

# After Their Establishment:

Right-wing Populist Parties  
in Europe

Florian Hartleb



# After Their Establishment:

Right-wing Populist Parties  
in Europe

Florian Hartleb

## CREDITS

Based on the research project for the Konrad Adenauer Foundation  
"Rechtspopulistische Parteien in Europa".

Centre for European Studies  
Design: RARO S.L.  
Printed in Brussels by Drukkerij Jo Vandenbulcke  
Brussels  
Centre for European Studies  
Rue du Commerce 20  
Brussels, BE – 1000

The Centre for European Studies (CES) is the official think-tank of the European People's Party (EPP) dedicated to the promotion of Christian democrat, conservative and like-minded political values.

For more information please visit:

[www.thinkingeurope.eu](http://www.thinkingeurope.eu)

This publication receives funding from the European Parliament.

© Centre for European Studies 2011

Photos used in this publication: Centre for European Studies 2011

The European Parliament and the Centre for European Studies assume no responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication or their subsequent use. Sole responsibility lies on the author of this publication.

# Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	
Topicality and Relevance of the Theme .....	7
<b>Definition</b> .....	<b>21</b>
• On the problems of concepts of political struggle ...	21
• Dissociation from conservatism .....	25
• Relationship with right-wing extremism .....	28
<b>Constituencies</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>Mobilisation Topics</b> .....	<b>34</b>
• Criticism of immigration and Islamophobia .....	34
• Criticism of Globalisation: The debate .....	35
• Euroscepticism .....	38
• Social populism .....	42
<b>Personality Factor?</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Austrian Case Study:</b>	
<b>Haider as a Prototype With a Twin</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Effects: Democracy Disrupted?</b> .....	<b>60</b>

**Germany** ..... **64**

- Little to offer despite variety and causes of this ..... 64
- New opportunity structures ..... 69

**Populism Sui Generis: East Central Europe** ..... **74**

**Policy Recommendations** ..... **79**

- Strategies of the mainstream parties ..... 79
- Political education ..... 83

**The Author** ..... **86**

## Summary

Right-wing populist parties have developed into a stable institution and a long-term feature of European politics. Again and again they prove themselves capable of gaining electoral success at national level, partly as a result of crises of the major parties, as is the case in France, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Scandinavia. After the change of the political system in Eastern Europe, populism also gained influence there. Yet right-wing populist parties rarely succeed in coming into government, and even if they actually manage it, they predominantly function only as junior partners or, as is currently the situation in the Netherlands, as supporters of a minority government.

Basically, they approve of the democratic system, and this is what distinguishes them from right-wing extremist parties. Populist party types manipulate anti-party emotions, present themselves as anti-elitist (in sharp contrast to conservative parties), have a tendency to break taboos in a highly staged manner effective in the media, have a central leader figure, create an in-group identity by targeting clear-cut enemy images, glorify the direct connection between the “people” and the government, and focus campaigning on a central theme.

Right-wing populist parties do not only enjoy popularity among those who reject modernisation or globalisation, but also among middle-class voters who are afraid of social decline and are therefore openly in favour of populist scapegoat campaigns against immigrants. The anti-Islam theme, in particular, has become the new “winning formula” among right-wing populist parties, as in the Netherlands,

Austria and Scandinavia. Other themes include Euroscepticism and criticism of globalisation in the broader and narrower sense of the word, as well as a policy of social promises.

Not the least of what populism has to offer is orientation as it is a movement that “personalises” the solution to problems. Its structures are characterised by the fact that it consists of loosely organised movements with a broad base rather than traditional political parties. The successful Dutchman Geert Wilders is in fact the only member of his party, which constitutes a complete departure from the usual concept of member parties. Germany, on the other hand, assumes a special role: right-wing populism in Germany has hardly been able to achieve any successes despite countless topics which could serve as starting points for discussion – such as the 2010 integration debate. This is partly due to the “shadows of the past” and partly to the scarcity supply element. In Central Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the “National Populism” that is widespread there is easily recognisable.

How can people’s parties respond to populist competition? Whether the popular demand for a sharper profile will really catch on, remains questionable at least. As far as the organisational strengthening of the parties is concerned, there are several suggestions for making membership more attractive, as well as for making processes within the parties more transparent and open. At this level in particular, populist party types are heading in new directions, as clearly shown by Geert Wilders and his one-member party, the PVV.

There are also tasks in the field of political education: one major feature of populism is its defensive attitude towards

the political system and its identification of scapegoats. “Us” against the “powers that be” – populist diction directly opposes representative bodies and thus classical institutions. This can only be counteracted if people are introduced early to the processes and fundamental values of democracy and if this process continues, wherever possible, in the sense of life-long learning.

## Introduction

### Topicality and Relevance of the Theme

The danger of extremism in 21st century Europe appears averted, with some exceptions. The 20th century as the “Age of Extremism” has left too deep marks.<sup>1</sup> Even parties that openly displayed right-wing extremist ideologies are striving for moderation and no longer oppose the political establishment head-on. This is also the conclusion reached by a recent omnibus on extremism in the EU, which deals with the current situation of extremism.<sup>2</sup> Instead, there is a new kind of magic formula. New parties which have become a talking point in Europe thanks to their successes – some have even taken up government positions – bear the “populist” label. Since the early 1980’s, new kinds of

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hobsbawm, Eric J.: *Das Zeitalter der Extreme. Weltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts.*– Munich; Vienna: Hanser, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jesse, Eckhard / Thieme, Tom: Extremismus in den EU-Staaten im Vergleich. In: *ibid* (Ed.): *Extremismus in den EU-Staaten.* – Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011. – pp. 431-482, here pp. 458-459.

primarily right-wing populist parties with an anti-establishment stance, an agenda of protest and a charismatic leader have been able to attain electoral success at a national level, for instance in France, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Scandinavia. With the change of the political system, the effects of populism have also spread in Eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> Thus, populism has become a long-term issue in European politics.<sup>4</sup>

Is there anything which unites populism or populist movements? As far as Margaret Canovan is concerned, all populist phenomena of the past and the present – from the Russian *Narodniki* and the American farmers movements at the end of the 19th century up to contemporary West European party democracy – have one thing in common: their appeal to a “people” regarded as homogenous, with a particular focus on the “man in the street” as well as an anti-elitist stance.<sup>5</sup> Given that the big parties are confronted with problems like decreasing ties to certain environments, declining popularity with voters and general identity crises, it will be no surprise that new rivals are coming on the scene. With green alternative movements based on post-material value shifts having found their place in broad swathes of society, no comparably large-scale erosion of society can be ascertained. Nevertheless, the individual’s feeling of insecurity in the face of increasing economic globalisation

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mudde’s best overview work at the time of writing, *Cas: Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. – Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. my commentary for the Konrad Adenauer Foundation London with the title “Is right-wing populism here to stay in European politics?” – [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_21456-1522-2-30.pdf?110118173147](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_21456-1522-2-30.pdf?110118173147) [25.01.2011].

<sup>5</sup> Cf. first Canovan, Margaret: *Populism*. – London: Junction Books, 1981.

and cultural consonance in all social milieus is growing, though to a greater or lesser degree. This development inevitably poses the question of which meaningful demarcation rituals can and should be undertaken by increasingly interdependent European societies. The Europe-wide success of the new right-wing populist parties is shown by election results in the individual countries. They show, as Frank Decker confirms, only too clearly, that “new right-wing populism has in the meantime gained a solid basis for success which is not likely to disappear in the foreseeable future.”<sup>6</sup>

In France, the rise of the Front National under Jean-Marie Le Pen began in 1984 with a 15% share of the votes. On 21st April 2001, Jean-Marie Le Pen enjoyed a moment of glory and shook the world of politics both inside and outside the country. With a 17% share of the votes in the first ballot of the presidential elections, which in France’s semi-presidential system are of outstanding significance, he achieved second place. This enabled him to throw Lionel Jospin, the left-wing candidate who had been Prime Minister for five years, out of the race and, for the first time, he was able to step up against the conservative Jacques Chirac in an admittedly hopeless final ballot. However, the party has lost influence and votes in recent years, partly due to the strict immigration policy followed by President Nicolas Sarkozy, and partly due to the elderly patriarch’s lack of vision for the future (Le Pen was born in 1928). However, the party remains in family hands: on 16th January 2011 his daughter was elected his successor in a crucial vote. She announced that she would run as a candidate at the 2012

---

<sup>6</sup> Decker, Frank: Rechtspopulismus. Ein neuer Parteientyp in den westlichen Demokratien. In: *Gegenwartskunde* 50 (2001), pp. 293-305, here p. 304.

presidential elections. Marine Le Pen, who has been entrusted with the task of revitalising the electorate, is striving to “de-demonise” her party and turn it into a people’s party. In this process she is not only focussing on anti-immigration policy but also on economic and social themes that have enjoyed great popularity during the financial crisis which has been rampant since 2008. She is thus combatting globalisation and is calling for France to leave the European Union.

