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CASE STUDY

REVISED EUPopLink Country report - Luxembourg

[version 2; peer review: 2 approved, 1 approved with reservations]

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Abstract

This report examines the dynamics of populism and Euroscepticism in Luxembourg, focusing on the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR) as the country's principal right-wing populist actor. Luxembourg exhibits a stable pro-European consensus shaped by its small size, economic reliance on EU integration, and absence of organized anti-EU interest groups. Public attitudes reflect this elite-driven pro-EU stance, with high levels of attachment and optimism toward the EU. The ADR, originally a single-issue pension reform party, has evolved into a soft right-wing populist force emphasizing pragmatic critiques of EU policies rather than advocating withdrawal. Its discourse combines vertical exclusion (people vs. elites) and horizontal exclusion (people vs. migrants), while adapting to Luxembourg's socio-economic context, particularly its highly integrated labor market and multicultural population. Mainstream parties respond adversarially to ADR initiatives when perceived as crossing political or ethical boundaries, yet occasional rhetorical adjustments suggest subtle accommodation of public concerns. Luxembourg thus illustrates a model of 'chameleonic populism,' where populist and Eurosceptic ideas are moderated and contextually tailored, highlighting the influence of structural and socio-political conditions on the expression of exclusionary politics in small, integrated states.

Keywords

populism, euroscepticism, Luxembourg



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Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

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REVISED **Amendments from Version 1**

This revised version has been updated to strengthen conceptual clarity, empirical grounding, and alignment with the EUPopLink theoretical framework. The introduction now frames Luxembourg more explicitly as a least-likely case for hard Euroscepticism and radical right-wing populism, while adding nuance to the relationship between public support for the EU and the potential activation of softer Eurocritical mobilization. It also provides a more detailed description of Luxembourg's migration and labour-market profile.

The section on populist political actors has been revised to clarify the contested classification of the ADR. It now distinguishes more explicitly between right-wing, national-conservative, far-right, and populist elements, and uses the ADR's 2023 national election manifesto to substantiate the claim that the party expresses recurring populist discourse through anti-elite claims and appeals to popular sovereignty. The discussion of gender-related issues has also been rephrased to avoid adopting contested party terminology in the authorial voice.

The section on the populism-Euroscepticism nexus has been substantially revised using the EUPopLink distinctions between the object, intensity, consistency, and nature of Euroscepticism. It now draws on the ADR's 2019 European election manifesto to clarify the party's soft Euroscepticism, its "Europe of sovereign nations" position, and the populist framing of EU decision-making. The discussion of vertical and horizontal exclusion, triadic right-wing populism, and chameleonic populism has been clarified and more directly linked to the Luxembourgish case.

The section on responses to Euroscepticism now applies Meguid's distinction between adversarial, dismissive, and accommodative mainstream-party strategies and reflects more explicitly on the tension between democratic boundary-setting and strategic partisan competition. The conclusion has been sharpened to highlight Luxembourg's broader comparative significance. No figures, author list, data, or code have been added or revised.

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

Introduction

As a founding member of the EU and host to several major EU institutions, Luxembourg is characterized by a broad and durable pro-European consensus. This consensus reflects the country's small size and its economic dependence on European integration, including foreign and cross-border labour, as well as the absence of organized interest groups, business stakeholders, or major political parties advocating for withdrawal from the EU (Besch & Lessing, 2016). Consequently, "strong Euroscepticism is basically non-existent in public discourse" (ibid, p. 12).

Public attitudes largely mirror this elite-level consensus. According to the Spring 2025 Eurobarometer, 57% of respondents in Luxembourg hold a positive image of the EU, compared with 43% across the EU; 66% are optimistic about its future, compared with 62%; and 81% feel attached to the EU, compared with 63% (Eurobarometer, 2025). These levels of support substantially narrow the electoral space for hard Euroscepticism. Public demand is not fixed, however: parties can activate or amplify latent concerns through agenda-setting and issue framing. Luxembourg's pro-European public opinion therefore constrains, but does not eliminate, opportunities for softer and more selective Eurocritical mobilization.

The case is nevertheless striking because several of Luxembourg's socio-economic characteristics – globalization, high immigration, and intense labour mobility – are frequently mobilized by right-wing populists elsewhere. Luxembourg ranks among the countries with the highest GDP per capita globally, has one of Europe's highest proportions of foreign residents and a labour market heavily dependent on foreign and cross-border workers. Of its residents, 12.9% originate from neighbouring countries, 20.9% from other EU member states, and 15.5% from outside the EU. Moreover, Luxembourg is among the OECD countries receiving the highest number of asylum applications per capita (STATEC, 2021). Meanwhile, many native Luxembourgers occupy stable, well-paid public-sector positions for which Luxembourgish proficiency remains important (de Jonge, 2021). Despite – or perhaps partly because of – these conditions, Luxembourg is frequently cited as a comparatively successful case of integration (Fetzer, 2011).

Euroscepticism has thus remained marginal in both party politics and public discourse, and Luxembourg is not usually associated with populism (Carls, 2021, 2024; de Jonge, 2021; Fetzer, 2011). It nevertheless constitutes a valuable least-likely case for examining the populism-Euroscepticism nexus.[i] It shows that these currents may emerge even under highly constraining conditions, although in moderated and locally adapted forms.

Populist political actors

The principal actor combing right-wing politics with a recurring populist discourse in Luxembourg is the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (Alternativ Demokratesch Reformspartei, ADR). Founded in 1987 as a single-issue movement campaigning for pension reform, the ADR gradually broadened its programme and, in 1992, adopted a new name emphasizing democracy and pension justice. It reached its electoral peak in 1999, winning 11.3% of the national vote. After pension reforms in 1998 and 2002 reduced the salience of its founding issue (Schulze, 2006), the party rebranded again in 2006 to reflect its wider political ambitions. It regained prominence in 2015 by leading the successful campaign against a referendum proposal to extend voting rights to non-citizen residents. In the 2023 general election, the ADR secured five of the 60 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, before winning its first seat in the European Parliament in 2024.

