various political bodies, each with its own history and different types of limited political power. These bodies include the elected Sami Parliament, the Advisory Board for Roma Affairs, the Swedish Assembly of Finland (*Folktinget*) and the National Advisory Board on Ethnic Relations (*ETNO*). The task of these various bodies is usually to provide policy statements and to support cultural and linguistic activities with the help of small budgets provided by the Finnish government. It can be debated to what extent these various political bodies can make the voice of the minorities heard in Finland. To oversee the legal protection of members of minority groups there is also a Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (until 2015 called the Ombudsman for Minorities) (Wahlbeck 2013).

According to Kymlicka, 'polyethnic rights' relate to a range of minority policies and to various groups with special needs, although these rights are slightly difficult to identify unambiguously. Kymlicka (1995) refers mainly to immigrant groups in his discussion of these rights. In Finland, the municipalities are the main producers of public services, and many of the services they provide in minority and immigrant languages can be seen as polyethnic rights (Wahlbeck 2013). The state also provides public services in three national languages (Finnish, Swedish and to a more limited extent Sami). However, the services in the national languages are not officially considered as specific *minority* rights, although separate linguistically-divided administrative solutions are very common. For example, there is a specific Swedish-speaking parallel structure in the area of education, although the same education laws and rules apply for both language groups. To apply different laws for the different language groups would, of course, be foreign to the Finnish principles of law and its emphasis on the equality of individuals. Actually, it is difficult to identify to what extent there are legal group-differentiated

rights as such in Finland, since the legislation tends to be explicitly based on rights of individuals. The collective rights for Samis constitute a case in point. The status as an indigenous people has been interpreted as a basis for granting *cultural and linguistic* rights, which has not been considered a difficult political issue in Finland, since these rights in practice mainly constitute individual rights. Yet, group-specific *economic* rights have been much more difficult to achieve. Land-rights for the Sami, and in connection to this the exclusive right to define who belong to the group of Samis, have been the object of heated debates in Northern Finland. The government of Finland has for a long time hesitated to ratify the ILO Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, exactly because of the legal difficulties and political opposition in connection to the implementation of economic rights for the Samis as a collective group (cf. Lehtola 2015). Likewise, in relation to the Swedish-speaking Finns, who are much fewer than the Finnish-speakers, much of the public debate has focused on an opposition to some (real or imagined) specific collective rights of the linguistic minority, rather than questioning individual rights. Parallel linguistically divided public services might be perceived by the majority as an unjust 'privilege' of the minority. Thus, an opposition to specific group-specific rights for Swedish-speakers exist in public debates, but on the other hand individual cultural rights seem to be generally accepted. A key dilemma is that individual and collective rights are difficult to distinguish from each other, especially in the case of language rights. Is a language an individual resource or a particular collective feature of a group? Clearly, it can be both. Kymlicka (1995: 45–48) argues, with a reference to French-speaking Canada, that language rights can be either individual or collective or both, depending on the situation. The international academic debates indicate that linguistic rights can constitute a key issue for both the realisation of basic human rights and the struggle for minority rights (Kymlicka and Patten 2003).

In conclusion, minority rights constitute complex issues and the best solutions are often the outcome of extensive dialogue and complex political processes (Rex 1996; Parekh 2000; Modood 2013). However, a key question is to what extent politicians are able and prepared to engage in a dialogue that can find the best solutions. Many politicians might look for easy populist solutions to these complicated challenges.

The Populist True Finns Party

As already mentioned, many social scientists argue that we since the late-1990s have witnessed a general political backlash against multicultural policies; while Kymlicka argues that the minority rights of old minorities have not been affected by this development. This leads to the question of how statements concerning minority rights made by the political party of the (True) Finns fit this development. The English name of the party has varied. The widely used translation the 'True Finns' was officially changed to the 'The Finns' after the election in 2011, other possible translations of the official Finnish name *Perussuomalaiset* could be the 'typical', 'fundamental', 'average' or 'ordinary' Finns. The (True) Finns party was founded in 1995 after the dissolution of the populist Finnish Rural Party. Timo Soini, formerly Party Secretary of the Finnish Rural Party, has been the party leader of the (True) Finns Party since the year 1997.