In Belgium, two newly created right-wing populist parties have been able to make their voices heard since the mid-1980s: the original *Vlaams Blok* and the small, now marginalised *Front National*,<sup>7</sup> based on the French example. The xenophobic *Vlaams Blok*, which came into being towards the end of the 1970s, strives for the independence of Flanders. It dreams of a Flanders that is not only independent but also ethnically homogenous. This homogeneity is to be achieved by deporting non-EU foreigners to their home countries and compelling EU foreigners to assimilate. Despite being ostracised by other parties – just like the French *Front National* – the party has been able to achieve substantial successes. From a legal perspective, an unequivocal assessment has been made in relation to xenophobia within the *Vlaams Blok*. The verdict of the Belgian High Court, in November 2004, indicated that the *Vlaams Blok* at the time had indirectly committed grave violations of anti-racism laws. What is more, the party became liable for legal violations by three bodies related to it. The verdict also called for State-financed allocation payments to be stopped. Without forfeiting its political

---

<sup>7</sup> The party is unitarian and monarchistic and campaigns against immigrants. It achieved its best result in the parliamentary elections of 1995, with 2.3% of the vote.

continuity, the party responded by toning down its programme and changing its name to “Vlaams Belang”. In the meantime the party is striving for social acceptability

In Switzerland, the *Autopartei* (founded in 1985) has been able to gain 5% of the vote in national elections. Ever since the beginning of the 1990s, Christoph Blocher – who is officially only the Zurich Canton Chairman but in reality is also the mastermind and whip of the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) – has caused a high in Swiss confederate right-wing populism. The chemical company boss and party financier has systematically “trimmed” the once liberal-conservative SVP – which originally had only regional roots – to become a right-wing populist organisation. At the general elections of October 1999 it scraped the position of leading party in terms of votes (22.5%) – even if it did not gain the majority of seats. Four years later it was able to achieve another victory, becoming the clearly strongest party with 26.8% of votes and seats. On the back of the election results, Blocher caused a revolution and brought about the collapse of the “magic formula” which since 1959 had laid down the proportional representation of the parties in government and had always guaranteed the same number of seats in the Swiss government to all of the four major parties. Blocher pushed through his massively increased claim to a second government office for his party, and got himself elected into the national government on 10th December 2003. The all-parties coalition in the Swiss concordance democracy at any rate ensures unanimity in all governmental decisions, which in practice means that the party must endorse the course of government automatically. However, on 12th December 2007, Blocher was duped in the Swiss Federal Parliament, after the SVP once again gained votes in the elections. In a surprise move, a Centre-Left Alliance pushed through its

own candidate, SVP Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, against Christoph Blocher, who was designated by the government coalition. Having initially left her options open, she finally accepted election to the Federal Council. In the meantime, her national organisation has been excluded from the SVP Federal Party. Widmer-Schlumpf was elected Swiss Woman of the Year in 2008.

In Denmark and Norway, so-called “Progress Parties” (who are explicitly against immigration) have been able to attain a solid position in the party system. The Norwegian Progress Party, having achieved nearly 15% of the vote at the parliament elections, supported the conservative minority government from 2001 to 2005. At the 2009 parliamentary elections, the party achieved 22.9% of the vote under its new chairman Siv Jensen. Since the terrorism committed by 32-years-old Anders Behring Breivik on 22nd July 2011, a possible connection between right-wing populism and terrorism is under discussion, at least concerning the roots and ideas behind such acts in practice and in theory. Breivik was responsible for the bombing of government buildings in Oslo that resulted in eight deaths, and the mass shooting at a camp of the Workers’ Youth League (AUF) of the Labour Party on the island of Utøya, where he killed 69 people, mostly teenagers. He was indeed an isolated terrorist and not part of a movement whereas he wrote more than 1500 pages referring to populist parties in Europe (in addition to many other traces of his propaganda). Breivik himself was once an active member of the Progress Party, but left the party because he considered it too moderate. Indeed, it would not be fair to say that right-wing populists are the root or the cause of Breivik’s actions. In general, right-wing groups are much more moderate and not support the use of force — as he did in such a brutal way.

The Danish People's Party (DVP), headed by Party Chairwoman Pia Kjaersgaard, has also played a major role since the 2001 parliamentary elections (12%) as it has since then tolerated minority governments for nearly ten years. In the November 2007 elections, the party achieved a 13,9% share of the vote, its best result so far.

The elections of September 2011 mark the end of 10 years with the centre-right-liberal government based on support from the populist Danish People's Party which got 12,3 % (minus 1,6 %). Before, the populists influenced policy quite a lot (carrying out passport checks at land borders, in defiance of the Schengen agreement). In Sweden, a similar group, New Democracy, did not achieve success until 1991, and then only briefly. But even there, the right-wing populist organisation, the Swedish Democrats, succeeded in entering Parliament at the 2010 parliamentary elections (5.7%), forcing a minority government to be formed in Sweden as well. The party, founded in 1988, once had right-wing extremist orientations, but under the leadership of Per Jimmi Åkesson (born in 1979) it became a right-wing populist organisation, focussing on immigration and anti-Islam issues.

In Finland too, the "True Finns" party was able to achieve a resounding success in the parliamentary elections of 17th April 2011. The Eurosceptic party which mobilised against the EU-supported bail-out of Portugal, gained almost 20 percent of the vote in their first national elections. The party campaigned on vetoing financial aid to the debtor countries and on renegotiating the bail-out agreement. Party leader Timo Soini who graduated as Master of Social Sciences with a thesis on populism has alarmed the Finnish elites by leading his True Finns party into a neck-and-neck position

with the three mainstream parties that traditionally dominate Finnish politics. Coalition negotiations according to the consensual system in Finland with the conservative National Coalition Party (NCP) and the Social Democrats failed, however, because the True Finns are strongly opposed to both the euro and European banking and financial bailouts. Timo Soini said that EU policy once again played the decisive role in his party's choice to go into opposition. This shows that right-wing populism has now gained a foothold even in Sweden and Finland where it had previously been unable to record relevant successes.

In Italy the regional organisation *Lega Nord*<sup>8</sup>, headed by its figurehead Umberto Bossi – with populist media entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi and his *Forza Italia*<sup>9</sup>, as well as the former neo-fascists of the *Alleanza Nazionale* around Gianfranco Fini – successfully made the leap into government in 1994. The alliance ended only a few months later, after the coalition partner *Lega Nord* broke with Berlusconi in the wake of the corruption allegations against him. Since the election of 13th May 2001<sup>10</sup>, Silvio Berlusconi is once again Italian Prime Minister and the old alliance has been revived. After the two biggest parties of the centre left bloc united under the banner of the *Partito Democratico* in autumn 2007, Berlusconi

---

<sup>8</sup> The “Party of the Lombards”, originally an autonomist movement, operates with an identity grounded in historical myth and – while it actually participates in government – it expresses resentment against Rome (and against the EU). It's favourite enemies are “spongers” from the South and immigrants.

<sup>9</sup> Silvio Berlusconi, the media magnate from Milan, decided to enter the world of politics in spring 1994. What ultimately happened was that a club-like mass movement, by the name of *Forza Italia* developed in no time at all – this movement already became the strongest group in Parliament at the parliamentary elections of 1994, with 21% of the vote; and it led to Berlusconi taking the role of Prime Minister.

<sup>10</sup> The centre left governments of Romano Prodi and Massimo D'Alema in the meantime only enjoyed short-term success.

suggested pursuing a merger of the parties into a single political force on the centre right. However, the big alliance partners, *Lega Nord* and *Alleanza Nazionale*, spoke out against their own dissolution. The project was thus put on ice. After the fall of the government under Romano Prodi, and pending consideration of the early parliamentary elections, the project of a common party was revived summarily. On 8th February 2008, Berlusconi and Fini let it be known that *Forza Italia* and *Alleanza Nazionale* were going to enter the election with the joint list *Popolo della Libertà* and that the *Lega Nord*, with its own list, would enter into a coalition with it. The *Popolo della Libertà* was founded during a conference from 27th-29th March 2009 in Rome; at the same time the “political club” *Forza Italia* was officially disbanded.

In Austria, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) under Jörg Haider gradually succeeded from 1986 onwards in catching up with the “big” people’s parties: the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP). It threw its historic German nationalist traditions overboard and replaced them with a distinctive kind of populism. The result of this uptrend was participation in government from February 2000, after it won 26.9% of the vote at the general election; the FPÖ had reached the zenith of its success.<sup>11</sup> However, the implementation of government policies quickly became a hard battle, as they were permanently discredited and finally torpedoed by the hardliners around Jörg Haider who persisted in adhering to their opposition course. The electoral crash, even within the

---

<sup>11</sup> The “FPÖ” group even became a European political power. During the year 2000, the EU member states introduced sanctions against Austria for a short time, which led to considerable controversies within and outside the country.

opposition, led to Haider's secession, and he founded the Future of Austria Alliance (BZÖ). What happened was something no-one had reckoned with: the FPÖ, with Heinz-Christian Strache (who was similar to Haider), was able to consolidate itself and regain its old strength with mottos such as "Daham statt Islam" (Home, not Islam). Both organisations achieved success in the general elections (FPÖ: 17.5%; BZÖ 10.7%). Haider lost his life soon afterwards in a car crash. Since then, a reunification process has been initiated as the FPÖ has proved to be clearly stronger than the other parties. Thus, it won 26.2% of the votes cast at the 2010 parliamentary and local council elections, becoming the second-strongest party.