The ADR's classification remains contested. Some scholars and expert-informed classifications describe it as populist, far right, or right-wing populist (Carls, 2021, 2024; de Jonge, 2021; Zulianello, 2020; Blau, 2005), whereas others are more hesitant or reject these labels (Luxemburger Wort, 2017; Poirier, 2012). This ambiguity partly reflects the party's comparatively moderate rhetoric and adaptation to Luxembourg's structural and socio-political constraints. A restrictive approach may regard its populism as too intermittent or muted, while a context-sensitive approach identifies a strategically adapted form of "right-wing populism à la luxembourgeoise" (Carls, 2021).

Under the EUPopLink definition, populism requires both anti-elite claims and appeals to popular sovereignty (Lorimer et al., 2026). On this basis, the case for classifying the ADR as populist rests not on its positions on immigration, gender, or national identity, but on its recurring portrayal of politics as a conflict between Luxembourgish citizens and unresponsive national or supranational elites, together with its demand that authority be returned to the people.

The ADR's 2023 national election manifesto contains both elements. Party president Fred Keup argues that decisions are taken "over the heads of the people" and contrasts this with the ADR's promise to return decision-making to Luxembourgish citizens. The manifesto connects this critique of governing elites to crime, COVID-19 restrictions, declining purchasing power, language loss, the weakening of the family, and demographic growth. Crucially, these claims are coupled with demands for referendums, direct democracy, and greater popular control over political decision-making. The ADR therefore goes beyond generic anti-establishment rhetoric by presenting itself as the vehicle through which the popular sovereignty can be restored. Because this people–elite opposition recurs across policy domains, its populism amounts to more than an isolated rhetorical device, even if it remains softer and less systematic than that of paradigmatic populist parties.

This vertical people-elite antagonism is accompanied by horizontal boundary-making (Brubaker, 2020; Bennett, 2019; De Cleen, 2017; De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). The ADR presents migrants and non-citizen residents seeking political rights as potential threats to Luxembourgish identity and political membership. This exclusionary dimension is nevertheless adapted to Luxembourg's particular context. The party does not reject immigration outright, which would be politically and economically implausible in a country dependent on foreign and cross-border labour. Instead, it presents Luxembourg as a multicultural space rather than a multicultural nation: foreigners may be accepted as workers and residents without necessarily being incorporated into the symbolic and political core of the national community.

This helps explain Carls' (2021) characterization of the party as practising "right-wing populism à la Luxembourgeoise." Rather than primarily mobilizing economically marginalized groups, the ADR often appeals to comparatively privileged native Luxembourgers, particularly those employed in public administration and education, where Luxembourgish functions simultaneously as a marker of cultural belonging and a gatekeeping mechanism in the labour market.

[i]This country report traces the links between party-based populism and Euroscepticims in Luxembourg. The present country report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action (Andreadis & Vasilopoulou, 2026) following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines (Lorimer et al., 2026).

The party's ideological content should be assessed separately from its populism. From its manifesto, it is clear that the ADR combines national conservatism with classical liberalism, emphasizing national sovereignty, cultural preservation, direct democracy, and limited state interventions. It is Luxembourg's most immigration-sceptical party (Fetzer, 2011, p. 15), opposes voting rights for non-citizens, and favours more restrictive citizenship rules. It also adopts socially conservative positions on family, education, and gender, opposing gender-sensitive language, "gendered" schoolbooks, expanded transgender rights, and what it portrays as ideological "indoctrination" in schools, while taking more liberal positions on topics such as prostitution (Carls, 2021, 2024).

These positions explain the right-wing and, in some respects, far-right affinities of the ADR's discourse; they do not, by themselves, establish its populism. The party is therefore best understood as combining a right-wing, national-conservative host ideology with a recurring, though moderated, form of populism. This produces a triadic structure in which "the people" are opposed vertically to elites who disregard their sovereignty and horizontally to groups portrayed as lying outside, or threatening, the national political community (Judis, 2016; Carls, 2024).

The ADR's European affiliations have reinforced perceptions of a rightward shift. It joined the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe in 2010 and became associated with the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group after securing its first EP seat in 2024. These links have prompted accusations of far-right sympathies, which the party rejects. MEP Fernand Kartheiser has insisted that "there is no extreme right politically represented in Luxembourg. All these extremist tendencies are completely alien to our thinking." Blau, however, argues that the party's emphasis on national identity, Euroscepticism, moral decline, and immigration overlaps with central themes of the European far right (RTL Today, 2023). De Jonge (Journal.lu, 2023; RTL Today, 2024b) similarly identifies a rightward movement, particularly in the ADR's growing focus on migration, gender, and climate, while stopping short of classifying it as extremist. The reported departure of former president and founding member Jean Mehlen over "ideological differences" further suggests a discernible ideological shift (RTL Today, 2025a).

Positions on 'Europe' and the Populism-Euroscepticism nexus

Luxembourg's main parties, including the Christian Social People's Party (CSV), the Democratic Party (DP), the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP), and the Greens (Déi Gréng), support EU integration. Euroscepticism therefore remains marginal. Other parties, including The Conservatives (right-wing), The Left (left-wing), and the Luxembourg Communist Party (left-wing), express varying forms of Euroscepticism, but the ADR is the most visible right-wing actor linking Euroscepticism to a recurring populist discourse.