The True Finns won a historic electoral result in the Finnish parliamentary election in 2011, increasing their share of the votes from 4 to 19 per cent. In the 2015 election the

party got 18 percent of the votes, which confirmed its position as one the major parties in Finland. The party joined, for the first time in its history, the coalition government formed in 2015. In the Finnish political system, broad-based coalition governments are more the rule than an exception, and the fact that a populist party is in government is not unprecedented. Still, the political values and the rhetoric of the party can be quite different than the ones that can be found among other Finnish political parties. In the following, I analyse statements on minority rights in the official party programmes in the elections in 2011 and 2015 respectively (True Finns Party 2011a, 2011b; Finns Party 2015a, 2015b). This is followed by an analysis of explicit political statements on minority rights by MPs of the party.

The Official Party Programmes

The Finns party can be described as populist, nationalist and explicitly EU-critical. 'Populist' is a description that is embraced by the party itself. In an official statement of the values of the party, populism is described as an ideology that defends the interests of the individual citizen against the political elite and bureaucratic power structures (True Finns Party 2011a). According to political scientists (e.g. Gherghina, Mişcoiu and Soare 2013) a minimal definition of a populist party is that it must appeal to the 'people' and be against the 'elites', which the Finns party clearly claims to do. The political scientists Ann-Cathrine Jungar and Anders Jupskås (2014) have defined the party as a populist radical right party. The description as a radical right party is supported by its socioculturally authoritarian and value-conservative policies (cf. Keskinen 2012; Loch and Norocel 2015). Still, it is also socioeconomically centrist,

it has a strong agrarian background, and the rhetoric of the party tends to support traditional Nordic welfare policies rather than neoliberal values (cf. Elmgren 2015; Pyrhönen 2015). The party's own description of its values has been the following:

> The True Finns Party is a nationalist Christian-social party. We do not believe in the right-wing power of money or in the left-wing power of the system. We firstly believe in and trust the human being. All political solutions have to be based on humanity, in which a sense of community is essential. A sense of community is to a very large extent based on shared values and norms, and these also provide the possibility to develop a society and a nation. Democracy is people's power, and this is not possible without a people. The people and humanity are both primarily based on the sense of a community. (True Finns Party 2011a, translation from Finnish by the author)

As these value statements describe, the populist ideology of the party make references to the existence of a people that make up a unitary community, which needs shared values and norms to develop a society and a nation. Furthermore, the political rhetoric and the discourse provided by the party portray it as the representative of the Finnish people and the Finnish nation, i.e. the true and typical Finns that constitute the 'real' majority of the population in Finland, a stance that is reflected in the name of the party. In the parliamentary election in 2011, the party published a political programme consisting of a collection of statements. The party position on specific cultural questions and minority issues is outlined in some parts of this program. The need for a defence of an abstract 'Finnishness' is explicit in the rhetoric:

> Finnishness is Finland's gift to the world and the key to success for our society, also in the 21st century. We defend multiculturalism through defending our national identity. For True Finns, patriotism means selflessness. We must treasure the Finnish language. Cultural appropriations must be targeted to reinforce Finnish identity. Pseudo-artistic postmodernists can find their funding in the free market. The Finnish Broadcasting Company must be Finnish and deliver high quality. (True Finns Party 2011b)

In general, the election programme in 2011 display a concern for the future of Finnish culture, Finnish identity and Finland as an independent nation. The nation is under threat and needs to be defended. The threat comes from various societal developments, like globalisation, urbanisation, the EU, and from a multicultural society. However, the threats are not really explained in the programme and remain largely abstract.