In the Netherlands, the *Liste Pim Fortuyn* (LPF), with 17% of the vote, became the second most powerful party<sup>12</sup>, even without its main candidate and eponym, murdered on 6th May 2002 just a few days prior to the parliamentary election, and participated in the new majority bloc. Prior to Pim Fortuyn's death, it was hard to comprehend what political views he really represented in a number of areas.<sup>13</sup> Fortuyn saw Islam as the enemy per se, and he can be viewed as a prototype of modern-day anti-Islamic populism. He believed that the increasing influence of Islam would, in the long term, undermine important values of Dutch culture, such as the equality of people and freedom for homosexuals. For this reason, Fortuyn wanted to restrict immigration through asylum and marriage and force Muslims who had already

---

<sup>12</sup> The Rotterdam Communal Elections in the spring of the same year, formed the basis of this. The party led by Fortuyn gained 35% of the vote right from the start.

<sup>13</sup> During his time as a student, he considered joining the Communist Party, but later on he joined the left wing of social democracy. Fortuyn was for a long time inspired by Marxism, but he also admired Silvio Berlusconi.

immigrated to integrate, if necessary by force. Members of this group should be forced at 18 years of age to live together with Dutch contemporaries.<sup>14</sup> Following the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11th September 2001, he even made a case for closing the national borders to Muslim immigrants.

With his anti-Islamic orientation, Fortuyn wanted to demonstrate the general failure of multiculturalism. He used arguments which were often trivial in nature: “In the Rotterdam district of Feyenoord, where I live, people see women scurrying through the streets like ghosts. They avoid making contact with other people, especially men. They don’t even make eye contact. This creates an unpleasant atmosphere in the city.”<sup>15</sup> According to him, the Netherlands had imported riff-raff into the country who did not integrate because people left them in peace rather than imposing the values of the guest country on them. Fortuyn clearly left his mark with his anti-Islamic attitude.

Years later, the anti-Islamic Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV), founded in 2006 by Geert Wilders, a Member of Parliament who resigned from the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), among others, has achieved success. In the same year, it won 5.9% of the vote at the parliamentary elections, winning as much as 15.5% in 2010, a result that was much higher than the opinion polls had predicted. Wilders, who is a great friend of Israel as a result of many trips

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Fortuyn, Pim: *De islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*. – Uithoorn; Rotterdam: Karakter etc., 2001. – pp. 95-106. It was as early as 1997 that Fortuyn published his pamphlet “The Islamisation of our society”); but it was the second edition, published after 11th September 2001, that was a big success.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73 (Author’s translation).

to the country,<sup>16</sup> immediately announced that he was prepared to make compromises in order to govern (he immediately abandoned his opposition to an increase in the retirement age). Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel was quick to call the collaboration of her Dutch comrades with Wilders ill-advised.

The Dutch government coalition will be confronted with Wilders' extreme statements on Islam – he compared the Koran with Hitler's "Mein Kampf". In his speeches, commentaries and interviews, Wilders demonstrates an ever more radical kind of Islamophobia, based on a multitude of apocalyptic conspiracy theories suggesting the imminent subjugation of Europe. On 11th September 2010, in New York, he was one of the main speakers at a demonstration against the construction of an Islamic mosque in the immediate vicinity of Ground Zero. In his own country, Wilders has to answer for his harsh criticism of Islam in court: the course of this controversial trial, which began in early October 2010, is still completely open, especially as the trial has had to be re-initiated after the defence submitted a plea accusing the judges of bias. However, it is to be expected that the further progress of the trial will influence the position of the government.<sup>17</sup> On 23rd June, a court in Amsterdam acquitted

---

<sup>16</sup> Wilders sought out his political friends not so much in Europe as in the United States and in Israel – in particular in circles regarded as extreme right by the countries they were based in. It meant that Wilders felt connected to Avigdor Lieberman and his party "Jisrael Beateinou". In the USA, he established contacts with persons and organisations that, like him, were concerned about the Islamisation of Europe, and had strong ties with Israel. This focus on the United States and Israel at least has made Wilders an outsider in the national populist family, which is not exactly known for expressing pro-American or pro-Israeli attitudes.

<sup>17</sup> On the phenomenon of Wilders and his development cf. Vossen, Koen: Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten: Die ideologische Entwicklung des Geert Wilders. In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich. – Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 77-104.

Geert Wilders of the charge of racial hatred instigation. The trial was considered a test to freedom of speech in the Netherlands. Wilders declared on the same day with a smile on his face: “It’s not only an acquittal for me, but a victory for freedom of expression in the Netherlands. Fortunately you’re allowed to discuss Islam in public debate and you’re not muzzled in public debate. An enormous burden has fallen from my shoulders.”

There are also states with no history of successful right-wing populism. In Germany, the short-term success of Ronald Schill in Hamburg (2001-2003) has been the only right-wing populist success so far. There is no doubt that historical awareness in Germany puts the brakes on the development of right-wing populist movements, whilst the federal structure and size of the country also stand in the way of such rapid growth as in the Netherlands. In addition, a charismatic personality capable of mobilising people all over the country is nowhere to be seen. However, this does not mean that Germany will be saved from such movements. The commotion over Thilo Sarrazin’s book, “Germany does away with itself”, showed that in September 2010 about 18% of the German population would have been ready to vote for a party which would endorse a political programme in line with Sarrazin’s standpoints with regard to the inability of Muslims to integrate. Thus, there seems to be voter potential even if there is no talk yet of its mobilisation.<sup>18</sup> There are other countries with no right-wing populist electoral successes, including Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg.<sup>19</sup> This aspect is mostly excluded from relevant

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian: Einleitung. In: *ibid.* (Ed.): *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich – Münster etc.*: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 7-16, here p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stöss, Richard: *Rechtsextreme Parteien in Westeuropa*. In: Niedermayer, Oskar / Stöss, Richard / Haas, Melanie (Ed.): *Die Parteiensysteme Westeuropas*. – Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006. – pp. 521-563.

observations. There is also no “International Populist Party” in the European Parliament, even though populism has also been successful in Eastern Europe.

Currently there are considerable concerns about a new populism arising with reference to recent developments and a general feeling of malaise with the European project both from national elites and people from member states. Observers speak about an anti-European virus. The reason is rather obvious: some countries of the Euro zone have come into serious financial distress. For instance, the EU had to create a European bailout fund when states such as Greece, Ireland and Portugal suffered grave financial problems as a collateral consequence of the financial crisis of 2008. These measures of solidarity, being at the cost of the financially stronger countries and the entire construct of the common economic zone with its flagship the Euro, are difficult to convey to the populations of the “rich, subsidising countries”. The European elites are in fear and talk of a “new danger of populism” – a topic of current conferences in European Parliament organised from altogether four fractions (Liberals, Greens and EPP in March; Socialists in June 2011).

## Definition

### On the Problems of Concepts of Political Struggle<sup>1</sup>

The term populism is on everyone's lips. It is commonly confused with the struggle for popularity or with demagoguery which no politician or party can dispense with. This dubious word is sometimes regarded as a swearword, implying the accusation that the other politician or the other party is not practicing any real politics. As such, populism is nothing more than "posturing" with cheap promises that can never be fulfilled. And yet this view, which suggests that populism is tasteless, falls short. For one thing, the criticism of populism can itself be populist by nature, replacing rational arguments. Moreover, this view prevents people from seeing that new kinds of "populist" parties really are taking shape all over Europe and that they are able to effect a partial change to party systems.

The term populism (from Latin *populus* = people), compared to terms like liberalism, conservatism or socialism, has less of an appearance of being the offspring of an historical genealogy or of the further development of some kind of historical spirit or notion. Rather, it works as a term that, from a scientific perspective, is not always reflected properly. The term populism has particular relevance in connection with political and media discourse. Often the term has a negative connotation, implying that someone is only telling the people what they want to hear while fanning latent fears and

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. here Hartleb, Florian: Rechtspopulistische Parteien. – Sankt Augustin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2005. – (Working paper/Documentation; 143).

prejudices. When used in a positive sense, a “populist” is someone who understands the problems of “ordinary people”, articulates them and communicates with the “people” directly. Hence the conflicting nature of the term populism. On the one hand, it embodies democratic ideals solely on the basis of its meaning. Based on this logic, populism is a solid component of democracy. On the other hand, the “-ism” suffix suggests that the term populism is already an overshoot *per se*, one which can also work against the norms of states with modern democratic constitutions, namely against representative bodies and democratic administrative decision-making processes. Thus, there is a tense relationship between populism and democracy.

Some scholars view populism as a term used to identify a specific kind of politics, interaction and communication. They identify the term with a specific style of politics and mobilisation strategy charged with sentiment.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the author classifies populism as an ideology which is to be defined with the aid of clear characteristics relating to its content. For example, it is suited to defining a specific kind of party within contemporary party democracy in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Recently, the “Eastern Europe” application has also been discussed. If the phenomenon is observed at global level, the Latin American continent, where a mythically rehashed kind of populism as an authoritarian force had and still has regime character, comes to the fore. However, the different meanings and regions by no means exclude a

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jagers, Jan / Walgrave, Stephaan: Populism as a communication style: An empiric study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. In: European Journal of Political Research, 46 (2007) 3, pp. 319-345.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hartleb, Florian: Rechts- und Linkspopulismus. Eine Fallstudie anhand von Schill-Partei und PDS.– Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004.

scientifically valid application of the term “populism” if the ideological aspect is included.