The ADR's position is best described as soft Euroscepticism or Eurocriticism. Its 2019 European election manifesto presented the party as "eurorealistic" or "euro-pragmatic" rather than anti-European, while its 2024 manifesto similarly frames the party as defending a strong Luxembourg within Europe rather than opposing European cooperation as such. This is consistent with Alexandra Schoos' statement that, "Luxembourg needs Europe and the European Union (Le Quotidien, 2024)." The ADR supports European cooperation insofar as it preserves peace, free movement, the internal market, and the common currency, but rejects excessive centralism, federalism, majority voting, and further transfers of sovereignty. Its preferred model is a "Europe of sovereign nations," based on subsidiarity, national veto rights, and respect for national and cultural identities.

In EUPopLink terms (Lorimer et al., 2026), the object of its Euroscepticism is both policy- and polity-related: it criticizes specific EU policies, including migration, climate, sanctions, enlargement, and defence integration, while also opposing the EU's perceived trajectory toward deeper centralization. Its opposition therefore concerns the current practice and future direction of integration rather than the principle of European cooperation. In terms of nature, its critique is primarily sovereigntist and national-conservative, but becomes populist when EU decision-making is framed as removed from citizens, national parliaments, and democratic control.

The 2019 and 2024 manifestos both clarify why the ADR's EU discourse is not merely conservative or sovereigntist. The party presents European integration as a process through which distant institutions, federalists, technocrats, and mainstream governing parties move power away from national peoples and member states. It calls for stronger parliamentary scrutiny, defence of the Luxembourg Compromise, unanimity in areas of vital national interest, and referendums on transfers of sovereignty, treaty changes, and major EU decisions. The populist element lies in this combination of anti-elite critique with an appeal to popular sovereignty and the will of national peoples.

At the European level, this vertical antagonism is again accompanied by horizontal boundary-making. The ADR supports legal migration and free movement within the internal market, which is particularly important in Luxembourg's migration-dependent context. However, both manifestos defend stronger external borders, reject EU asylum quotas,

criticize uncontrolled or illegal immigration, and insist that asylum and migration should remain national competences. The party presents EU migration policy since 2015 as a source of declining public trust in the EU and links migration control to sovereignty, security, and cultural identity. This approximates a triadic right-wing populist structure in which "the people" are positioned vertically against distant elites and horizontally against outsiders or uncontrolled migration from outside (Judis, 2016; Carls, 2024).

Recent crises have reinforced rather than transformed the ADR's orientation. During the Brexit debate, the ADR did not treat Brexit as a model for Luxembourgish withdrawal, but as evidence that federal Europe had failed to maintain democratic legitimacy, favouring a flexible "Europe à la carte" (Högenauer, 2021). The 2019 and 2024 manifestos show continuity in this respect: both defend subsidiarity, unanimity in key areas, national sovereignty, and opposition to a federal Europe. The 2019 manifesto also prefigured later positions on Ukraine, Russia, and defence. It supported Ukraine economically and democratically, while warning against geopolitical escalation, defending unanimity in foreign policy, favouring pragmatic relations with Russia, and rejecting a European army. These positions help explain the party's later criticism of EU sanctions, military escalation, and defence federalization after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The 2024 manifesto updates this position by condemning Russia's invasion while maintaining a sovereignty-first and economically cautious approach to sanctions, defence, and foreign policy.[ii] Similarly, the ADR's criticism of COVID-19 restrictions, opaque decision-making, and unilateral border closures reflected a longer-standing opposition to technocratic overreach and the transfer of national competences (Lamour & Carls, 2022). The 2024 manifesto extends this critique to digital regulation and freedom of expression, presenting EU governance as technocratic, centralizing, and insufficiently responsive to citizens.

Taken together, the ADR's Euroscepticism is soft but consistent. It accepts European cooperation while opposing federalization, majority voting, supranational competence expansion, and EU intervention in fields it defines as national. Its critique is not purely opportunistic: sovereignty, subsidiarity, national democracy, cultural identity, and democratic control are longstanding themes across both the 2019 and 2024 European election manifestos. Its salience nevertheless increases during crises and European elections, when EU institutions can be presented as distant elites overriding national peoples.

The ADR should therefore not be classified as populist simply because it advances immigration-sceptical, national-conservative, or socially conservative positions. These features locate it on the right and explain its partial overlap with the European far right (De Cleen et al., 2018; Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019). Its populism lies in the recurring construction of conflict between Luxembourgish or European peoples and unresponsive national or supranational elites, coupled with the claim that sovereignty must be restored through referendums, direct democratic control, and stronger national decision-making (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). It becomes specifically right-wing populist when this vertical people–elite logic is combined with horizontal boundary-making around migration, language, citizenship, and cultural sovereignty (Judis, 2016; Carls, 2024). It can consequently be understood as a right-wing populist actor whose populism, although less systematic and confrontational than that of paradigmatic populist radical-right parties, is sufficiently recurrent to constitute more than occasional anti-establishment rhetoric (van Kessel, 2014).

Responses to Euroscepticism and consequences

Luxembourg's pro-EU mainstream parties have responded to the ADR through adversarial, dismissive, and, more selectively, accommodative strategies (Meguid, 2025). The dominant response is adversarial, particularly when mainstream actors perceive the ADR as crossing normative boundaries.

Adversarial responses are especially visible at European level, where the ADR's alliances and positions can be linked to broader radical-right networks. Mainstream MEPs criticized its ECR affiliation: Charles Goerens (DP) described its allies as "not the best company," while Marc Angel (LSAP) warned that this marked "the first time that Luxembourg has members on the benches of the extreme right or the populist right." Tilly Metz (Déi Gréng) remarked that "it's easy to run a campaign with populist slogans," stressing the lack of substantive policy proposals. Christophe Hansen (CSV) characterized the ADR as part of "the far-right bloc" (Luxembourg Times, 2024b).

