

# Right-wing populist media events in Schengen Europe

## The negotiated border discourse in-between nation states

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Leaders of European right-wing populism (RWP) have developed speeches about the state border control required to protect the “people” electing them. Nevertheless, are these RWP narratives necessarily circulated during populist media events that take place in the symbolic locations of European integration? It is argued that border control discourse in these EU places can be mitigated by RWP actors, but also emphasized by the media depending on the separated predispositions of politicians and reporters to address the border issue in a given context. Bourdieusian “field theory” is used in this article to grasp the potential differentiated discursive positioning. Based on a comparative analysis of RWP media events organized in the town of Schengen in Luxembourg, the investigation allows us to shed new light on the specificities of populism in the media.

**Keywords:** right-wing populism, media events, borders, field theory, journalism, critical discourse analysis

### 1. Introduction

Media events have been defined as particular live broadcasted moments instrumental in uniting society (Dayan & Katz 1992; Katz & Liebes 2007; Dayan 2008). The dramatic media events of the past 20 years, from terrorist attacks to migrant crises, have been a context favoring the emergence or strengthening of Right-Wing Populism (RWP) parties, the distinctive discourse of which has consisted of contrasting a pure people with a corrupt elite and threatening “others” (Canovan 2004; Mudde 2004; Rydgren 2017). These parties and their active supporters have been especially good at producing viral events through the mass media and social

media. These circulated events do not have the power of unification of a live, tragic terrorist attack, but to paraphrase Billig (1995), their insidious repetition in a routinized media agenda can be viewed as strategic disruptive elements of a broader “banal populism”: a series of sensationalist narratives/attitudes helping to keep alive and visible their antagonistic dimension in a less agitated public sphere. RWP media events can be defined as transgressing “popular media events” (Hepp & Couldry 2010, 8) produced to attract the attention of a community of viewers on a regular basis.

Populist parties and leaders at the core of media events, as well as the mass media circulating them, diffuse a representation of geographical space. These representations are linked to what can be termed a “MediaSpace,” meaning “the kinds of space created by media and the effects that existing spatial arrangements have on media forms as they materialize in everyday life” (Couldry & MacArthur 2004, 2). By “spatial arrangements,” we refer to all the structural and contextual settings associated with material and ideational space. These settings determine both the selection and the framing of information, such as for instance the territory from which populist representatives built up their political legitimacy and where their “people” are located, as well as the relevance of this territorial entity for a readership/audience targeted by the media and embedded in a given territory (Lamour 2021a). As the existence of most media is determined by its effective circulation among a public contained within nation states, the state border is a major physical and symbolic boundary determining the type of space represented by the media. In parallel, as populist parties, leaders, and followers are also contained within nation states, they can be keen on using the same state border in their confrontational people vs. others narratives. This is illustrated by the “Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall!” leitmotiv chanted by U.S. citizens during the 2016 Trump electoral campaign, to emphasize the needed closure of the U.S.-Mexico border. The state border conceived as a necessary barrier is also circulated by European RWP leaders (Lamour 2019a, 2021b; Lamour & Varga 2020). Nevertheless, there has been a lack of investigation into the meaning of state borders during populist media events in the EU, as well as how contextual and structural elements are negotiated both by politicians and reporters to circulate a specific representation of borders during these events.

European RWP leaders have been keen on criticizing a “Borderless Europe.” The “Europe of Schengen” is the negatively connoted expression used by them to symbolize the open border policies, promoted by the scapegoated liberal elite controlling the EU against the interests of the people. By comparison, “Fortress Europe” is a key spatial basis of right-wing “meta-populism” (de Cleen 2017; Lamour 2020, 2021b) uniting RWP parties beyond state borders; that is, the controlled territory where the coalesced “us” is found – the peoples of Europe. How-

ever, what is the exact border discourse circulated by European populist leaders and the media during events organized in the symbolic locations of European integration, such as the town of Schengen in Luxembourg? It is argued that RWP agents and the reporters present at media events in this type of EU location can circulate a multiplicity of border narratives, because discourse is viewed as the product of the negotiation between a constantly changing contextual environment and routinized practices to address a given phenomenon within political and journalistic fields. Following a review of the literature on media events, field theory, and the populist representation of borders, the argument, the methodology, and the case studies are presented. The investigation is developed in three main parts. The first is a comparative analysis of the border discourse circulated in the chosen events by the selected populist leader, while the second is dedicated to the border narratives added by reporters for their audience. The third part comprises an exploration of the structure/agency dynamics within each field that lead to a diversity of spoken or written texts on borders. A concluding discussion addresses what the analysis of media events can bring to the investigation of populism in the media.