There are four dimensions that always seem to constitute a structural and typological guideline:

- *Technical dimension*: populism simplifies and creates a direct contrast between a “people” regarded as homogenous and the establishment. The anti-elitist stance is displayed through chronic, inflammatorily accentuated protests in the sense of the “taboo breaker”.
- *Content-related dimension*: populism presents itself as a kind of “anti-ism” with concrete content. In this sense, an anti-Islam tendency within European right-wing populism has become a talking point in recent times. Other enemy stereotypes are “global capitalists”, “social parasites” and immigrants.
- *Personal dimension*: an eloquent and charismatic leader is often recognised as the speaker in populist movements, as the advocate of the “will of the people”, who fights the establishment in a manner similar to Robin Hood.
- *Media dimension*: the mass media – in particular the tabloids – often enter into a symbiotic relationship with populist movements, hoping for headlines.

Thus, the definition of the phenomenon is simple enough: populism, which has appeared since the late 1960s in Western Europe (with the variants of right-wing and left-wing populism), refers to parties and movements that fight with a polarising attitude “against the powers that be”, in particular traditional people’s parties, thus playing the “advocate of the

homogenous people”. They often manipulate sensitive issues in a manner that violates taboos, issues like immigration, subjective or objective welfare-sustaining protectionism against economic globalisation or, in the context of the European Union, simply the wish for simplification in the increasingly complicated multi-level system. The latter point may be understood as a general unease in relation to representative bodies and often infers the wish for greater participation in a sense of direct democracy. The person who represents these interests is often regarded as a “saviour” figure, at least by his followers, in contrast to classic “career politicians”<sup>4</sup>.

Right-wing populism consists of a conglomerate made up of trends which appeal to the “man in the street” rather than to specific social strata, classes, professional groups or interests. Both privileged strata and fringe groups in society are treated as scapegoats for outrages in society. There are thus two central aspects:

- The *vertical* dimension as a general characteristic of populism: the dissociation from the political classes (institutions, traditional parties). The attitude is one of “us” against “the powers that be”.
- The *horizontal* dimension as a specifically right-wing variant of populism: the dissociation from immigrants, aliens and criminals; the attitude of “us” against “the outsiders”.

The birth of the populist “newcomers” – according to populist argumentation – is legitimised by the fact that

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. in relation to this fundamental problematic of politics Weber, Max: Politik als Beruf. – Stuttgart:Reclam, 1992 (“Politics as a Vocation”).

parties with political responsibility have in some way failed to remain loyal to their mandate. They focus on “anti-party feelings” within the population, who often evaluate legitimate political conflicts as excessive “party bickering”. Prejudices against political parties are often based on ignorance. This ignorance is often the result of an over-simplified way of thinking which makes citizens’ movements appear creative and dynamic, while political parties on the other hand seem to be nothing but antiquated organisations with elitist traits.

Populist party types, which can not only be differentiated from the established parties but also, thanks to their fundamental acceptance of the system, from right-wing extremist parties, manipulate anti-party feelings. They oppose the establishment, have a tendency to commit staged taboo violations as a pretext to gain media coverage, have a central leading figure, define themselves as an “us” group with clear enemy stereotypes, glorify the direct connection between the “people” and those in government and place a major topic at the centre of their campaigning. Populist organisations regard the representation of interests by the “mainstream” people’s parties and parliamentary representation as defective, which is why they frequently actively stand up for more democracy by means of popular petitions and plebiscites. In this process they adopt a thoroughly dangerous rhetoric of simplification in order to market their brand of politics.

## Dissociation from Conservatism

In political debate, conservatives are often branded right-wing populists. However, equating conservatism with right-wing populism overlooks the differences.

Conservatism is strictly oriented towards universal values and ideas, for example discipline and obedience. From a normative perspective it is characterised by stability. In part marked by religion, conservatism heads a debate on morals and traditions; it firmly emphasises institutionalised social structures such as family and marriage, develops strategies to combat emancipator elements within society, is mainly based on traditional elites in ordered circumstances and transcends fundamental questions in the field of politics. According to conservatism, the State has to be authoritarian as far as jurisprudence and internal and external security are concerned. On the other hand, conservatism demands a relative abstinence of the State in matters of economic policy and works toward fostering the private initiative of the individual as much as possible.

Unpredictable right-wing populism, on the other hand, does not attempt to achieve any radical or revolutionary changes to existing values; in its own words, it seeks to unify a society tending towards multiculturalism and to reinforce State power with strong crime fighting and prevention measures. On the surface, the above indicated postulates are of a genuinely conservative nature. Conservatism and right-wing populism come together in their upholding of societal traditions and their use and idealisation of them as a counterpoint to new, unmanageable conditions. In spite of this attested proximity, the two phenomena are not interchangeable, closely related terms; rather, they are mutually exclusive. Thus, conservatism, by default, sees itself as an idea of the social elite, whilst populism is clearly oriented against the social establishment.

The following standpoint vividly demonstrates the boundaries between conservatism and populism: the two

phenomena look at the institutional procedures of the democratic constitutional State with different levels of appreciation. Conservatism holds the regulations of representative democracy in high regard, but populism holds them in low esteem. The latter expresses its suspicion of mediatory *corps intermédiaires* which in its view slip in between the people and the leadership and thus bastardise the true “will of the people”. Populism pursues the aim of weakening the institutions it regards as inconvenient, in particular those unable to prove that they are directly legitimised by popular vote. Representative elements are frowned upon in populism, and parties representing “particular interests” are regarded with suspicion.

Overall, the comparison between right-wing populism and conservatism admits the following conclusion:

## Differences

### Right-wing populism

fickle, unpredictable  
(solid values basis)

anti-elitist

holds institutions  
in low regard

“Us” vs. “Them”  
(polarisation)

opportunism

### Conservatism

stable

elitist

holds institutions  
in high regard

“We are all in the same boat”  
(integration)

spiritual roots

Populism was born of an attitude of protest which opposes conservatism and vociferates against it. Right-wing populism profits to a significant extent from a modern, (neo-) conservative dilemma. As a result, modern right-wing populism is a “response to a strategic positional problem of a major people’s conservative party, which, in the eyes of its right-wing conservative regular clientele, proclaims a programme that is too blurred in specific areas”, as Fritz Plasser and Peter A. Ulram emphasise.<sup>5</sup> Thus, conservatism is forced to go on the defensive and compelled to react by a strengthened right-wing populism.

### Relationship with Right-Wing Extremism

Right-wing extremism, right-wing radicalism, extreme right, new right, radical right, (right-wing) fundamentalism, (neo-) fascism – all these terms are in circulation alongside right-wing populism, indicating a similar kind of phenomenon. Often, some authors will simply use them as synonyms, neglecting to differentiate between the terms. In order to understand right-wing populism, it is helpful to ask about its relationship with right-wing extremism. Overlaps between right-wing populism and right-wing extremism are clearly identifiable in certain areas, although the phenomena indicated are in no way comparable or interchangeable.

The *Liste Pim Fortuyn* and Geert Wilders’ PVV can be viewed as populist, but they cannot be labelled extremist. The Belgian *Vlaams Belang* and the French *Front National* are populist and can also be labelled extremist due to their

---

<sup>5</sup> Plasser, Fritz / Ulram, Peter A.: Wahltag ist Zahltag. In: Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, 18 (1989), pp. 151-164, here p. 155.

racist elements. There is the possibility of isolated overlaps and even considerable points of contact with unconstitutional endeavours; however, populism should in no way be correlated with extremism. It is generally held that populist parties or movements are not *a priori* in positions that are anti-democratic or unconstitutional. They can also definitely articulate democratic elements.

Populism should not be discredited from the outset as unconstitutional. It does not shake the cornerstones of the democratic canon of values. Populist anti-attitudes stem from some kind of target-oriented opportunism, not from consistent opposition to the system. An anti-system party refuses to co-operate with the “system parties” and has an agenda of destructive non-compliance within the political process; an anti-parties party desires to integrate into the political process constructively, in its own way and is on principle prepared to communicate and form coalitions. Populist parties operate not with anti-system feelings, but with anti-party feelings. Tests can be performed on an individual case basis.

Western European right-wing populism is frequently understood as a type of neo-fascism. In Claus Leggewie’s view, right-wing populism is a “hair’s breadth away from fascist ideology”.<sup>6</sup> However, right-wing populists do not strive for a radical change of existing values or for any revolutionary changes. Right-wing populism’s reversions to fascism are at most of a highly selective nature. In other words: right-wing populism does not have any kind of historically grounded enemy stereotype, but deals in diffuse

---

<sup>6</sup> Leggewie, Claus: “Nationalpopulismus” – der neue Rechtsextremismus. In: Theo Schiller (Ed.): *Parteien und Gesellschaft*. – Stuttgart: Hirzel et al., 1992. – pp. 61-70, here p. 66.

resentments. In contrast to the traditional and fascist right, populism *per se* does not operate as an anti-democratic movement.

