In this chapter the aim is to identify the populist parties in Europe that have gained parliamentary representation at least once between 2000 and 2013. As discussed in the previous chapter, I assume that certain parties have populism at the very core of their appeal; these parties cannot be properly characterised without considering their populist discourse. These populist parties (1) portray ‘the people’ as virtuous and essentially homogeneous; (2) advocate popular sovereignty, as opposed to elitist rule; and (3) define themselves against the political establishment, which is alleged to act against the interest of ‘the people’. The previous chapter has already indicated that there are certain challenges when it comes to identifying a clearly circumscribed set of populist parties. This chapter will confirm that there are a substantial number of parties that can be seen as borderline cases of populism. As will be shown, one of the difficulties of using the concept as a tool of classification is that populism is not always a stable core attribute of certain political parties only. Populist rhetoric can in theory be voiced by all parties, and political actors may also modify their degree of populism over time. Particularly in post-communist countries, furthermore, anti-establishment rhetoric tends to be a feature of many (new) parties, making a distinction between populist and non-populist parties arguably less meaningful.

In the end, however, parties are identified that can, at least for a certain period of their existence, be considered as genuine cases of populism. In addition, the chapter provides a rudimentary assessment of the credibility of populist parties in the various European countries, in order to provide the data for one of the conditions in the QCA presented in the next chapter. As outlined in Chapter 1, in order to determine whether a populist party has been credible, its electoral appeal and organisational
cohesion are considered. Regarding the former element, the electoral appeal of populist parties, I will consider the visibility and persuasiveness of the party leadership, and the party’s ability to dissociate itself convincingly from extremism as well as from the political establishment. Some of these indicators are not directly relevant for all populist parties in this study, and they are therefore not all discussed for each individual case. Some populist parties, for instance, never came close to participating in government, and it has thus not been difficult for them to distance themselves from the political mainstream. Others, in turn, never had significant problems in dissociating themselves from extremism. On the basis of the assessment of credibility, it is determined whether a country has been characterised by a substantial, reasonable, limited or no supply of credible populist parties during the period of study. In the next chapter, these categories will be turned into quantitative values in order to conduct the QCA.

The analysis in this chapter mainly relies on a study of secondary and party literature, and the assistance of country experts (see Appendices A and B). Countries in which no populist parties have won seats in national parliaments are disregarded, unless borderline cases have surfaced that require discussion. The countries which are not discussed here are Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom – the last country, however, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. It is worth noting that the QCA in the next chapter covers all 31 countries, including those in which populist parties have failed to break through. Further, in order to avoid tautological reasoning as regards the assessment of credibility (‘the parties that did not manage to win any seats must have lacked credibility’), the country experts were asked whether there have been any credible yet electorally unsuccessful populist parties (see Appendix B). The responses indicated that there were no such cases that would influence the judgement about the supply of credible populist parties in a given country.

After a description of the populist (borderline) cases in the various countries, and an assessment of their credibility, the concluding section of this chapter touches on the general observations that can be made on the basis of this exercise.

The populist parties and their credibility

Austria

The Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ) is one of the best-known populist parties in Europe. The FPÖ was founded in the