[ii]Some of the ADR's leading figures have, at times, openly expressed support for more radical right-wing positions. This tendency is particularly evident in the context of the war in Ukraine, where Kartheiser's rhetoric has sparked controversy. His framing of the Ukraine war as a U.S.-Russia proxy conflict and criticism of EU alignment with the Biden administration echo narratives associated with Donald Trump (two-thirds of ADR voters thought that the election of Donald Trump is a good thing) (Luxembourg Times, 2024a). Kartheiser's 2025 trip to Moscow – and his remark that he would "rather fly to Moscow than talk to the Brussels bubble" – marked a clear opposition to the EU. The fallout was swift: on 4 June 2025, Kartheiser was expelled from the ECR group – the ADR continues to stand with Kartheiser (Luxembourg Times, 2025a).

The ADR's position on Ukraine and Russia prompted similar reactions. Isabel Wiseler-Lima (CSV) commented, "We observe that the ADR has become more radicalized. They express understanding for various Russian positions, which we find deeply concerning" (Virgule, 2024). Foreign Minister Xavier Bettel (DP) called Kartheiser's Moscow visit "extremely problematic and unhelpful (Luxembourg Times, 2025b)." Following Kartheiser's expulsion from the ECR, Metz (Déi Gréng) responded with sharp irony, stating, "Too extreme even for the extremists! That's quite an achievement (RTL Today, 2025c)."

Language politics has produced similar reactions. Kartheiser's insistence on using Luxembourgish in the EP was dismissed by Wiseler-Lima as a "circus act," while Angel called it a populist "stunt", arguing: "We conduct politics for our language, not with it. That is what the far-right and the populists might do (RTL Today, 2024c)." Domestically, politicians across the ideological spectrum culture Minister Eric Thill (DP) likened the ADR's narrative to "a juggler throwing a single ball" – an illusion of complexity without real substance. Similarly, MP Liz Braz (LSAP) warned that instrumentalising language promotes "subliminal xenophobia in political discourse (RTL Today, 2024a)."

Social-media controversies have produced particularly forceful boundary-setting. In 2025, ADR MP Tom Weidig liked a post advocating the "extermination of LGBTQ" people, prompting a rare unanimous parliamentary resolution condemning all forms of hate speech (RTL Today, 2025b). In 2019, a Facebook post by then-ADR politician Sylvie Mischel led Djuna Bernard (Déi Gréng) and Franz Fayot (LSAP) to compare the party with Germany's right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD), while Frank Engel (CSV) called on citizens to resist "sleeping fascism (Reporter.lu, 2019)."

Such reactions defend democratic norms, particularly in response to hate speech, far-right associations, and pro-Russian positioning, but they may also serve a strategic partisan function. By portraying the ADR as extremist, irresponsible, or unserious, mainstream parties seek both to enforce normative boundaries and to restrict the legitimacy and electoral appeal of a right-wing competitor.

Dismissal is more common when the ADR's EU criticism appears symbolic or electorally marginal. This strategy helps preserve the pro-European consensus, but it may also support the ADR's claim that established parties ignore dissenting concerns. Limited accommodation occurs mainly on adjacent issues such as migration, public order, and national identity. De Jonge (RTL Today, 2024b) notes that centrist politicians have occasionally echoed right-wing themes, as illustrated by controversies involving Simone Beissel (DP) on begging and Marc Lies (CSV) on refugees. These cases do not indicate that mainstream parties have become populist or Eurosceptic, but they show selective convergence on issues associated with the ADR's agenda, potentially in response to electoral competition.

The consequences of the ADR's Euroscepticism remain limited. It has not displaced Luxembourg's pro-European consensus or generated support for withdrawal. EU opposition is also rarely its sole or principal electoral appeal; rather, it provides a sovereignty-based frame linking migration, language, public order, foreign policy, and democratic control. Its influence is therefore more visible in the increased salience and partial normalization of these themes than in a substantive reorientation of Luxembourg's European policy.

Conclusion

Luxembourg remains a least-likely case for hard Euroscepticism and populist radical-right-mobilization, but it is not insulated from these broader currents. The ADR combines a recurring people–elite antagonism and appeals to popular sovereignty with national-conservative and selectively nativist positions. Its acceptance of European cooperation and economically necessary immigration distinguishes it from more radical cases, while its boundary-making around language, citizenship, political membership, and national sovereignty gives its populism a specifically Luxembourgish form.

The ADR can therefore be understood as an example of 'chameleonic populism' (Taggart, 2000, 2004): its discourse is responsive to local conditions and capable of challenging aspects of the political mainstream while continuing to operate within it. The Luxembourgish case shows that, in small, open, and deeply Europeanized states, right-wing populist Euroscepticism may be moderated rather than absent.

More broadly, the case underscores the need for context-sensitive approaches to the study of populism and Euroscepticism. It suggests that the populism-Euroscepticism nexus cannot be assessed solely through hard rejectionism, overt anti-EU mobilization, or explicit radicalism. Luxembourg broadens the analytical scope by demonstrating how populist and exclusionary claims can be adapted to strong pro-European norms, dependence on transnational labour, and deep

structural integration within the EU. It thereby challenges analytical models derived primarily from larger states and highlights the flexible and context-dependent character of populist Euroscepticism.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.