## **2. Media events, fields of power, and the border from a right-wing populist perspective**

Media events are live broadcasting moments, which become parts of social life; from coronations to the darkest events such as disasters (Dayan & Katz 1992; Katz & Liebes 2007; Dayan 2008). Media events have been approached as inclusive elements of people's life, embedded within particular nations. They can give rise to multiple interpretations; especially across state borders, as the meaning of events can be different depending on nations (Couldry & Hepp 2017). RWP stakeholders, whose discourse consists of contrasting a corrupt elite with a pure people also threatened by "others" such as migrants (Canovan 2004; Mudde 2004; Rydgren 2017), have been especially good at promoting a wide variety of disruptive live events. These RWP media events can be planned and ceremonial. However, there is also the direct production and use of videos on social media associating disruptive representations with the political claims, such as the live streamed videos stigmatizing migrants on the Facebook page of Matteo Salvini, the leader of the Italian *Lega* (Kalia et al. 2018). Not all RWP audiovisual communications can be considered as a media event. Populist media events are those attracting the mass media and/or produced in the social media with a view to reach a popular public in terms of masses or social classes. Populist media events are a form of "popular media events" (Hepp & Couldry 2010, 8); that is, regular audiovisual events set-

ting against each other the pure “people,” the corrupt “elite,” and the threatening “others” to keep the populist sensationalism and disruption alive.

Disruptive media events, in the same way as consensual ones, put representatives of the journalistic sphere in a difficult position of potential exploitation by the establishment and anti-establishment behind these events (Katz & Liebes 2007, 164). Serving the anti-establishment – especially RWP parties that portray themselves as the main force of the political anti-establishment in Europe (van Spanje 2011) – has been viewed respectively as wittingly or unwittingly depending on two attitudes of the mass media (Esser et al. 2017): direct support (populism *by* the media) or information (populism *through* the media). The public broadcasters and the elite press occupying a dominant position in the journalistic profession, have been viewed as somewhat distant from the “anti-establishment” populist movements whereas the tabloid press and commercial broadcasters have been considered more open to them (Lamour 2019a, 2021b; Mazzoleni 2008; Moffit 2016). This differentiated attitude of the media can be related to Bourdieusian fields of power and tensions (Lamour 2019b). Political parties and the professional mass media are structured within respective fields, with internal dynamics based on “partial revolutions” (Bourdieu 1995, 74); that is, the entry of newcomers eager to impose new rules, but needing to respect the code of conduct of the field they enter in order to secure their legitimate presence in it. Field theory can be relevant with regard to exploring populist media events, and more precisely the discourse produced by political actors and how this discourse is remobilized by reporters. It enables us to grasp the structure/agency dynamics involving two aspects. First, the stabilized panoply of skills and attitudes used by politicians and journalists when addressing an issue; that is, their *habitus* structured on past socialization (Bourdieu 1984, 6). Second, the constantly evolving interactional context of the political discourse production and media representation, requiring both politicians and reporters to select their most appropriate skills and attitudes to this context. From a field theory perspective, political and journalistic agents can be approached as “plural actors” (Lahire 2011, xii), organizing their practices based on a series of various functional, pre-defined, and field-specific templates or genres adapted to a given situation. For example, interviews, political meeting speeches, or representations aimed at the formation of public opinion, but also at the self-presentation of speakers (Krzyżanowski 2010, 2014; Wodak 2001).

Furthermore, as suggested by Bourdieu, political and journalistic fields are becoming progressively heteronomous, with increasing inclusion of external values that influence the respective structural “rules of the game” (Bourdieu 2005). The dominance of external “offer and demand” business values in the journalistic field has become evident with the destabilization of media business models since

the 1980s and the increasing importance given to routinized *infotainment*, sensationalism, and popular news to limit audience loss. These “offer and demand” business values have also affected political actors. Marketed political leaders have been progressively “sold” to an audience based on their appearance, depoliticized persona, and capability to entertain. The populist leaders have an advantage over their opponents in this last domain due to their communication style, which is often based on coarse, uninhibited, popular, personalized, and dramatizing judgment (Lamour 2020; Ostiguy 2017; Wodak & Krzyżanowski 2017). Their presence in the media promises the circulation of sensationalist or shocking narratives, and the expected subsequent enlargement of the media audience (Mazzoleni 2008). Other values have also been absorbed within the political field. The development of European integration and the building-up of the European parliament have, for instance, favored political interactions crosscutting nation states. This has led to the inclusion in the political field of what can be termed “paradiplomacy” values (Keating 1999, 11); that is, more pacified political interactions, interactions that are more functionally specific and targeted (often opportunistic and experimental) than diplomacy, and that imply politically-driven considerations. In parallel, within states, the heteronomous tendency of the political and journalistic fields can take place with the massive and sudden arrival of newcomers refusing to respect the rules of the game. The *Gilets Jaunes* uprising – which destabilized the French public sphere in late 2018 and early 2019 with an initial support of a majority of French people – exemplifies this phenomenon. It revealed the existence of a heterogeneous group of citizens arguing for social justice, entering public debate outside party politics, and refusing to institutionalize themselves. These citizens were also mobilized through social media and showed mistrust and sometimes violence toward the professional mass media being perceived as part of the establishment (Kipfer 2019; Lianos 2019; Royall 2019).