In the most recent parliamentary election in 2015, the official party programmes of the Finns Party (2015a) became more detailed. Although the rhetoric followed similar lines of argument, the references to the intrinsic value of Finnish culture became less pronounced. Instead, general economic arguments were emphasised and the party portrayed itself as the defender of the economic interests of the Finnish people. This defence was pronounced both in relation to the Finnish state, the EU and in relation to immigration and minority groups in Finland. This 'defence of the Finnish people' had been part of the rhetoric already in earlier election campaigns. In a discourse analysis of anti-immigration debates supporting the party, Niko Pyrhönen (2015) argues that the debates since the early 2000s have been characterised by an exclusionary 'welfare nationalism'. Thus, like the previous party programme, the 2015 programme of the

party can be seen as being implicitly built upon a dichotomy between the real Finnish people and outsiders who threatened the interests of the Finnish people and who did not have an equal right to a share of the economic welfare. This dichotomy becomes especially evident in the specific programme for an immigration policy of the party, which in practice was formulated by the so-called 'immigration-critical' activists of the party. The programme concludes that 'Finland needs to abandon the last 25 years of thought that immigration and multiculturalism are intrinsically necessary and desirable concepts' (Finns Party 2015b: 7). The programme includes general demands for a consideration of the presumed economic burden of immigration, more restrictive asylum policies, restrictions on family reunification and end of all presumed policies of 'positive discrimination'. Furthermore, the programme states that gaining Finnish citizenship should not be regarded as a right, it should be a reward achieved after successful integration only.

A rhetoric that makes references to social issues, including national welfare and individual equality, is clearly found in the more recent party programmes. The culturalist and radical rhetoric of the election campaign in 2011 seems to have been downplayed in the more recent official party documents, a development that might be related to the party's ambitions to be in government. Still, as I will outline below, there are statements and activities of individual MPs of the party that continue to represent a pronounced exclusionary culturalist and nationalist rhetoric.

Minority Policy Statements of the True Finns MPs

The type of political statements found in the official party programmes of the (True) Finns Party are perhaps not that unusual, and similar ideas can be found among many other populist politicians in Europe. However, a more radical and extreme picture of the party emerges in the public statements on multiculturalism and minority rights made by some of the elected MPs. In 2011, the party became a relatively diverse party involving both traditional populist politicians as well as political extremists coming from a variety of nationalist, far-right and so-called 'immigration-critical' networks. Finnish anti-immigration activists had a visible presence on the internet in the early 2000s, and many of these activists subsequently joined the True Finns Party, and undoubtedly also provided the party with many voters (cf. Pyrhönen 2015). In the following, the focus is on MPs who belong to these anti-immigration activists, since the party statements on minority policies mainly are produced by these politicians.

A well-known commentator on minority politics in the party is Jussi Halla-aho, who was elected an MP in 2011 and a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) in 2014. He has a political history as an independent blogger, and has gained his reputation for testing the limits of free speech, particularly in his anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism, and anti-Islamist writings. In 2009, he received a court sentence for disturbing religious worship, which propelled his later political career. The case was ultimately settled by the Supreme Court in 2012, where the conviction was confirmed and a conviction for hatred against an ethnic group was added to the sentence. In his blog Halla-aho has, among other issues, warned about the dnger of a Muslim invasion in Europe. According to him, the immigration of Muslims has created a danger for the Western civilisation and a need to fight for the survival of Western culture, in which he

includes Finnish culture. According to this narrative, the culprits for this dangerous threat to Western civilisation are the 'multiculturalists' who have opened the borders of Europe. The colourful statements made by Halla-aho have been widely reported by the media in Finland, and are well known among the general public. Despite, or perhaps because of, these statements, he has gained a large electoral support in all elections he has taken part in. Because of the large number of votes Halla-Aho and other immigration-critical candidates are able to gather, they have also gained a strong position within the (True) Finns Party. For example, Halla-aho was one of the main authors of the party's official immigration policy document in 2015 (although he did not take part in the parliamentary election himself, declaring that he preferred to continue as an MEP rather than an MP).