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✓ **Robert Csehi**
Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary

Overall, I find this case study quite informative. If I understood the objective of the study correctly, it was to provide a descriptive account of the ADR and the current experience of Luxembourg with populism and Euroscepticism. In this sense, the study fulfilled its purpose. Having also read the previous reviews, I have nothing really substantial to add, I just want to highlight a few things that could be relevant for the future, nevertheless. Given that the study was carried out under the EUPoPLink cost action framework, I felt that the populist and Eurosceptic aspects were a bit too neatly separated from one another. In most cases, we already know a lot about the Eurosceptic AND the populist dynamics, and where we lack understanding is really about the interactions. I felt that the study could have done a better job addressing this. Instead of describing separately what populism AND Euroscepticism looks like under the ADR, this could really be integrated into a more theoretically driven research puzzle. In fact, the introduction starts with an interesting puzzle: given the special circumstances of Luxembourg, why do we see the emergence of both populist and Eurosceptic ideas at the party level? And once we see this, the natural question is WHY do we see a specific form of each, and how do they actually interact? Once again, I am not sure, what the general objective of the study was (beyond description), but this could be relevant for the future.
This concern of mine was basically driven also by the fact that both concepts were a bit under-conceptualized. Now, I know that the conceptualization is supposed to appear in a central document, but it makes the study also a bit hard to evaluate this way. After all, a potential interaction between the two concepts should be based upon analytical linkages between the concepts' main building blocks. Why is the dyadic or triadic differentiation known in the populism literature relevant for Euroscepticism? Also, I feel that populism is not necessarily about the vertical or horizontal differentiation, because a lot of politicians do that. What differentiates populists from non-populists is really the moral division that they base this differentiation upon. What matter is not the people vs elite antagonism, but really the *corrupt* elite vs the *honest* people, or the *deserving* people vs the *undeserving* non-people. But, once again, we know this already, and applying this framework for a case study is informative, but I feel that the real work should start with the study of interactions between the two main concepts.
Overall, I found the piece informative, but theoretically less engaging, which - I admit - might not have been the objective of the study in the first place.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: European integration, populism, Euroscepticism, East-Central Europe

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 03 June 2026

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Levan Kakhishvili
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I would like to thank the editorial team for giving me an opportunity to review a rather interesting case study: "EUPopLink Country Report – Luxembourg." This manuscript offers a concise and engaging survey of populism and Euroscepticism in Luxembourg, centered on the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR) and its place within a strongly pro-European political environment. The article's main contribution lies in showing how a right-wing populist actor can adapt its

message to the specific structural and socio-political conditions of a small, affluent, multilingual, and deeply EU-embedded state, producing a form of what the manuscript calls “chameleonic populism.” Overall, the manuscript is interesting, clearly written, and sufficiently detailed to give readers a solid overview of Luxembourgish political discourses on populism and Euroscepticism, and it should be indexed subject to minor revisions.

The manuscript succeeds especially well in contextualizing Luxembourg as a country in which strong Euroscepticism has remained marginal despite social and economic features that, in other European contexts, often provide fertile ground for the radical right. The author effectively links this pattern to Luxembourg’s small size, economic reliance on European integration, dependence on foreign and cross-border labour, and the absence of organized anti-EU actors. The historical overview of the ADR is also clear and useful, tracing the party from its origins as a pension reform movement to its current role as the principal carrier of soft right-wing populist and Eurocritical discourse. The discussion of the ADR’s “populism from above,” especially its appeal to relatively privileged native Luxembourgers in public administration and education, is particularly insightful and one of the strongest parts of the manuscript.

At the same time, the introduction would benefit from sharper conceptual framing. The manuscript uses terms such as populism, right-wing populism, extremism, and Euroscepticism in a generally intelligible way, but it would be stronger if it offered concise working definitions of these concepts near the outset. Because the article questions whether and how the ADR should be classified as right-wing populist, readers would gain from a clearer explanation of the criteria being used and of how those criteria relate to the Luxembourgish case. Such additions would also give the author an opportunity to cite relevant scholarly literature, which is prevalent on the topics of populism and Euroscepticism. This issue is especially relevant where the manuscript notes that some scholars classify the ADR as right-wing populist while others reject that label. Rather than only listing the two camps, the manuscript should briefly explain which definitions of right-wing populism they rely on and why these lead to different conclusions. That would provide a more nuanced understanding of the party’s ideological profile and help readers assess the classification debate more systematically.

A few passages would also benefit from greater analytical nuance. On page 3, the statement that Eurobarometer figures indicate “a limited public demand for a strong Eurosceptic party” is plausible, but it may be somewhat too static. Public demand is not always pre-political or fixed; it can also be shaped, activated, or manufactured by political actors through issue framing, agenda setting, and strategic mobilization. A short acknowledgment of this possibility would strengthen the argument and avoid implying that existing public attitudes alone determine party political opportunity. Similarly, the claim that Luxembourg is frequently cited as a successful case of integration is interesting and relevant, but it would be more convincing if the manuscript specified more clearly who the immigrant population consists of. The national, socioeconomic, and legal composition of immigrants, i.e., whether they are mainly EU workers, non-EU migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, or highly skilled professionals, can significantly shape public perceptions and party strategies. Adding a sentence or two on this point would sharpen the empirical basis of the argument.

There are also some language choices that merit reconsideration. The use of the expression “gender ideology” risks adopting a contested political label in the authorial voice, even if the intention is to describe ADR discourse. It would be preferable either to attribute the term explicitly to the party or to rephrase in more neutral analytical language. That would help preserve the manuscript’s critical distance and analytical precision.