The European RWP parties and leaders that play the card of political anti-establishment movements, distrusting the mainstream mass media and communicating through social media, take part in the reconfiguration of tensions in the journalistic and political fields. They present themselves as stigmatized parties, representing the people and dominated by the mainstream mass media and political groups representing different heads of the same elite (Lamour 2021c, 2021d). These tensions within fields animated by these populist representatives are expressed notably during media events, while the state borders related to the populist process of inclusion and exclusion (Wodak 2011, 2018) can be used to express the tensions within fields. The border is then presented as a physical gate, the openness of which is encouraged by the liberal and mobile political/journalistic elite for its own interests, whereas it should be reinstated as a protective shield for a rooted people threatened by global flows. The border is an integral part of

the “Somewheres” (us) vs. “Anywheres” (them) discourse, securing the attraction of RWP among large segments of the society that feel threatened by globalization (Goodhart 2017). The populist discourse mobilizing borders and expressing tensions within fields of power is based on this stabilized people vs. elite opposition, accompanied by the inclusion of “others” to be stopped at the border; meaning migrants. However, the populist discourse can also be somewhat “chameleonic” (Taggart 2000), especially concerning: the identity of the people, the elite, and the others; the nature of the threat; and the type of border control to be implemented to prevent this threat (Biancalana & Mazzoleni 2020; Lamour 2020, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d).

The narratives associated with state borders during RWP media events express the existence of a “MediaSpace” (Couldry & MacArthy 2004, 2), and more precisely the presence of spatial arrangements affecting agents of the political and journalistic fields present during these media events. These spatial arrangements, which have been little researched, include the territories where politicians secure their elections and where their electorate is embedded, and the territories where reporters have their audience (Lamour 2021a). The spatial arrangements can be central to explain the border discourse produced by populist representatives and reporters when populist media events take place in a symbolic location associated with European integration. The “Europe of Schengen” is an expression often mentioned in RWP border narratives to symbolize the borderless Europe, threatening the people and powered by an irresponsible and failing elite. However, how can we qualify the border discourse produced by populist leaders and circulated by the media during populist media events in locations symbolizing the European integration such as the town of Schengen in Luxembourg? Do populist leaders emphasize the border control needed to protect the “people” electing them in their home territories while reporters simply reproduce this message?

### 3. Argument, methodology, and case studies

It is argued that the populist media event discourse about state borders in European locations such as Schengen can be multi-faceted, because of the structure/agency dynamics within the fields of politics and journalism leading to differentiated narratives. Populist politicians can use a discourse that mitigates their border control for the good of “their people,” while reporters can unwittingly promote the populist border control narratives. This stems from the different *habitus* mobilized in each field to address border issue in a given political, journalistic, and spatial context. Populist stakeholders and reporters are expected to be “plural actors”

(Lahire 2011, xii), representing the border based on the use of ingrained skills and attitudes most appropriate in a given situation.

The methodology in the current article consists of using a Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) in Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the discourse and visual representations circulated in relation to borders during these media events. DHA is an appropriate approach, because its goal is to examine a discourse based on the systematic use of available background information constitutive of the multiple layers of the discursive production. This production expresses the routinized adaptation of inherited templates or genres (Krzyżanowski 2010, 2014; Wodak 2001, 2018). DHA can help to deconstruct the sequences of dissimilation (otherness) and assimilation (sameness) structuring the discursive antagonism between “us” and “them” that is inherent to populist-related discourse (de Cillia et al. 2013; van Dijk 1998, 2013). The scope of this article is to investigate the antagonistic *nomination*, *predication*, *argumentation*, and *perspectivation* (Wodak 2001, 2015; Richardson & Wodak 2013) associated with state borders; that is, respectively the definition of groups, their attributes, the justification of attributes, and the positioning of populist leaders in the argumentation concerning issues in relation to state borders. For each selected discourse, the most central dimensions of the discursive strategy are investigated (nomination, predication, argumentation, and perspectivation).

The research is based on a comparison of two media events organized around a RWP politician, Florian Philippot. Philippot was the architect of the relaunch of the French *Front National* in the 2010s (Chrisafis 2017), notably by softening the communication style of the party, a process also termed as the “Haiderization” (Wodak 2015, 2) of RWP parties’ rhetoric, including more coded antagonistic messages. Philippot came to Schengen on 19 September 2015 to lay a funeral wreath for the Schengen Treaty and cross-border free circulation, during the heated 2015 migrant crisis and a few weeks before the French regional elections. In those elections, he was a *Front National* candidate for the presidency of the Greater Eastern Region “Alsace-Lorraine-Champagne-Ardenne” facing Luxembourg. His second visit took place on 9 May 2019 (the day of Europe), a few weeks before the European election in which he presented himself as the leader of his own party, *Les Patriotes*, officially supported by Nigel Farage (one of the architects of Brexit).<sup>1</sup>

The data used to carry out the research on the political and journalistic narratives are the audiovisual contents circulated by broadcasters and social media during the event, to which we added the content of newspapers articles produced for the occasion. The 2015 event was structured essentially around the substantial presence of the mass media from France and Luxembourg, while the one in

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1. [www.facebook.com/philippot.f/posts/2170605223023679](http://www.facebook.com/philippot.f/posts/2170605223023679)

2019 was organized almost exclusively around the Facebook page controlled by Philippot. The TV news bulletin and newspapers databases in Luxembourg and in France were searched for the week after both events. We used the keywords “Philippot” and “Schengen” to capture the maximum number of distinctive narratives produced by the French populist leader and reporters in relation to these events. The EDD and Europresse database were used to isolate French media content, while that for Luxembourg was accessible thanks to direct collection of data from the existing three major media companies: RTL, Saint-Paul, and Editpress. All the collected content was analyzed to obtain a synthetic vision of the media events, but the CDA is organized around the most distinctive narratives produced by Philippot and those added by reporters in the original languages (French, German, and Luxembourgish). These narratives help us to grasp the border discourse circulated in each context. The analysis also takes into consideration parallel visual or verbal messages associated with borders and produced on the site by the selected populist party and its representatives.