Negative and cynical formulations prevail in the programmes of populist parties. The allegations are aimed at parties which incarnate the epitome of the pluralistic system in Western democracies. Although populism sometimes uses a flat and dumbed-down rhetoric and repeats sweeping statements like a prayer wheel, the actual faults of the overstretched party democracy which governs many Western democracies, also provide ample scope in this regard. In a certain way, populism can even fulfil a corrective function when it forces the “party caste” into the defensive so that it has to make structural changes. In the eyes of right-wing populists, everyday politics is just a big enrichment industry, established with the aim of distributing money from below to the top. Representatives of populist parties, on the other hand, seek to project a consistent counter-image; they appear to be incorruptible and free of ideology, pragmatic and unconventional.

Populist parties campaign with policy of protest which targets political opponents and knows few scruples. They especially enjoy employing the method of “negative campaigning”, particularly during election campaigns – as anti-party parties in the course of modern “detergent election campaigns”, they are eager to leave a “splash of colour”. Their so-called polarising strategies are, for example, manifested in blame games, and they are generally aimed at the politicians of established parties. However, that does not make them right-wing extremists.

## Constituencies

During the 1980s and the early 1990s many successful European far-right parties still represented positions which were neo-liberal but scarcely critical of capitalism. Examples include the Austrian FPÖ and the *Front National*. A competitive spirit dominated. Today, these right-wing organisations woo globalisation losers. Capitalism itself offers countless examples of impulses for criticism, as displayed by the worldwide chain reaction resulting from the collapse of some US banks during the year 2008.

Besides the thesis of globalisation losers, welfare chauvinism has been recognised as a handy statement formula. The policy of welfare chauvinism aims to ensure that the services of the welfare state by and large only reach the local population. In this context, the term welfare applies to welfare benefits paid to the individual by the State; it does not apply to the affluence of society.<sup>1</sup> Welfare chauvinism takes up the fictional argument that distribution conflicts revolve exclusively around the national State in question. This ensures the serving of protectionist attitudes within the population and constituents. The voters want to retain their *status quo* at any cost, so they turn to a party that promises to make an effort in this respect. Right-wing populist organisations manipulate the population's needs for protection with the aid of isolationist slogans. They fuel the fear of economic downgrading and social relegation.

In the present day, when industrial workers, made redundant as a result of production being automated or relocated to

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Decker, Frank: Der neue Rechtspopulismus. – 2nd, revised edition. – Opladen: Leske and Budrich, 2004. – pp. 198-206.

countries with lower labour costs, are applying for jobs in the service sector and are seeing themselves competing with immigrants, it is possible to speak of a modernisation crisis (and an international one, at that). On the one hand, the educated upper class in the modern day consists almost exclusively of individualistic and liberal global citizens who speak several foreign languages and who definitely affirm multicultural society with its open borders and globalisation. On the other hand, the uneducated classes hold onto national traditions, their mother tongue, their native culture and their old residential areas in major cities, in spite of increased immigrant settlement. They also fear that the national welfare state will collapse if access to its services is not closed to the massive influx of foreigners; their *welfare state chauvinism* is latched onto and stoked by populist and national parties. This welfare state chauvinism is sometimes interpreted as a sociological alternative to the modernisation loser theory, claiming that those who vote for populist parties have internalised more traditional or semi-modern values and fewer post-modern ones, than those who vote for established parties. Accordingly, it has been claimed that they are more critical of multicultural and globalised society; this has been proved with sufficient empirical evidence. At the Swiss general election, Christoph Blocher's SVP succeeded in acquiring a reservoir of voters from business circles. The constituents ranged from economic liberals to neo-yuppies, all united first and foremost by one thing: their aversion against the State and taxes. In this way, the party gained a completely heterogeneous clientele, including builders, artisans and globalisation losers, as well as business representatives and the *nouveau riche*.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. on this paragraph Lucardie, Paul: Populismus: begriffshistorische und theoretische Bemerkungen. In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich. – Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 17-38, here pp. 27-29.

The growing electoral successes of right-wing populist parties are linked with the modernisation crisis of neo-liberal shareholder capitalism, which does not even stop at global economic crises. It is characterised on the one hand by a rapidly increasing concentration in the finance sector as a result of mega mergers and gambling on the stock exchange and on the other by demands to accelerate the pace of work due to unemployment, deregulation policy and social decline. Neoliberal capitalism causes deeper splits in society by increasing the gap between rich and poor. These economic and social changes result in strong disruptions to the fabric of society, marked by fears, feelings of menace and loss of identity.

Another explanation has been cited, with the aid of real statistics, based on the formula “more foreigners and more immigration mean more success for anti-immigration right-wing populists”. However, right-wing populist parties can achieve success independently of the current immigration policy of their country – as proven by Steffen Angenendt: “There are some countries with strong right-wing populist parties which have a relatively high proportion of foreigners e.g. Belgium, Austria and Switzerland, while others – like Denmark, Italy, Norway and Portugal, do not. [...] It could be assumed that immigration-related problems are particularly serious in countries whose right-wing populists have attained major electoral success and which have a low proportion of foreigners. However, this does not seem to be true: that may ring true for France, with the integration problems it has suffered for decades in its suburban ghettos, but not for Denmark or Norway.”<sup>3</sup> In Sweden, too, the

---

<sup>3</sup> Angenendt, Steffen: Einwanderung und Rechtspopulismus. Eine Analyse im europäischen Vergleich. In: Internationale Politik, 58 (2003) 4, pp. 3-12, here p. 11.

Swedish Democrats were able to enter parliament in 2010, although there are no major immigration problems in that country.

## Mobilisation Topics

### Criticism of Immigration and Islamophobia

By now, the issue of immigration has become extremely important in Western Europe: right-wing populist parties and their representatives capitalise on a “the boat is full” campaign. Surveys indicate that approximately two thirds of citizens in the European Union have for a long time held the opinion that the upper limit for taking in immigrants has been reached. Such mindsets do not only express a “No” to asylum seekers or immigrant workers; there is verbal expression of a deep feeling of insecurity and unease. Experts admit today that politicians and social establishments have already “mollycoddled” immigrants for far too long, saying that they have overlooked the cultural conflict between orthodox Islam and libertarian, permissive European societies in which, for example, the emancipation of women and homosexuals have become flagship values.<sup>1</sup> They argue that politicians and key figures have long been

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. on this paragraph Cuperus, René: Der populistische Dammbbruch. Die niederländischen Volksparteien unter Druck. In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich. – Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 163-178.

nurturing a romantic idea which does not correspond to reality.<sup>2</sup>

Poorly integrated Muslims suffer discrimination and prejudices in modern Europe. Nearly all right-wing populist organisations regard European culture as under threat, warning against the Islamisation of Europe and the danger to national identity. They take advantage of a cornucopia of resentments while managing to gain ever more influence on the government policies (burka prohibition etc.). They regard the presence of Islam and its public statements – mosque construction, traditional clothing etc. – as a thorn in their flesh. In addition, right-wing populism wants to meet the demands of an electorate which has suffered from a kind of anti-Islamic psychosis ever since 9/11. Islam is regarded as a global threat. It is the opinion of Michael Ehrke that “[since then] people have started associating the general rejection of migrants with a clash of cultures or *clash of civilisations* [...]. By all predictions, the anti-Islamic motif will be even stronger among the right-wing populism community of the future than it is today”.<sup>3</sup> A real starting point is the difficulties many countries experience in dealing with the issue of mass immigration, integration and so-called multiculturalism.

## Criticism of Globalisation: the Debate

The term “globalisation” is theoretically vague, and is used by many ideologies in different ways. During recent years,

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. on this paragraph Scheffer, Paul: Das Scheitern eines Traums. Die multikulturelle Gesellschaft ist eine Illusion. In: Die Zeit newspaper of 11.07.2002, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ehrke, Michael: Rechtspopulismus in Europa. Die Meuterei der Besitzstandswahrer.– Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2002.– p.17 (emphasis in the original).

people have often been confronted by the word in public debates. Famous politicians, economic elites, trade union officials, pacifists and environmental activists use the term globalisation every bit as much as right-wing populists. In this context the theme of globalisation has a discursive effect on the European party system, with criticism of globalisation being accepted with increased approval in EU member states. Major social changes normally give rise to opposition movements. The level of publicity attaching positive connotations to the topic “criticism of globalisation” shows just how relevant it is. Unlike the 1990s people are now conscious of the potential to shape reality rather than accepting an inherent necessity preordained by fate.

The currently popular criticism of globalisation, which was actually brought to life by the ideological counterpart, has been used by right-wing populist organisations during the 21st century. There are many (pragmatic-opportunistic) points of contact, in particular with regard to criticism of multinational groups of companies and institutions, which has indeed become popular. The focus on globalisation in the agenda of right-wing populism developed from its increased articulation of “social issues” and its self-styling as “the protector of the man in the street” since the mid-1990s. The vague ideas held by the “left-wing” movement critical of globalisation allow space to its own “right-wing” interpretation. These organisations use the same “neo-liberal” enemy stereotype in support of their arguments in favour of the fatherland and economic, political and cultural protectionism of the “nation”. However, “right-wing” critics of globalisation lack the intellectual superstructure of a theoretically presented globalisation critique. And yet they attempt to inspire fears of a globalised world in the population – supported by their own nationalist feelings.