The section on mainstream party responses is informative and gives a convincing overview of how the ADR is challenged, criticized, and sometimes delegitimized by established political actors,

particularly when it is perceived to cross normative or political red lines. The examples drawn from debates on European Parliament alliances, Ukraine, language politics, and social media controversies are well chosen and make the section vivid. At the same time, the analysis could go one step further by reflecting on whether these adversarial reactions are always fully warranted, or whether they may sometimes function as fear-mongering tactics aimed at discrediting a right-wing competitor that has the potential to gain social traction. Since the manuscript already notes that mainstream parties occasionally accommodate parts of the ADR agenda rhetorically, a slightly more reflective treatment of this tension between principled democratic containment and strategic partisan boundary-drawing would enrich the discussion.
The manuscript's conclusions are generally well supported by the evidence presented. The central claim that Luxembourg is not immune to populist and exclusionary politics, but that these politics take moderated and locally adapted forms in a small, prosperous, highly integrated state is persuasive and consistent with the empirical discussion. The article is also useful beyond the immediate case, because it encourages broader comparative reflection on how right-wing populism operates in contexts where overt anti-EU or anti-immigration radicalism is electorally constrained. For readers interested in teaching or applying the case comparatively, the manuscript already provides enough detail to be useful, though it would become even stronger with the conceptual clarifications noted above and a somewhat fuller description of Luxembourg's migration profile.
Overall, this is a thoughtful and worthwhile contribution that combines a clear overview of Luxembourg's political landscape with a compelling argument about the contextual adaptation of populism and Euroscepticism. Its strongest elements are the discussion of the ADR's ideological evolution, the treatment of language and national identity, and the broader framing of Luxembourg as a case of moderated or "chameleonic" right-wing populism. The revisions required are modest and mainly concern sharpening definitions, adding nuance to a few empirical claims, and slightly deepening the discussion of mainstream party responses and reproducibility. With these minor revisions, the manuscript would make a valuable contribution to the literature and would be suitable for indexing.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Party competition, European Union

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Author Response 14 Jul 2026

Lisa Verhasselt

Thank you for the generous and constructive review. I am grateful for the positive assessment of the report's contribution. I have revised the report to address the conceptual and empirical points raised while preserving the concise country-report format required by the EUPopLink guidelines.

Conceptual framing: Thank you for this suggestion. The report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action and follows the shared EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and country-report guidelines. In order to keep the reports concise and comparable, the full definitions of the conceptual categories are provided in the EUPopLink guidelines and in Lorimer et al. (2026), rather than repeated extensively in each country report. However, I have revised the text to make clearer how the Luxembourg case relates to these categories, especially the distinction between populism, right-wing populism, Euroscepticism, conservatism, and the far right.

Classification of the ADR: I have revised the discussion of the ADR's classification to avoid simply listing scholars who accept or reject the right-wing populist label. The revised text now explains why the classification is contested: a more restrictive approach may regard the ADR's populism as too muted or intermittent, while a more context-sensitive approach identifies a strategically adapted form of "right-wing populism à la luxembourgeoise." The report now presents the ADR as a soft or borderline right-wing populist actor rather than as a straightforward populist radical right party.

Criteria for identifying populism: I have clarified that, under the EUPopLink definition, populism requires both anti-elite claims and appeals to popular sovereignty. The revised report therefore does not treat the ADR as populist simply because it is immigration-sceptical, socially conservative, or Eurosceptic. Instead, the classification is grounded in the party's recurring portrayal of politics as a conflict between Luxembourgish citizens and unresponsive national or supranational elites, combined with its demand for referendums, direct democracy, and the restoration of popular control.

Public demand and Eurobarometer figures: Thank you for noting that the original wording risked presenting public demand as too static. I have revised this passage. The report now states that Luxembourg's high levels of public support for the EU substantially narrow the electoral space for hard Euroscepticism, but that public demand is not fixed and may be activated or amplified by parties through agenda-setting and issue framing.

Migration profile and integration: I have expanded the introduction to provide a fuller

description of Luxembourg's migration and labour-market profile. The revised version specifies that Luxembourg has a high proportion of foreign residents and distinguishes between residents originating from neighbouring countries, other EU member states, and outside the EU. It also notes Luxembourg's reliance on foreign and cross-border workers and its comparatively high number of asylum applications per capita.

Use of "gender ideology": Thank you for this important point. I have revised the relevant wording to avoid adopting contested party terminology in the authorial voice. The report now refers more neutrally to the ADR's socially conservative positions on family, education, and gender, including its opposition to gender-sensitive language, "gendered" schoolbooks, expanded transgender rights, and what the party portrays as ideological "indoctrination" in schools.

Mainstream party responses: I have revised the section on mainstream-party responses by applying Meguid's framework more explicitly. The report now distinguishes between adversarial, dismissive, and selectively accommodative responses. It also reflects more directly on the tension identified by the reviewer: adversarial reactions can function as principled democratic boundary-setting, especially in response to hate speech, far-right associations, or pro-Russian positioning, but they may also serve a strategic partisan function by limiting the legitimacy and electoral appeal of a right-wing competitor.

Accommodation by mainstream parties: The revised report also develops the point that mainstream parties occasionally accommodate adjacent parts of the ADR's agenda. It now discusses selective convergence on issues such as migration, begging, public order, and national identity, while clarifying that these examples do not indicate that mainstream parties have become populist or Eurosceptic.

Conclusion and comparative relevance: Thank you for the positive assessment of the conclusion and comparative contribution. I have revised the conclusion to make this contribution more explicit and concise. The report now frames Luxembourg as a least-likely case showing that populist and Eurosceptic currents may emerge even under highly constraining conditions, but in moderated and locally adapted forms. It also clarifies the meaning of "chameleonic populism" as the ADR's capacity to adapt right-wing populist discourse to Luxembourg's pro-European, multilingual, migration-dependent, and consensus-oriented context.

Reproducibility and scope: In line with the EUPopLink country-report format, the revised report remains a concise secondary-research case study rather than an original statistical or manifesto-analysis article. I have nevertheless strengthened the empirical basis by drawing more explicitly on the ADR's 2023 national election manifesto, and the 2019 and 2024 European election manifestos, alongside secondary literature and expert-informed classifications. No new figures, data, code, or author-list changes have been introduced.