#### 4. Populist media events in Schengen Europe: Approaching the border discourse with Bourdieu and DHA

The messages delivered by Philippot during the two events were multi-faceted and do not exactly correspond to the most obvious one associated with RWP: that of the border conceived as a protective barrier for people inscribed in the specific nation state or regional “container” where the electoral legitimacy of populist parties is based. The mass media were indirectly more involved than Philippot himself in the promotion of this standardized vision, which could attract his electorate. Following an investigation of the narratives circulated by Philippot and journalists, research is developed on the structure/agency dynamics within the fields of politics and journalism explaining this discursive diversity.

##### 4.1 Philippot in Schengen: Claiming protective borders for the French people?

The event that took place in 2015 shows a structural dissociation between the live discourse of Philippot on borders, the fixed slogan of the *Front National* circulated on the spot, and the singing of the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*. Philippot and the other activists of the *Front National* singing the anthem took place at the border between France and Luxembourg, and more precisely at the edge of the border town of Schengen. The staged and filmed collective singing expressed the symbolic state closure between France and Luxembourg.



However, this event was not necessarily in the style of Philippot. He was half-smiling, lowering his head and then raising his eyes toward the sky, seemingly as an embarrassed spectator rather than a truly mobilized participant. This contrasted with the other members of the *Front National* near him (including the MEP, Dominique Bilde) who sang vehemently as if they were at a popular sporting event.<sup>2</sup> On the same spot, a poster clearly about the French border control – which was probably approved by Philippot as the communications strategist of the party – was presented. It is a French-focused representation bearing the second most important national emblem of France after *La Marseillaise*: the three colored French flag, on which two feet wearing sneakers are walking, while pairs of legs we can guess as belonging to male migrants are represented behind the feet, not respecting the French national flag.<sup>3</sup> The represented limbs can be assimilated to the ones of (male) migrants, as the main slogan of the placard is “To stop the massive immigration!” while the second heading says “Enough of Schengen!” This poster portrayed the idea that male migrants arriving on French ground did not respect France. It was time to stop them at a protective French border by getting rid of the Schengen Treaty. However, the narratives of Philippot in Schengen on 19 September 2015, considered the most central ones by the mass media, were different in many ways.

First, his 2015 *perspectivation* – his direct involvement in favor of rebordering – consisted of going to Schengen to lay a wreath “to the memory of free circulation” and to “celebrate the return of national borders within the EU” (Piatkowski 2015, 4), not to organize a march in Luxembourg to react against the disrespectful male migrants invading France. Second, the speeches given during his interviews to the TV stations present locally (*RTL Lëtzebuerg*, *France 3*, *BFMTV*) help to reveal the chameleonic nature of populist discourse. In the first speech selected by *France 3*, the closure of the French border (and borders in general) was not made an issue. The *predication* associated with the out-group of migrants that would justify the control of the border was not negative. They were not portrayed as a disrespectful crowd marching toward France, requiring the closure of the French border, but a neutral community: “the migrants.” The main *argumentation* was not organized around the legitimate physical or cultural threat to French people posed by disrespectful migrants, but based on the relatively low-key issue of mobilizing the radical right electorate, the “*topos of economics*” (Wodak 2015, 53): “We are lacking means to welcome migrants,” “Taxpayers don’t have to pay for

2. <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/grand-est/regionales-2015-florian-philippot-depose-une-gerbe-schengen-811037.html> (video – start of the singing of *La Marseillaise*: 1.10 min.)

3. <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/grand-est/regionales-2015-florian-philippot-depose-une-gerbe-schengen-811037.html>

this major immigration.” The argumentation was organized around two opposite groups, not separated by the French state border. An irresponsible group, indicated by the French indefinite third person pronoun “*On*,” helping migrants to take risks crossing the Mediterranean sea and welcoming them in different locations in Europe, versus another indefinite “*On*,” who could not afford to accommodate these migrants. There was no clear promotion of French rebordering within the EU, but a desire to protect taxpayers in general and to reinforce an external fortress Europe – which is sometimes viewed as one of the purposes of the EU with the constantly reinforced Frontex agency.<sup>4</sup> The discourse of Philippot circulated by the Luxembourg TV news bulletin on *RTL Letzebuerg* was very different in terms of argumentation. The blocking of the “French” border was never mentioned by Philippot, who indicated “borders” as necessary “filters” to stop illegal migrants and a series of cross-border criminal flows anyone could agree with, such as the trafficking of guns. He used the example of border control in Germany and in Austria in the then migrant crisis, but not in France where the socialist government of François Hollande had already put in place the policy of border control since June 2015 at the Italian border. Philippot was promoting a broader European system of partial rebordering to justify the ending of the Schengen Agreement.<sup>5</sup> The message delivered on *BFMTV* was partly inaudible due to the presence of the pro-Schengen crowd, but a confused Philippot said about his opponents that “they celebrate the end of borders with us,” when he had come to celebrate the end of the free cross-border circulation in Europe.<sup>6</sup> The discourse of Philippot mentioned in the French and Luxembourg press in relation to the 2015 media event was relatively limited, except in a few French newspapers: on one side, the dominant newspaper in the French Lorraine (*Le Républicain Lorrain*) and on the other side, three dominant right-wing French national elite media outlets with the same journalistic source (the daily *Le Figaro* and the weekly *Le Point* and *L'Express*). In all these French newspapers, Philippot does not mention the issue of the “French,” border control and the protection of French people. Furthermore, there is continuity between the narratives given to the French regional TV (*France 3*) and the regional press (*Le Républicain Lorrain*) on the “*topos of economics*” (Wodak 2015, 53).