As outlined earlier in this article, Kymlicka (2010) has argued that that the abandonment of multiculturalism has mostly occurred in policies relating to immigrant groups, while the fundamental multicultural issues relating to indigenous peoples and national minorities have not been disputed. This argument is not supported by my analysis; on the contrary, the minority policy statements of the party MPs are not limited to immigrant questions. There are also examples of explicit minority rights statements that relate to majority and minority relations in general. After the parliamentary election in 2011, the True Finns were encouraged in the media to make clear their position on racism. This led to a proclamation signed by the whole True Finns group of MPs 'Against Discrimination, Racism and Violence' on 25 May 2011 (YLE 2011). The collective statement proclaims that the MPs denounce all forms of racism and discrimination. In the text they stress (this is done in bold letters in the original press release in Finnish) the following: They denounce racism against *any*

group *regardless* of whether it is a majority or a minority. Furthermore, they denounce all *discrimination or privileges* based on ethnicity, language, culture, religion or similar factors. They also demand that all political and public decision makers and discussants take discrimination and violence equally seriously regardless of whether the victim is a member of *a minority or a majority.* 'We find univocally, that the authorities have to treat everybody as an individual, not as a representative of an ethnic, cultural or similar group. Nobody should ever, in any situation, be *punished or rewarded* for his background' (YLE 2011, translation from Finnish by the author). This proclamation can be seen as a statement against differential treatment and group-specific rights, and thus more generally against minority rights. Indeed, the subsequent comments made by various True Finns MPs made it clear that this was exactly how it was intended to be understood. Halla-aho, who largely had formulated the text, explained for the media that this was a statement against all forms of differential treatment, including 'positive discrimination' and 'minority quotas'.

In this discourse, among politicians of the True Finns Party, minority rights seem to be regarded as something that diminishes the rights of the majority. This general impression is further strengthened by other actions of party MPs. In the autumn of 2011, MP Olli Immonen suggested that the office of the Ombudsman for Minorities should be abolished, since according to him its activities had tried to limit the freedom of speech guaranteed by the Constitution of Finland. In the budget debates in the Parliament, the party MPs has among other issues suggested cut backs in the funding of the Swedish Assembly and a renegotiation of the economic relation with the autonomous region of the Åland Islands (Pyrhönen 2012, 135).

The logic behind the rhetoric of the MPs seems to be that there exists a majority that is regarded as the discriminated and threatened group in society. This reverse logic resembles what the Finnish sociologist Suvi Keskinen (2012) has labelled a 'politics of reversal' in anti-immigration politics in the Nordic countries. She argues that while equality is a core value of the Nordic welfare state model, the anti-immigration discourse has been able to re-mould the discourse of gender equality and use it for the purpose of an exclusionary agenda portrayed as free speech supporting equality (Keskinen 2012: 270). I would like to add that a 'politics of reversal' is not limited to the discourse of gender equality. Actually, a reverse logic seems to be applied to minority-majority relations and minority rights in general. In the rhetoric of the Finns Party, Finnish people are portrayed as a majority group that is the victim of discrimination and a group whose interests need to be defended.

After the parlaimentary election in 2015, the so-called 'immigration-critical' activists seem to have consolidated a strong position in the party. The activists include MP Immonen who triggered a huge public debate in Finland in 2015. In June 2015 he participated in a nationalist gathering attended by members of the small neo-Nazi group the Finnish Defence League, whose members have been involved in numerous criminal activities, including violent attacks. This was followed by a in Finnish media widely reported Facebook-update on 25 July 2015 where MP Immonen wrote (for some unknown reason in English):

> I'm dreaming of a strong, brave nation that will defeat this nightmare called multiculturalism. This ugly bubble that our enemies live in, will soon enough burst into a million little pieces. Our lives are entwined in a very harsh times.