Overall revisions: Overall, the revised version sharpens the conceptual framing, adds nuance to the discussion of public demand and migration, avoids contested terminology in the authorial voice, deepens the analysis of mainstream-party responses, and clarifies Luxembourg's broader comparative significance. These revisions aim to address the

reviewer's main conceptual and empirical concerns while preserving the concise country-report format and remaining fully aligned with the EUPopLink guidelines.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

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The article raises a number of interesting and potentially important points regarding the evolution of Luxembourg's ADR and the broader dynamics of right-wing politics in Europe. The discussion of the party's interactions with other right-wing parties in the European Parliament is especially insightful, particularly in showing how association with transnational far-right networks may contribute to ideological radicalization. At the same time, the article would benefit from a clearer conceptual framework and more sustained engagement with the literature on populism.

A central issue concerns the distinction between "vertical" and "horizontal" exclusion. This distinction appears promising, but it is not sufficiently defined or developed. The concepts are introduced in the abstract and briefly referenced in the discussion of European Parliament debates, yet the article never clearly explains what differentiates the two forms of exclusion or how they relate to broader debates in the literature. The discussion recalls John Judis' (2016) distinction between dyadic left-wing populism and triadic right-wing populism, where the latter involves a three-way relation between "the people," "the elite," and an out-group. However, this connection is never explicitly articulated. More importantly, the article never fully demonstrates that the ADR is in fact "triadic" in this sense, meaning that it engages simultaneously in both vertical exclusion (against elites) and horizontal exclusion (against outsiders or minorities).

Relatedly, it is unclear whether the author intends to classify the ADR as a form of "chameleonic populism." The term appears in the text, but the argument is not fully developed. Rather than simply citing other scholars who use this characterization, the article would benefit from making a more explicit and positive case for why the ADR should be understood in these terms. If this is indeed a central claim, it should be stated more directly and substantiated with clearer evidence.

The article could also do more to explain why Luxembourg constitutes an important or theoretically interesting case. There seems to be a valuable opportunity here to frame Luxembourg as a least-likely case for right-wing populism. The emergence of a right-wing populist party in a wealthy, small, and historically moderate political system suggests that no country is

entirely immune from these broader political developments, even if some countries are less likely to experience their most extreme manifestations. Framing the case in these terms would help strengthen the article's broader comparative relevance.

I would also encourage the author to provide more systematic evidence demonstrating that the ADR has become more right-wing over time. At present, many of the claims rely on impressionistic observations or isolated examples. It would strengthen the article considerably to incorporate more objective indicators or longitudinal evidence, whether through manifesto analysis, discourse analysis, expert surveys, or voting behavior.

A related conceptual issue concerns the distinction between Euroscepticism, conservatism, the radical right, and populism. The article at times appears to conflate these categories. There are many mainstream and legitimate reasons for opposing further European integration, and Euroscepticism alone does not necessarily indicate a shift toward right-wing populism. Similarly, positions on issues such as constitutional sovereignty, public health mandates, the Luxembourgish language, or immigration may reflect conventional conservative politics rather than populism per se.

For this reason, the article needs a much clearer conceptual discussion of what constitutes populism. It is not obvious from the evidence presented that the ADR is organized around the populist distinction between a virtuous people and a corrupt elite, which remains central to many influential definitions of populism (e.g. Mansbridge and Macedo 2019).
Mansbridge, J. and Macedo, S., 2019. Populism and democratic theory. *Annual review of law and social science*, *15*(1), pp.59-77

At several points, the ADR appears more like a conventional conservative or center-right party than a genuinely populist movement. The author notes that some scholars have described the ADR as "atypical" among populist parties (e.g. Carls 2021), yet the article does relatively little to convince the reader that the party should nevertheless be categorized as populist.

Indeed, I found the discussion of the ADR's interactions with right-wing populist parties in the European Parliament more persuasive than the domestic analysis itself. This section demonstrates how a relatively moderate conservative party may become radicalized through its connections with more extreme transnational networks. Yet even here, the evidence seems to point more toward movement in the direction of the far right than specifically toward populism.

More broadly, the article would benefit from a clearer theoretical hook and a more explicit statement of its core contribution. At present, it is somewhat unclear whether the article is primarily descriptive or whether it is intervening in a broader theoretical debate. Clarifying the article's central argument — particularly regarding how Luxembourg's ADR should be conceptualized — would help sharpen both the analysis and the contribution.

Finally, the article would benefit from deeper engagement with the literature on populism and related concepts. Terms such as populism, Euroscepticism, conservatism, and the radical right are overlapping but distinct categories, and the substantial literature on these topics could help the author refine the conceptual framework. The PopuList project, for example, may be particularly useful because it systematically distinguishes between populist, far-left, and far-right parties using expert-informed classification criteria.

More generally, the literature review on populism feels somewhat underdeveloped. The following works would provide a strong foundation for clarifying the concept and distinguishing it from adjacent categories:

- Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*
- Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?*
- Ernesto Laclau, *The Populist Reason*
- Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*
- Margaret Canovan, *Populism*

Overall, the article contains a number of valuable observations and potentially important insights, particularly regarding the evolution of right-wing networks in Europe. However, the argument would be significantly strengthened by a clearer conceptual framework, more precise definitions, and a more explicit theoretical contribution

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: comparative politics and comparative political economy

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 14 Jul 2026

Lisa Verhasselt

Thank you for the careful and constructive review. I have revised the report to sharpen the conceptual framing, better substantiate the classification of the ADR, and clarify the report's comparative contribution, while remaining within the word limit and the structure required

for EUPopLink country reports.