The two speeches produced by Philippot in 2019 place another focus on the border. The first, given in a YouTube video, centered on the issue of border con-

4. <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/grand-est/regionales-2015-florian-philippot-depose-une-gerbe-schengen-811037.html> (video – discourse starts at 1.32 min.)

5. [www.rtl.lu/news/national/archiv/711362.html](http://www.rtl.lu/news/national/archiv/711362.html) (video – discourse starts at 2.22 min.)

6. [www.bfmtv.com/mediaplayer/video/florian-philippot-l-ambitieux-651101.html](http://www.bfmtv.com/mediaplayer/video/florian-philippot-l-ambitieux-651101.html) (video – discourse starts at 1.04 min.)

trol and extra-European migration. It was similar to that in 2015, and again without a clear focus on France. For Philippot, border control was mainly needed to save the life of migrants who were incited to come to Europe due to open borders. Schengen, as stated by Philippot, was “the cradle of Europe without borders [that] has become the coffins for many”; obviously the migrants. It was no longer the “topos of economics” that justified border control in Europe, but above all a humanitarian-style *argumentation* to which he also added the presence of terrorist risks and criminal trafficking, but only as secondary elements in the concluding remarks.<sup>7</sup> The second speech, disseminated in a video posted on Facebook by Philippot, centered around an issue leading to intense cross-border flows between France and Luxembourg: the price of petrol being far lower in the Grand Duchy. The issue in this video, taken near a petrol station in Schengen, was not about reinstating a closed border between France and Luxembourg to prevent the disappearance of an in-group of French petrol stations in Lorraine suffering because of the concurrence of an out-group of Luxembourg petrol stations offering cheaper fuel. It was about showing that once in power, the party of Philippot – *Les Patriotes* – would cut taxes on French fuel to make it as cheap as in Luxembourg.<sup>8</sup> No state bordering was proposed by Philippot. The architect of the rebirth of the *Front National* in France in the 2010s was never eager to present directly the border as a shield for “French” people who secure his election. The mass media circulating the 2015 events were actually more involved in diffusing a state national tension around the French border, which could unify his electorate.

#### 4.2 The mass media unwittingly serve the populist “anti-establishment”: The border as a closed and nationalized line of tension

In 2015, the event was centered on Philippot coming to Schengen to lay a wreath “to the memory of free circulation.” It was a populist and ironic appropriation of one of the major forms of media events: public funerals (Dayan & Katz 1992). This sensational aspect could not but attract the mass media, which could be given to wittingly or unwittingly serve the forces of the populist self-defined anti-establishment in the same way as those of the establishment (Katz & Liebes 2007; Mazzoleni 2008). In total, this event was presented by at least 25 French and Luxembourg mass media outlets including three major TV news channels, most of the newspapers circulated in Luxembourg (online and print),<sup>9</sup> and also in many

7. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5G5MtzhcwY&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5G5MtzhcwY&feature=youtu.be)

8. [www.facebook.com/philippot.f/videos/479151139551225/](http://www.facebook.com/philippot.f/videos/479151139551225/)

9. Luxemburger Wort, Tageblatt, L'essentiel, Le Quotidien, Lëtzebuerg Journal, and Le Jeudi.

French regional and national dailies and weekly information magazines.<sup>10</sup> A total audience of more than 10 million people (half a million in the Grand Duchy and 9.5 million in France) were reached, without taking into consideration the French 24-hour news channel *BFMTV*, with news repeated all day long that can be watched daily by up to 20 million people. In the long term, it was the photograph of Philippot near the barred sign for the commune of Schengen that became viral in other mass media such as the *BBC* (Leggett 2015).

None of the French and Luxembourg mass media defended the Philippot's move in Schengen to celebrate the end of free circulation within Europe. They also shared a common ground: an emphasis on the opponents of Philippot and the *Front National*, especially two executive politicians. These are Robert Goebbels, the Luxembourg ex-secretary of state who signed the Schengen Treaty and came to confront Philippot in Schengen, and Jean Asselborn, the foreign affairs minister of the Grand Duchy in post who reacted via a communiqué. Nevertheless, by presenting the event and the clash between pro and anti-Schengen groups, the media unwittingly circulated a vision of the border in line with the RWP narratives. This vision was of a clear physical, cultural, and political line of separation between people characterized by their nationality: a French *Front National* leader opposed to two Luxembourg politicians at or on the border; a French leader and his followers confronted by a "pro-European" militants with sometimes the evocation of German "extremists." This is an example of populist promotion *through* the media and not *by* the media (Esser et al. 2017). The mass media promotes populist antagonism around a state border by reporting the physical and verbal confrontation at the border and by letting opponents of the *Front National* disseminate oppositional ideas to the RWP vision of borders. These ideas did not exactly contradict what Philippot stated on the spot, but contradicted what could attract the electorate of the *Front National*; that is, the need for sealed and protective state borders. As mentioned earlier, the *nomination* of borders by Philippot was structured around the idea of "filters" and not "closure" to stop exclusively "illegal" migration; only for economic reasons and without focusing on French re-bordering. On their part, Philippot's opponents *nominated* what the growing electorate of the *Front National* at the national scale wanted to hear, namely the existence of foreign out-groups (Luxembourgers, Germans, etc.) opposed to the return of the state border "closure" – a closure perceived among the French electorate of the *Front National* as protection. By providing information about the event and the Luxembourg politicians confronting the *Front*