> These are the days, that will forever leave a mark on our nations future. I have strong belief in my fellow fighters. We will fight until the end for our homeland and one true Finnish nation. The victory will be ours. (YLE 2015)

This update was published only a few days after the 4-year anniversary of the Breivik terrorist attacks in Norway. The resemblance of the rhetoric with that of the Breivik manifesto, together with MP Immonen's documented contacts with neo-Nazis, led to an unprecedented public furore in Finland and numerous anti-racist demonstrations in 2015. Immonen himself explained that he had been misunderstood and he condemned non-parliamentary methods in the fight against multiculturalism, but he also defended his right to free speech. Yet, he did not explain for main stream media exactly what he meant by multiculturalism. The public furore and heated political debate that followed his original statement probably also prevented any dialogue about what exactly 'multiculturalism' might be. He did explain in a web-journal of the Finns Party that he "fights politically against extreme forms of multiculturalism", and gave as explicit examples quotas for immigrant children at municipal summer camps, the prohibition of *Suvivirsi* and Christmas celebrations in schools, and the increase of radicalization in Finland (*Suomen Uutiset* 29 July 2015). The infamous statement made by Immonen may have been inspired by the general discourse of the presumed 'failure of multiculturalism', which has been voiced also by mainstream politicians in Europe (cf. Joppke 2014). Many activists in the Finns Party felt that the negative attention the statement had received was out of proportion. For example, Halla-aho in a Facebook update on 26 July 2015 found it to be strange that it was considered news that politicians in the Finns Party were opposed to multiculturalism. Party activists have also widely and repeatedly held that the party is a victim of negative reporting in the

main stream media. According to this view, it is the 'established media' and politically biased journalists that are to be blamed for the negative portrayal of the party.

It is difficult to judge to what extent the Finns Party accepts or shares the more radical political opinions of their MPs. The party leader Timo Soini has repeatedly and over a long period of time declined to take a responsibility for the individual racist statements of his MPs (e.g. BBC 2013). The case of Immonen in 2015 largely followed the pattern of previous media attention on radical statements by MPs of the Finns party; the party as such is reluctant to explicitly condemn the statements[1]. There seems to be a repeating pattern where politicians active in the party express extreme political views, while the party officials decline to take any responsibility for the views and declare them to be the private opinions of individual MPs. In any case, the party has accepted both Halla-aho and Immonen as members of the party, and the party has provided them with a platform and position from which they can get their voice heard. It can be concluded that the Finns party has been unable or unwilling to delimit itself from extreme nationalists and the far right, and it is an open question how much power and influence the radical so called 'immigration-critical' group has within the party. The balance between the more traditional value-conservative populists and the radical 'immigration-critical' fractions of the party has probably become more delicate since the party joined the coalition government in 2015. As a member of a coalition government, the party has been forced to make many difficult political compromises concerning EU-policy, austerity measures and immigration and asylum policy, which many of the more radical party members and supporters undoubtedly have found difficult to swallow. Yet, the party also depends on the

electoral support from the more radical voters and the party policies in 2015 may be interpreted as a double strategy to be both a responsible government coalition partner and a radical populist movement at the same time.

Discussion

This article has described an explicit opposition to minority rights among members of the populist party of the (True) Finns Party. It has not been possible in this article to give an exhaustive overview of the opinions of the party, or of its MPs. For example, the MPs have given various explanations for their political statements. Still, the point in presenting the public statements in this article is to exemplify the fundamental questioning of minority rights that we can find today in populist rhetoric. In the election programmes, the Finns party portrays itself as the representative of the Finnish people, the Finnish nation, i.e. the true Finns that are assumed to constitute the real majority of the population. Furthermore, this people and nation are portrayed as being under threat and in need to be defended. In this political discourse, multiculturalism and minority rights constitute threats to the rights of the majority. The discourse is supported by a rhetoric that presumes an oppositional relationship between majority rights and group-specific minority rights. Thus, the discourse paints an imaginary picture of a people and a nation that is threatened by the rights of minorities, who by definition do not belong to the people and the nation. As a populist party, the Finns party claims to be a representative of the people and a political mobilisation for a defence of the majority is called upon. In this populist political discourse, minorities do not seem to have any rights of their own; the only thing that counts is majority rule. The general discourse seems to be that rights belong to the majority and not to the minority; members of

majorities can claim rights but members of minorities cannot claim rights. If cultural minorities claim cultural rights it might be considered a threat to society, since society according to the party's own value statement is based on a unitary culture, i.e. 'the shared values and norms' of the people (True Finns Party 2011a).