The keen criticism of globalisation is associated with a diffuse feeling of anti-modernism, which comes across as glorifying and idealising. Right-wing populism seeks to be a haven in times of intensified competitive pressure. As such, one kind of argument typical of right-wing populism is a relationship with globalisation ranging from out-and-out rejection to discreet scepticism. Right-wing populist organisations argue that globalisation as an economically motivated process of dissolving borders is taking a disastrous turn and thus must be curtailed as much as possible. Other right-wing populist parties show no ideological ballast and struggle to show conditional support of economic globalisation with its consequences. Normally, they have no objections against welcoming particularly qualified workers and accepting a broadly deregulated labour market. Nevertheless, right-wing populists inspire fear of globalisation by offering a type of nationalistic disengagement as an apparent solution. When you look at their arguments, globalisation appears as something evil – something that comes “from outside”. In a sense, it is a kind of unwelcome intruder.

Right-wing populists tend to put forth “territorial” arguments:<sup>4</sup> they propagate the illusion of a small, intact world which can be protected against global economic cycles; they glorify economic protectionism and channel diffuse fears among the population which for instance revolve around the loss of local jobs as a result of imports and investments. The narrow view based on resentments felt by the “man in the street” overlooks the significance of global dependencies, playing the nationalist trump card.

---

<sup>4</sup> Leggewie, Claus: Rechts gegen Globalisierung. In: Internationale Politik, 58 (2003) 4, p. 33.

## Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is a very comprehensive term covering a wide range of positions based on different content. Its origins lie – not surprisingly – in the traditionally Eurosceptic United Kingdom where it became part of the language used by politicians and journalists in the mid-1980s. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a “Eurosceptic” as a person who shows little enthusiasm for their country’s political autonomy being usurped by the European Community / Union. In its original use, during this early categorisation phase, the word designated an attitude of opposition to the EU / EC as well as to the integration of Europe as a whole.<sup>5</sup> In 1998, British political scientist Paul Taggart characterised Euroscepticism as a “building block of non-satisfaction” within the Western European party system.<sup>6</sup> Since then, during debates on the future of Europe, the topics of “European integration” and “European Union” have frequently become blurred, even though the two in no way have to go hand in hand. There is widespread interest in the phenomenological distinction between “hard” and “soft” Euroscepticism which was made by Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak in 2002 in view of the new Eastern European EU accession candidates. The “soft” form of Euroscepticism signifies the qualified rejection of certain aspects of the integration project or the EU in its current institutional form. It is a common argument that national interests are in opposition to the supranational

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Harmsen, Robert / Spiering, Menno: Introduction: Euroscepticism and the Evolution of European Political Debate. In: *ibid* (Ed.): *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*.– Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2004.– pp.13-36, here pp.15-17.– (European studies; 20).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Taggart, Paul: A touchstone of dissent. Euroscepticism in contemporary western European party systems. In: *European Journal of Political Research*, 33 (1998) 3, pp. 363-388.

treaty. “Hard” Euroscepticism rejects the “European idea” at a fundamental level, and thus logically accession to the EU.<sup>7</sup>

Right-wing populism expresses its scepticism towards a Europe whose countries would grow together. Right-wing populist parties manipulate the population’s existing attitudes against a Europe which would be governed by the EU / EC at the expense of indigenous national identity. They eye the European Union with suspicion, hence the slogan “Europe yes – EU no!” Right-wing populist parties exude no positive visions or impulses in favour of a unified Europe, quite the reverse. Right-wing populists warn that the institutions in Brussels which obviously lack proximity to citizens and democratic legitimacy will cause a massive cut in national sovereignty and identity. Grievances within current institutional structures offer an ideal starting point: EU policy, in reality, is lacking in democratic accountability, even though the Lisbon Treaty gave more rights to the European Parliament.

Euroscepticism in Western Europe has a complex shape. The cause for this lies in the history of the European integration process. The six states that founded the European Communities, in particular, were sensitised by the shadows of the legacy of the National Socialism and the experiences of the Second World War. As far as the European Communities were concerned, it was not only economic matters that played a significant role; humanism, security and peace in Europe did as well. To this day, these ideals have major significance, with the result that the

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Taggart, Paul / Szczerbiak, Aleks: Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe. In: European Journal of Political Research, 43 (2004) 1, pp. 1-27, here pp. 3-4.

mainstream was integrated into the party systems of the member states. Milder forms of Euroscepticism have resulted from the EU's "something for everyone" programme not always being congruent with national interests and the parties' electoral strategies. An economic line of conflict is currently especially evident in Irish Euroscepticism. The population itself has benefitted immensely from the European Communities and the principle of redistribution and now fears having to give up part of its share of the prosperity pie. Militant Euroscepticism forms on the fringes of the party system, especially when incompatible, ideologically motivated aims are articulated by communist or xenophobic forces. At the 2009 European elections, Eurosceptic forces on the right fringe caused a furore: in the Netherlands, the newly founded party of right-wing populist Geert Wilders (PVV) gained nearly 17% of the vote, earning second place. In Austria, the Austrian Freedom Party was able to double its share of the votes to 13.1%; moreover, the Future of Austria Alliance (BZÖ), originally founded by Jörg Haider as a gesture of revenge against his "old" party, the FPÖ, gained 4.7%. Add to this the votes for the list of EU rebel and former *Spiegel* news magazine correspondent Hans-Peter Martin, together these earned top position for the Eurosceptics. Martin himself is left-wing orientated.

In the right-wing populist arguments, the dark side of the Brussels Alliance – centralism and the "Eurocrats' regulatory frenzy" – stands in contrast to what they themselves aim to embody: "closeness to the people" and quick, non-bureaucratic responses to the needs of the national population. Furthermore, they point out a dilemma as far as the European integration movement is concerned: the will of the citizens of European states expressed in polls and elections leads a shadowy existence. The snag lies in the

fact that the legitimacy of the European Union is primarily drawn from treaties made by state governments, whilst resolutions of the European Parliament, as the representative of the people, are of secondary importance. However, right-wing populists, unlike right-wing extremists, do not reject the European unification process. What they criticise first and foremost is “how”, not “whether”. The EU theme can be made transparent in a number of variations. In this way, populists can denounce the weaknesses of European foreign and security policy, thus propagating a typically black-and-white image of a bastion of Western Christianity against an unpredictable Islam. Or they denounce the free movement of goods on the domestic market, claiming that it gives succour to organised crime. They rely on existence of a serious potential of anti-European resentment which can be exploited politically. Some right-wing populist parties behave in an ambivalent way towards the EU, especially when it comes to immigration issues. Populists aiming to “survive” long-term will apparently not call for the EU to be boycotted, but rather glorify and market “a Europe that is an economic and cultural fortress”.

Currently there are considerable concerns about a new Euroscepticism arising with reference to recent developments and a general feeling of malaise with the European project both from national elites and people from member states. Observers speak about an anti-European virus regarding a new protest wave on the streets especially in Greece and Spain and dissatisfied people in general. Even in the driving-force-country Germany Europe is seen as a problem rather than a solution. The reason is rather obvious: some countries of the eurozone have come into serious financial difficulties. For instance, the EU had to create a

European bailout fund when states such as Greece, Ireland and Portugal suffered grave financial problems as a collateral consequence of the financial crisis of 2008. These measures of solidarity, being at the cost of the financially stronger countries and the entire construct of the common economic zone with its flagship the Euro, are difficult to convey to the populations of the “rich, subsidising countries.”

In the recent parliamentary elections of 17th April 2011 the Eurosceptical party “True Finns” mobilised against the EU-supported bail-out of Portugal, gaining almost 20% of the vote in their first national elections. The decision to found the True Finns after the collapse of the Finnish Rural Party was made in the summer of 1995. It took some time to achieve some electoral success. The party campaigned for the 2011 election on vetoing financial aid to the debtor countries and on renegotiating the bail-out agreement. Until now, the issue of Europe has not been a major political priority, reflecting a silent acceptance of the pro-European stance of successive governments. With the rise of the True Finns, the dividing line between those in favour of European integration and those more critical of it has become an electoral one.

## Social Populism

Right-wing populist parties put forward their demands concerning the relationship between state and economy ambivalently: their repertoire includes the prevention of state economic intervention, tax cutbacks, a reduction in state apparatus, the privatisation of state and communal responsibilities and ultra-liberal ideas in the realm of tax and

cultural policy as well as the call for state subsidies in various economic and social areas, protection of the national economy, demands for the state to protect the health service and supply benefits for those who are “really” in need. Demands which as such are incompatible, such as strengthening social security for the “ordinary people” in particular, increasing expenditure on families or the police and simultaneously a reduction of state functions or the privatisation of public-owned companies, are reduced to a common denominator.