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10. Non-exhaustive list: Le Républicain Lorrain, Vosges Matin, L'Est Eclair, L'Union, L'Ardenais, Nord Littoral, Le Dauphiné Libéré, le Courrier de l'Ouest, le Télégramme, Le Figaro, Le Parisien, 20 Minutes, Le Point, L'Express, and L'Obs.

*National*, the mass media helped to create the media event around the strategic and quiet Philippot. Nevertheless, why did Philippot never talk in Schengen about borders as a necessary protection for “French” sovereign people to be reinstalled, and why did the mass media indirectly do so in 2015?

#### 4.3 A son of the French state nobility in partially revolutionized political fields and the sealed social world of journalists

The discourse of Philippot can only be explained if we consider him as a “plural actor” (Lahire 2011, xii) producing content about borders based on the selection of his *habitus* and the ingrained skills and attitudes best adapted to address an issue in a given situation. Here, the situation is characterized by specific spatial arrangements orientating the message toward borders. As suggested by the DHA of the Critical Discourse Analysis, it is by including all the available structural and contextual background information that we can grasp the multiple layers of a written or spoken text (Krzyżanowski 2010; Wodak 2001, 2018). Philippot is a stakeholder in the political field and a source of information in the parallel French and Luxembourg journalistic fields. These fields are located in a specific geographical space, including state borders that can be reproduced, hardened, overcome, or made irrelevant. The evolving speeches of Philippot were more precisely based on the fact of him being a plural actor included in a political field structured by “partial revolution” (Bourdieu 1995, 74); that is, the arrival of newcomers in a field of tensions requiring Philippot to adapt his discourse to the given situation. Paradoxically, we can state that it was the major structuring internal forces of the French leader that allowed him to produce evolving narratives on borders, and more precisely his *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984, 6): a series of interactive dispositions inherited from past socialization.

The structuring *habitus* of Philippot is that of the “state nobility” (Bourdieu, 1996: xii): the corps of French top civil servants who have been trained in the elitist educative system. The calm Philippot as the man behind the “*Haiderization*” (Wodak 2015, 2) of the *Front National* never uses the rhetoric of the “popular man in the street” so strongly associated with populist narratives (Ostiguy 2017). He followed the *Voie Royale* to join the French meritocratic elite: an educational path through the state-sponsored elitist system (the renowned Parisian secondary school and Eton-like *Lycée Louis Le Grand*, plus the *HEC* and *ENA* academic schools) and a career as a civil servant in the most renowned General Inspection of the Administration, notably carrying out audits for the French Home Office. From a Bourdieusian perspective, in all these educational and professional milieus, Florian Philippot developed a system of dispositions and especially a way to express ideas and to interact that denote a conformity with

the quiet, methodical, flexible, and cool-headed group of *Les énarques* (people trained in the ENA school). *Les énarques* are taught to produce spoken/written texts to overcome tensions in a wide variety of interchangeable situations (Bellier 1992; Eymeri-Douzans 2013).

By going to Schengen in 2015 and in 2019, Philippot used his “state nobility” *habitus* in two different political fields in tension and not located in the same geographical space: a cross-border and momentary “para-diplomatic” (Keating 1999, 11) field in 2015, and an elastic France-bounded one in 2019. In 2015, he went to Schengen as the vice-president of the *Front National*, eager to become the next president of the French region facing Luxembourg. The opportunistic and political dimension of para-diplomacy attracted him to Schengen. His aim was to create an ironic event abroad (the funeral of Schengen Europe) to secure his visibility in a relatively dull French regional election campaign (Simon 2015). However, he was confronted by the politician Robert Goebbels, who was at home in the Grand Duchy and occupied a comparatively dominant position, as proved by the relative weight of his narratives in both the French and Luxembourg media compared with Philippot. In this tense moment, as a trained specialist in tension reduction, Philippot distributed to the present French and Luxembourg mass media what can be seen as the least state-national and confrontational speech possible for each media outlet inscribed in state-bounded national journalistic fields: multiple and general narratives on the state border. France is diluted in a European space because the para-diplomatic political field he decided to join briefly is European and not French. The ultra-flexible *énarque* Philippot was able to rescale his “France First” discourse at the European level. Furthermore, his “*topos* of economics” in the regional French media to justify or implement migrant border control in Europe was in some ways predictable from the mouth of an *énarque* and top civil servant of the auditing General Inspection of the Administration who planned to become president of a French region setting its budget. By insisting on borders as “filters” to control external and illegal migrants, Philippot actually mentioned what is emphasized in the pro-European Luxembourg Museum of Schengen dedicated to the Treaty of the same name (Lamour 2019c). However, Philippot’s appeasing, almost Schengen-like discourse on state borders was actually less important than the nationalized antagonism between French, Luxembourgers, and Germans, which would be represented by the reporters.