As outlined in the beginning of this article, Kymlicka (2010) argues that the international backlash and retreat from multiculturalism has mainly occurred in relation to the acceptance of ethnic-cultural diversity among *immigrant groups*. Likewise, studies of populist parties in Scandinavia have described the central role played by anti-immigration policies in the policy agenda of the parties (Widfeldt 2015; Hellström 2016). It appears that these assessments are not completely accurate in the case of the minority policy statements of the (True) Finns party and its MPs. The statements that have been presented in this article are not only about policies relating to immigrants. Actually, any real or imagined minority who is not considered truly Finnish, or not considered sufficiently representing 'Finnishness', can become the target of the rhetoric. Furthermore, the rhetoric is not limited to specific policies; instead the fundamental principles of group-specific rights for minorities are disputed. In populist rhetoric, the appeal to the 'people' is probably easy to combine with an emphasis on the rights of the 'majority', but as I have described in this article, the rhetoric can also take one step further and connect a defence of majority rights with an opposition to collective group-specific rights for minorities. In fact, the 2011 statement of the MPs of the party displays an explicit attack on differential treatment and minority rights. The discourse against group-specific rights seems to be based on an extreme individualistic perspective on society. The MPs 'find univocally, that the authorities have to treat everybody as an individual' (YLE 2011).

The populist rhetoric has simplified complex political issues; slogans referring to individual rights, equality and welfare are frequently used as arguments by the (True) Finns party. The populist and individualistic rhetoric might actually be one reason for the popular support of the party. In the case of Finland, individual equality is a political goal which finds much support among the general public and a goal that can be incorporated into the idea of the Nordic welfare state. In Finnish society, public administration and legal traditions are largely based on a universal and individualistic tradition; in this tradition collective group-differentiated rights easily seem to become far more controversial and complicated political questions than is the case with individual rights. Public services are in Finland usually provided according to universal principles based on traditional individual rights, but some specific group-differentiated rights have also been applied, most clearly in the case of indigenous peoples and old national minorities. As outlined in this article, these (presumed or real) collective group-specific rights are the ones that often become the target of the populist rhetoric of the (True) Finns party.

Social scientists have outlined various models of multicultural policies that combine group-specific rights and individual rights. Yet, there is reason to emphasise that the minority also needs to get its voice heard in the political arena. The alternative to making the voice of the minority heard is the hegemony of majority rule, which leaves the minorities wholly dependent on the goodwill of the state and its majority. As the populist rhetoric presented in this article indicates, this goodwill is not always present. Rather, the rhetoric can be based on a reverse logic where the members of the majority are portrayed as the victims of discrimination. The possible implications of this rhetoric

are not only limited to discursive changes. Minorities are often dependent on the state and state policy. In the Nordic welfare state model, welfare services are administered by a large public sector, which in practice also implement the minority policies. Minority policies are therefore largely subject to political control and dependent on state funding, which makes minorities vulnerable in the case of policy change. Thus, political parties are able to significantly influence minority policies. It is therefore important to examine the minority rights discourse found in statements of populist parties. As the case of the Finns Party indicates, these parties can obtain mass electoral support and the possibility to influence policies from positions in government.

Notes

[1] In connection to the widespread public debate following the Facebook update of Immonen in 2015, the slow reaction and relatively modest condemnations from the Finns Party drew attention in Finnish media (e.g. YLE 2015). The party leader Timo Soini was on holiday and did not comment on the incident. The Party Secretary Riikka Slunga-Poutsalo commented that Immonen's words were not well chosen, but the party as such did not take any immediate actions since it was up to the parliamentary group to discuss the issue with Immonen, when they eventually would meet two months later. In the end, Immonen was, formally at his own request, temporarily suspended from the group for a few months.

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