Right-wing populism accepts market economy principles in principle. In their programmes and their propaganda, right-wing populist parties mix the economic aims of neo-liberal deregulation with feelings of anti-globalisation, and combine income redistribution in favour of higher income groups with social demagoguery and elements of welfare state protection, addressing a broad voter spectrum with this highly contradictory conglomerate of ideologies. The large majority of populist rightists operate a double strategy. On the one hand, they speak in favour of state deregulation; on the other hand, they aim to protect the state against other states by means of regulative measures. International competition by low-salary countries, for example, serves to justify protectionism.

The struggle for individual productivity manipulates a suspicion of the social welfare network, resulting in socio-demagogic postulates aimed against “social parasites”. The conceptions of right-wing populists tend to represent a negative dissociation from current politics rather than form a set programme. As concerns their “positive” attitude and activities, they must always remain vague enough so as to be able to reintroduce the State as the patron of the

domestic economy via the back door, figuratively speaking. This results in a juxtaposition of market-centred and protectionist ideas. Deregulation is recognised as a requirement and a recipe for business success and economic prosperity. If there is little confidence in one's own international competitiveness, then right-wing populist arguments state that sufficient space must remain for the promise to secure the future by means of state subsidies and protection from foreign competition. Thus, right-wing populists have economic protectionist ideas with noticeably nationalistic undertones.

## Personality Factor?

Not the least of what populism offers is orientation, because it acts the part of a movement which “personalises” the solutions to problems. Its structure is such that it involves loosely organised movements with mass support rather than functioning as traditional political parties. Indeed, Geert Wilders is the only member of his party, which signifies a complete detachment from the traditional concept of member parties. Populism is a symptom of parties' changing functions – the party no longer grows from the base with a pyramid structure; rather, it is like a virtual phenomenon surrounding an individual person. The rather loose internal organisational structure means that there is a loyalty tailored to the “head”. This can mean a lack of democracy within the party itself. The parties are led in an authoritarian way, and they represent this claim by the chairman. Central issues are

often decided by the leading figure without involving the remainder of the party leadership or indeed the party rank and file. The leader sometimes compels the party to accept decisions by first making them known publicly, thus exerting pressure on officials and members.

A populist leader, who acts the part of the self-appointed party political representative of the interests of the “man in the street” and/or the “national interest”, maintains that he/she recognises the “real” needs of the people by invoking the hypothetical will of the people. A number of rhetorical stylistic devices which promise success may be used:<sup>1</sup>

- “*Trick of persecuted innocence*”: He regards himself as a victim, wrongly stigmatised by the media and by the “old parties”.
- “*Crusader mentality*”: He wants to fight for the “man in the street” who is finally demanding his rights. He acts vicariously against corruption and sleaze.
- “*Trick of tirelessness*”: He wants to act the part of a persistent and stubborn fighter for what is right.
- “*Emissary Trick*”: He adopts the image of a progressive saviour.

Thus, the populist claims to be the sole alternative to political chaos or to corrupt parties and politicians, and the “clean” saviour of the nation. He has a low opinion of bold projects and big visions. He professes to be introducing

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. still applicable Jaschke, Hans-Gerd: Die „Republikaner“. Profile einer Rechtaußenpartei.– Bonn: Dietz, 1990. – p. 88-89.

what is “absolutely new” in the positive sense into the world of politics. Sometimes the populist does not develop along the same lines as typical political careers; the populist is a newcomer (or acts like one) and can thus distance himself outwardly from conventional politician types. He pitches his lack of experience in politics as a positive quality. Furthermore, he adopts the image of the “anti-career politician”, assuming the role of a non-politician who has won his spurs elsewhere – in business or entertainment. During the election campaign he attempts to continue developing the element of the new (“other”) politician, based on mythology.

The populist preaches, in his own words, that hard work automatically leads to success – as his own example demonstrates – and that high, self-envisioned aims can also be fulfilled with the aid of courage, self-confidence and belief in one’s own strength. Thus, the Swiss Christoph Blocher incarnates a dual function. On the one hand, he works as a billionaire chemicals entrepreneur – he is obviously a successful businessman. On the other hand, as a farmer by training the farmyard smell of the ordinary man still clings to him, figuratively speaking. He has always his maintained distance from the elites, who have never regarded him as one of their own. Blocher does not act the part; he really is a “folksy” character. He expresses discontent and indignation, and speaks in short sentences and with pithy words.

The populist promises to break open the alleged incrustations of daily political business, to articulate the everyday issues, cares and needs of the “silent majority” and to put right again the co-ordination systems of existing political debate that he regards as having fallen apart. He is

regarded as a “bad guy” in the world of politics and flirts with it. He is a charismatic leader, which is crucial for integration, external impact and media coverage. The frequency of charismatic<sup>2</sup> leader figures in populist movements is born of two factors: a) the lack of other legitimation criteria (for example, those that are programmatic or traditionally pre-structured); and b) the nature of populism as an anti-movement that is, first and foremost, loosely organised and mainly in opposition to something. A charismatic leader as defined by Max Weber embraces “the task assigned to him and demands obedience and loyalty by virtue of his mission (originally used in a religious sense). Whether or not he receives it is determined by his success. If those whom he devotes himself to should fail to recognise his mission, then his claim will fall apart. If they recognise him, he will lord it over them for as long as he is able to retain this recognition by ‘proving his worth’.”<sup>3</sup>

The acceptance of leadership charisma by his followers is reciprocated “if they accept their leader as an icon and are magnetically drawn to him.”<sup>4</sup> If the charismatic figure should disappoint his followers who demand his commitment to the “small issues of the people”, then his claim as leader will fail immediately, and his charisma will dissipate. This charisma is directly associated with the image of the victor, if this is lost, the leader’s *raison d’être* would be seriously jeopardised. The leader, for his part, is permanently inter-

---

<sup>2</sup> The term “charismatic” / “Charisma” has Greek origins and means “gift”, “great talent”.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, Max: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie.* – 4th edition – Tübingen: Mohr, 1956. – p. 663.

<sup>4</sup> Reinfeldt, Sebastian: *Nicht-wir und die-da. Studien zum rechten Populismus.* – Vienna: Braumüller, 2000. – p. 128. – (Studien zur politischen Wirklichkeit; 8).

related with the grassroots of the party, disciplining them and steering them.

Thus, the rise and sudden fall of the populist saviour are closely related. The leader's own party can refuse to obey, make a mockery of his rigid leadership style and emancipate itself when he fails. The leader has the function of masking the partially contradictory positions of his party and concealing the tense relationship between a clear position on policy and topical arbitrariness. He is the centre of the public image of the whole party. On the one hand, this fixation is an opportunity for the outsider vying for attention, but on the other it comes with major (security) risks.

The leader's political thinking alternates between wishful thinking and self-overestimation. A continuous transition between claims and reality, appearance and substance, sets in. If he finds himself in the crossfire of criticism, this can paralyse the party's capacity to act. If their leader is no longer untouchable as a result of electoral failure, this will easily result in internal quarrels and discord in a party that seems unstable. Such parties are rarely able to regenerate from coup attempts and palace revolutions. They are dependent on their leader; the fate of the party is connected to that of the leader.

## Austrian Case Study: Haider as a Prototype with a Twin<sup>1</sup>

The FPÖ has a long tradition. It was founded in 1956, too late to influence the post-war structures of political culture which were defined by a fundamental anti-fascist consensus. From the start, it belonged to the German nationalist faction, a faction that spawned the Austrian variant of the NSDAP. Eventually, the FPÖ tolerated the social democratic minority government from 1983 onwards and gained acceptance at a European level in the family of liberal political parties.<sup>2</sup> The young and ambitious Jörg Haider<sup>3</sup> assumed the position of chairman of the FPÖ in 1986, leading the unprecedented rise of the “Free Liberals” with his “true” opposition party in the federal government. He laid down the new direction of the FPÖ in his inaugural speech: “We are [...] a reliable partner for those who stand outside today. For this reason, we are no “normal” party; we are a political movement that could be better described as a permanent citizens’ initiative.”<sup>3</sup> The truth was that the party was defined by Haider’s authoritarian leadership style.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. on this chapter Hartleb, Florian: Extremismus in Österreich. In: Jesse, Eckhard / Thieme, Tom (Ed.): Extremismus in den EU-Staaten. – Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011. – pp. 265-281.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. on this paragraph and the classification of the FPÖ (Freedom Party) as a traditional party Pelinka, Anton: Die FPÖ in der vergleichenden Parteienforschung. Zur typologischen Einordnung der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs. In: Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, 31 (2002) 3, pp. 281-290, here pp. 286-289.

<sup>3</sup> Jörg Haider, born in 1950, came from a Nazi-dominated home. He quickly showed himself to be highly gifted; even as a schoolboy he won speech contests and gained a PhD in law in 1973. In 1979 he entered the Austrian parliament for the FPÖ as the youngest member at the time.