The position of reporters following the 2015 ironic “funeral” was also determined by their professional *habitus* to be used in a specific media event: A French populist leader crossing the Luxembourg border to lay a funeral wreath in the European symbolic place of Schengen and even more precisely in the spot where a monument has been built to celebrate the Schengen Treaty. The *habitus* of the reporters is determined by structural spatial arrangements, and they belong to a

state-bordered journalistic field. Their socialization is spatially contained through professional training, a press card, and employers associated with a given nation state, producing specific visions and ethics that motivate and legitimize their daily occupational routines – especially when addressing political issues. Furthermore, the “templates” they use must address a situation relevant for a public imagined as embedded within a territorialized and nationalized community (Krzyżanowski 2014). As a consequence, the mobilization of this *habitus* in Schengen facilitates a framing of the populist media event where the most important aspect is a state-bordered and nationalized confrontation on the spot with on one side France, French populist crowd and its flag and Marseillaise, Philippot, border control and on the other, Luxembourg political personnel, demonstrating Pro-European crowd, sometimes German extremists and border freedom. Many reporters in the Luxembourg mass media are French citizens trained in French journalism schools, but they have been absorbed within a Luxembourg profession where their peers give them the right to work in the Grand Duchy and to target readers, listeners, or viewers based in Luxembourg. In parallel, there was a key external force justifying their unwitting and collective promotion of the media event around Philippot, a force mentioned by Bourdieu (2005) when looking at the journalistic field becoming more and more heteronomous: the growing strength of capitalist market values determining the journalistic norms. It is best described as the “infotainment” context affecting the news distributed to citizens-news consumers. A good argument at the border between the supporters of Philippot and their opponents can only but attract the mass media, and determine the chosen angle of the event in this infotainment environment, rather than a discussion on the mitigated discourse of Philippot and the complexity of the migrant crisis. Another external force with a spatial dimension could determine the attitude of reporters during this event: the geographical location of the targeted public and its routinized mobility across state borders. The French regional newspaper, *Le Républicain Lorrain*, offered a nuance compared with the other French (and Luxembourg) mass media by integrating the cross-border context experienced by a large proportion of its public. The reporter from this newspaper was the only one quoting the local *Front National* mayor of Hayange, Fabien Engelmann. Engelmann was present in Schengen, by the side of Philippot, and stated: “There is no question of putting up barbed wire, and cross-border workers [employed in Luxembourg] have understood that. The villages along the border [of Luxembourg] voted overwhelmingly FN in the last elections” (Simon 2015, 1). This quotation was only added by this reporter because the area of circulation for his article was centered on the northern part of Lorraine, which is included in the cross-border metropolitan region powered by Luxembourg (Lamour 2021a). It was considered the exclusive interest of the readership of this daily, who partly commute

across the state border and potentially vote for FN candidates.<sup>11</sup> This functional and cross-border spatial arrangement determines the singularity of this regional French newspaper's representation of the border.

In 2019, Philippot was not part of a European para-diplomatic political field in tension that would be represented by professional reporters embedded in different state-bounded journalistic fields. His two 2019 videos in Schengen replicated the “down in the street” direct communication exploited by populist leaders such as Matteo Salvini (Kalia et al. 2018), but with the discursive environment in conformity with the state nobility *habitus* of Philippot: a stable and quiet milieu in which he can calmly expose his ideas without the “low” discursive style often linked to populism (Ostiguy 2017). In 2019, Philippot was in an exclusive French political field, but one beyond the France-Luxembourg state border. The political opportunity was a commemorative date (9 May; the day of Europe) just before the European elections expected to be won by anti-European political forces everywhere in the EU and in relation to a French public sphere in turmoil following the *Gilets Jaunes* uprising. By leaving the *Front National* following the 2017 French presidential election, Philippot increased his anti-European independence by promoting “Frexit.” However, he also lost the advantage of belonging to the dominant radical right populist party, able to attract a massive French electorate.<sup>12</sup> He belongs to the sovereigntist political groups that decided to directly attract a proportion of the *Gilets Jaunes* (Kipfer 2019; Royall 2019). Consequently, Philippot's 2019 discourse on borders denotes an adaptation to the politically-indefinite and social-oriented political newcomers: the “yellow vests”. It shows more precisely the presence of a deal with one of the figures of the *Gilets Jaunes* movement invited onto major French TV and radio stations over many months: Jean-François Barnaba. This representative is a moderate, eloquent, intellectual by profession (an orchestra director) who decided to strike a deal with Philippot, the man shaping the social protectionist program of the *Front National*. However, Barnaba's momentary presence in the French political field – without any elected mandate or party legitimacy – is based on the fight against social deprivation. The *Front National* stigmatization of migrants is not what the moderate *Gilets Jaunes* like Barnaba fought for. Consequently, the flexible Philippot needed to adapt his border discourse, and primarily promoted state bordering to prevent the death of

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11. Northern Lorraine is the French area where most of the 93,000 cross-border workers residing in France and employed in Luxembourg are located (Statec 2018).