Conceptual framework and engagement with populism literature: Thank you for this suggestion. The report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action following the shared EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and country-report guidelines. In the interest of keeping country reports concise and comparable, the full definitions of conceptual categories are provided in the EUPopLink guidelines and in Lorimer et al. (2026), rather than repeated in detail in each country report. However, I have revised the text to connect the Luxembourg case more explicitly to the EUPopLink definition of populism and Euroscepticism. I also added references to relevant conceptual literature where space allowed.

Vertical and horizontal exclusion: Thank you for highlighting this. I have revised the discussion of vertical and horizontal exclusion to define the distinction more clearly. Vertical exclusion now refers to the ADR's construction of conflict between "the people" and national or supranational elites, while horizontal exclusion refers to the construction of migrants, non-citizen residents, or progressive "ideologues" as threats to Luxembourgish or European identity. I have also linked this more explicitly to Judis' triadic populism and clarified how the ADR combines both forms of exclusion.

Triadic right-wing populism: I have strengthened the argument that the ADR's discourse approximates a triadic right-wing populist structure. The revised report now shows how the ADR positions "the people" vertically against national and EU elites, while also drawing horizontal boundaries against groups portrayed as lying outside or threatening the national political community. This is supported with evidence from the ADR's 2023 national manifesto, and its 2019 and 2024 European election manifestos.

Chameleonic populism: Thank you for noting that this concept required further clarification. I have revised the report to state more explicitly why the ADR can be understood as an example of chameleonic populism. Rather than using the term only as a label, the revised version explains that it refers to the ADR's capacity to adapt right-wing populist discourse to Luxembourg's least-likely context: EU-critical without being anti-EU, culturally defensive without rejecting immigration as such, and anti-elite while often appealing to relatively privileged native Luxembourgers.

Luxembourg as a least-likely case: I have revised the introduction and conclusion to frame Luxembourg more explicitly as a least-likely case for hard Euroscepticism and radical right-wing populism. The report now emphasizes that Luxembourg's wealth, small size, pro-European consensus, multiculturalism, and dependence on foreign and cross-border labour make hard anti-EU or uniformly anti-immigration politics unlikely to gain broad appeal. This strengthens the comparative relevance of the case.

Evidence of the ADR's rightward shift: I agree that this point needed firmer empirical grounding. Within the limits of a concise country report, I have added more systematic evidence from the ADR's 2023 national election manifesto, and the 2019 and 2024 European election manifestos, as well as from expert-informed classifications and secondary literature. The revised text now distinguishes between manifesto evidence, scholarly

classification, and interpretive assessment. No original longitudinal manifesto or discourse analysis is introduced, as the country reports are designed as concise secondary-research case studies.

Distinguishing Euroscepticism, conservatism, radical right politics, and populism: I have revised the report to avoid conflating these categories. The text now states explicitly that the ADR should not be classified as populist simply because it is immigration-sceptical, socially conservative, national-conservative, or Eurosceptic. These elements help locate the party ideologically on the right and explain its overlap with far-right themes, but its populism lies in the recurring construction of a people–elite conflict and the claim that sovereignty should be restored through referendums, direct democratic control, and stronger national decision-making.

What makes the ADR populist: Thank you for raising this important point. The revised report now makes the case for classifying the ADR as a soft or contextually adapted populist actor more directly. It draws on the ADR's 2023 manifesto, where party president Fred Keup argues that decisions are taken "over the heads of the people" and contrasts this with the party's promise to return decision-making to Luxembourgish citizens. The report explains that this is not merely anti-establishment rhetoric because it is combined with appeals to popular sovereignty, referendums, and direct democratic control.

Domestic evidence versus European affiliations: I have revised the report so that the domestic analysis no longer relies mainly on the ADR's European affiliations. The discussion of the party's ECR links remains, but the classification of the ADR as populist is now grounded more clearly in domestic manifesto evidence and recurring claims about citizens, elites, referendums, sovereignty, language, and political membership. The European affiliations are treated as reinforcing perceptions of rightward movement, rather than as the sole basis for classification.

Theoretical hook and core contribution: I have sharpened the report's core contribution. The revised version argues that Luxembourg demonstrates how populist Euroscepticism operates under constraining conditions. In a strongly pro-European, highly internationalized, and labour-dependent small state, hard rejectionism is unlikely to gain broad appeal; instead, right-wing populist and exclusionary claims appear in moderated, locally adapted forms. This argument is now stated more clearly in both the introduction and conclusion.

Use of the PopuList and expert-informed classifications: Thank you for this suggestion. I have revised the report to align the classification of the ADR more explicitly with the EUPopLink conceptual framework. Rather than relying on party labels alone, the revised version assesses the ADR in relation to EUPopLink's definition of populism as combining anti-elite claims with appeals to popular sovereignty. The report also acknowledges the contested nature of the ADR's classification in the secondary literature and expert-informed sources. It therefore presents the ADR not as a paradigmatic populist radical-right party, but as a soft and contextually adapted right-wing populist actor whose populism is recurrent, though moderated by Luxembourg's pro-European and consensus-oriented political context.

Scope of the literature review: I agree that a fuller literature review would be valuable. However, the EUPopLink country reports are intended to provide concise empirical country accounts, not comprehensive theoretical literature reviews. The report is constrained by the project's structure and 3,000-word limit. I have therefore not added an extended literature review, but I have strengthened the links to the EUPopLink framework and added selected conceptual references where they directly clarify the analysis.

Overall revisions: Overall, the revised report now more clearly distinguishes between Euroscepticism, conservatism, the radical right, and populism; provides manifesto-based evidence for the ADR's populist discourse; explains vertical and horizontal exclusion more explicitly; substantiates the use of chameleonic populism; and frames Luxembourg as a theoretically relevant least-likely case. These revisions aim to address the reviewer's main conceptual and empirical concerns while preserving the concise country-report format and remaining fully aligned with the EUPopLink guidelines.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.