12. Philippot gained 36% of the vote in the French Greater Eastern region during the second turn of the 2015 regional election and under the list of the *Front National*. Four years later, the *Patriotes* party was only voted for by 0.97% of voters during the 2019 European election in the same French regional area (Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2019).



migrants in his 2019 YouTube video, which was ended by an ill-at-ease Barnaba insisting that a border could be an open door.<sup>13</sup> The entry of the *Gilets Jaunes* into French politics has constituted only a “partial revolution” (Bourdieu 1995, 74) of the French political field in which the stabilized Philippot is embedded. It was a partial revolution because the *Gilets Jaunes* have not been able to maintain a long-term presence in the mass-media covered French political field that is still trusted by representatives of political parties and journalistic commentators.

## 5. Concluding discussion: From the leopard to the chameleon... under the spotlights of somewhere

The surge of populism in Europe is strongly related to the changing socio-political parameters of the past decades, and especially the recent, tense economic and migrant issues. These offer opportunities for populist parties to develop a discourse of fear and crisis in the media (Lamour 2020, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d; Moffitt 2015; Wodak & Krzyżanowski 2017). RWP parties are perceived as favoring borders imagined as barriers protecting the people from whom their political legitimacy originates. However, as noted in this article, populist leaders do not necessarily emphasize this approach to borders at media events. As suggested by Stavrakakis (2017), populist narratives place the elite and especially academics – but also journalists – in a dilemma concerning how to approach populism beyond its pejorative definition. The current research, based on the analysis of two populist media events that took place in Schengen, has consisted of deconstructing four dimensions of populism in the media involving border discourse.

First, it turns out that the antagonistic dimension of populist spoken and written texts circulated among Europeans during media events, can be based primarily on relatively moderate narratives; almost pro-European ones, as proved by those produced by Philippot. However, these moderate narratives must be seen only as the “eye of a populist cyclone,” characterized by the parallel presence of other spoken and written texts, as well as body language, music, artefacts, and public agitation involving both populist forces and their opponents. These form an ensemble of confrontational elements organized around the populist agenda.

Second, social media has been seen as a platform through which populist leaders can circulate their messages to address and mobilize their electorate without filtering by the mass media (Moffitt 2016). Nevertheless, one should not overemphasize the power of social media over the mass media, as the former pre-

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13. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5G5MtzhcwY&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5G5MtzhcwY&feature=youtu.be) (Discourse start: 1:51 min.).

vents the presence of contradicting narratives, which can be relatively important for populist leaders in the process of representing victimization by the establishment. The 2015 mass media covered event of Philippot set against Luxembourgers and a pro-European crowd offered a richer antagonistic discourse than the social media one in 2019. The total mastering of communications on the part of populist agents on social media prevents them from benefitting from the expected dissonant voice of the scapegoated elites and others apparent in live events in the mass media.

Third, a leopard cannot change its spots, or more precisely, its *habitus*. Populist agents and the reporters following them, are the product of a socialization process associated with their respective political and journalistic fields, which are not structured around populist antagonism, but on broader templates to address an issue in a given context. The level of flexibility of the populist discourse depends on the *habitus* of populist speakers, and consequently their greater or lesser ability and willingness to avoid a verbal (and potentially physical) clash. From among his political templates and genres (Krzyżanowski 2014; Wodak 2001), the elite-trained Philippot picks those that best suit both discursive contexts. These are, “self-presentation” as a moderate in 2015 to maintain his elite face when confronted by a Luxembourg politician, pro-European crowd, and media; and elite-style “political advertising” in 2019, when speaking for the French Yellow Vests in the presence of Barnaba, the moderate *gilet jaune*. The populist leopard has the best chance to become a chameleon as long as his skills and attitudes enable him to disappear behind the fire and fury of the RWP media event spectacle. What RWP representatives from the state nobility say in one media event is actually less important; almost inaudible within the broader discourse associated with RWP that is already integrated by all its listeners and circulated by shouts, music, and placards. Everybody knows what the *Front National* and *Les Patriotes* stand for: “*les Français d’abord*”.

Fourth, space is often ignored when academics investigate populism. The two analyzed media events organized in Schengen show the material/ideational space is both a structural and a situational element behind the production of populist discourse. Politicians and reporters have been socialized within contained nation-state territories that they cannot escape. Nevertheless, the existence of media events combining politicians and reporters from different state-contained territories can open up new spatial arrangements across state borders. These include the emergence of a more integrated European space, where a French populist leader can claim there are European borders for filtering migrants, as foreseen by the EU Schengen Treaty and as implemented by EU governments controlled by mainstream parties. Populist discourse released in a foreign territory can favor the circulation of a “meta-populism” (de Cleen 2017; Lamour 2020, 2021b), in which the

“us” can include many different state-contained peoples and their governments, while the “they” can regroup an indefinite community, active across borders and helping migrants. Media events in places symbolic of EU integration, such as Schengen, are not planned just anywhere, but in key locations enabling an RWP “somewhere” to be circulated, regrouping the archipelago of the European peoples.

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