Even in the early years he practiced “chameleon-like transformations”, as described by his biographer Christa Zöchling in graphic terms: “When the young functionary travelled across the country, he regularly packed several kinds of wardrobe in his Mini and before each event he would head into a ditch to slip into the most appropriate costume: traditional Austrian dress for the village tavern, jeans for the disco, a suit and tie for the seminary.”<sup>4</sup> With his political views, the eloquent and charismatic Haider defined the course of the FPÖ for two decades. His political views qualify him as the prototype of European right-wing populists:

- *Politics of “us” versus “the powers that be”*: Jörg Haider writes about this in his book “The Freedom I’m Talking About”: “We [the FPÖ] have been reproached for populism, which we regard as an honour. In a democracy, the people must be listened to and taken seriously! Orders issued from the ivory tower of a reigning political class who as such are obviously contemptuous of the common people have no place in a system which promotes freedom. Rather, they must incarnate straight-up state political responsibility, take the concerns and fears of the people seriously, and coordinate political practice in such a way as to ward off possible dangers and threats at an early stage.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Haider, Jörg: Antrittsrede des neugewählten Bundesparteiobmanns Dr. Jörg Haider auf dem ordentlichen Bundesparteitag 1986 in Innsbruck. Published by: Freiheitliches Bildungswerk.– Vienna: FPÖ Political Academy, 1986. – p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Zöchling, Christa: Haider. Licht und Schatten einer Karriere. – Vienna: Molden, 2000.– p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Haider, Jörg: Die Freiheit, die ich meine (“The freedom I’m talking about”). – Frankfurt am Main; Berlin: Ullstein, 1994. – p. 57.

- *Self-appointed advocate of the “silent majority”*: Jörg Haider illustrated this concern thus: “The cause for the political success of our movement lies with the fact that we, contrary to the views published by the media and the political establishment, articulate the public opinions of broad population strata. The silent majority that carries the burdens of the State has the right to make its voice heard.”<sup>7</sup>
- *Fuelling prejudices against the “political class”*: “The modernisation of this country begins with getting rid of the powers and privileges of the reigning political caste [...]. In this sense, we have established ourselves as taboo breakers in a closed society.”<sup>8</sup>
- *Emotional charging of the “topic of foreigners”*: Time and again, Haider made the topic of foreigners a focal point of his party’s tactics and campaign strategy, for example by comparing “the number of foreigners with the number of the unemployed” or with generalised references to crime committed by foreigners.
- *Fuelling enemy stereotypes*: Jörg Haider constantly warned of a multicultural society. According to Haider, immigrants have not integrated into the social and cultural structures that they have encountered. Rather, immigrants have expected the locals to pay tribute to new practices.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Haider, Jörg: *Befreite Zukunft jenseits von links und rechts. Menschliche Alternativen für eine Brücke ins neue Jahrtausend.* – Vienna: Ibero and Molden, 1997.– p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Haider, Jörg: *Die Freiheit, die ich meine* (“The freedom I’m talking about”). – Frankfurt am Main; Berlin: Ullstein, 1994. – pp. 86-106.

- *EU as a scapegoat*: In his anti-EU rhetoric, Haider describes European integration as a symbol of rampant bureaucracy and as an assault on the sovereignty of Austria: “The EU today can do anything: interfere in the daily life of every individual [...], but it offers no security. [...] The EU has begun intervening on a massive scale in various areas of life which are none of its business. It is but the sign of the development of an administrative monster that cannot be tolerated by citizens any more. [...] Tonnes of regulations, 80% of our laws are decided by officials in Brussels – who were not democratically elected. Exhaust fumes are regulated; the colours of the paint on the roads and tractor seats are subject to European standards, lawnmowers too.”<sup>10</sup>

- *Politics of welfare chauvinism*: The FPÖ has proclaimed itself the workers’ advocate, propagating the expansion of the welfare state. Thus Jörg Haider wrote: “The scandal of our system is this: lazy, good-for-nothing, social parasites and daydreamers are safe thanks to the caring hand of the welfare state, while league climbers willing to learn and who list personal achievement as their foremost priority, are left with nothing.”<sup>11</sup>

- *Application of professionalised media strategies*: Populist parties with a decision-making process that is centralised and also geared entirely to the “star” at the top, generally meet the demands of modern media democracy better than traditional parties with their more complex committees and decision structures. Haider perfected this policy; he himself profited from negative coverage. This reinforced his own

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 206-207.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

clientele's acceptance that the entire establishment has supposedly conspired against the populist "newcomer".<sup>12</sup>

Under Haider's personalised, charismatic direction, the FPÖ succeeded, step by step, in joining the league of the "big" mainstream parties – SPÖ and ÖVP – who remained in an ever increasingly unpopular Grand Coalition.<sup>13</sup> The uptrend led to participation in government from 2000 to 2002 and the FPÖ was at the zenith of its success. The other EU member states recognised some of the main features of an extremist party which is why, between February and September 2000, they called for sanctions against Austria in response to the FPÖ's inclusion in the coalition.<sup>14</sup> The background for this was semantic gaffes on the part of Haider, which caused him to be accused of being a right-wing extremist, especially in the phase of his electoral rise. Haider ranted about the "orderly employment policy characteristic of the Third Reich" and described the Nazi concentration camps as "penal camps". Nevertheless, extremism researcher Patrick Moreau states, despite the emotionally charged nature of the topic: "To make the museum of verbal horrors the essential message would be to miss the point of Haider's thinking."<sup>15</sup> His strategy was, in

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Macho, Thomas: Politische Avatare. Jörg Haider und die Mediendemokratie. In: Hauch, Gabriella / Hellmuth, Thomas / Pasteur, Paul (Ed.): Populismus. Ideologie und Praxis in Frankreich und Österreich. – Innsbruck etc.: Studien-Verlag, 2002. – pp. 165-170. – (Studien zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte; 12).

<sup>13</sup> Continuously recurring personnel turbulences did little to change this. A liberal spin-off, born out of protest against the anti-immigrants-oriented "Austria First" referendum of the FPÖ (the Liberal Forum founded in 1993) could not jeopardise the success of the FPÖ.

<sup>14</sup> The Council of the Wise report described the FPÖ as a "right-wing populist party using extremist language". Cf. Kopeinig, Margaretha / Kotanko, Christoph: Eine europäische Affäre. Der Weisen-Bericht und die Sanktionen gegen Österreich. – Vienna: Czernin, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Moreau, Patrick: "Österreich ist kein Volk von Nazis!" – Organisation, Programmatik und Wählerschaft der FPÖ. In: Jahrbuch Extremismus & Demokratie, 12 (2000), pp. 73-92, here p. 92.

truth, both too flexible and too complex to belong in the agenda of an extremist ideology.

Jörg Haider would not allow himself to be integrated into government. The government policy of the FPÖ as a junior partner quickly became problematic, as it was permanently torpedoed by hardliners surrounding Jörg Haider who insisted on a course of opposition. As far as his participation in government was concerned, Haider officially withdrew from the Federal Party, but unofficially he never laid down the role of the most powerful man in the party. The erosion process within the party was quick to begin. What is shown here primarily were the limitations of the charismatic leader, often his own worst enemy due to egocentricity and egoism. He regards himself as irreplaceable and attempts to draw his party down with him into the maelstrom of decline if he should fall. The surreptitious party head used every opportunity offered to him to snub the government, for example with a non-agreed visit to the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in February 2002. This caused gross outrage at a national and international level. The Austrian, who boasted about his good relationships with the Middle East, wanted to assume the image of a peacemaker.<sup>16</sup>

It came to a head in summer 2002 with the “Knittelfeld Coup”. Haider got rid of his government team following a

---

<sup>16</sup> In his book “Zu Gast bei Saddam. Im ‚Reich des Bösen“ former pro-American Haider launched a sharp attack on US foreign policy. Although Haider asserted that he had “no intention of writing an anti-American book”, his statements were unequivocally against such an idea: “Whether in Afghanistan or in Iraq: America launches brutal attacks [...] on existing energy sources out of pure economic greed – it wants to gain total control over the natural resources of crude oil and natural gas.” He also claimed that “America’s gigantic misinformation machine of the past left nothing out [...] in its bid to proclaim Saddam Hussein as the new Hitler.” Quotes from Haider, Jörg: Zu Gast bei Saddam. Im “Reich des Bösen”. – Vienna: Ibero, 2003.

resolution supported by the FPÖ ministers which was intended to postpone planned tax reductions following major flood damage. Haider was not able to compel them to rethink and tried to organise a party conference in Knittelfeld in order to enforce his wishes. It resulted in uproar; the FPÖ ministers stepped down with one accord. After the devastating result of his party at the early parliamentary elections of 2002 that it brought about (from 26.9% to 10.0%), Haider once more announced his come-back as party chairman, but failed to follow up his words with actions. When he designated himself a “simple party member” and said, “I’m off” many observers felt like they were at a “Punch and Judy show”<sup>17</sup>. The Carinthian even sent his sister Ursula Haubner forward for a while, as the FPÖ wore out one chairman after another. Haider himself referred to “Sisyphus” when talking about the burden of his task and his sacrificial role. He deliberately concealed his own responsibility for the electoral decline of the party.<sup>18</sup>

During another electoral disaster, which saw the FPÖ plummet to 3.3% at the Lower Austrian Council Elections of 6th March 2005, Haider proclaimed the readjustment of the FPÖ as a “casual, stylish and young party”, which he would take over once again “in the event of an emergency”. A headwind was forming within the party. Following the defeats of the past, Haider saw himself challenged by a new rival. At the party conference in 2005, a rival candidate emerged in opposition to the young Viennese FPÖ chairman

---

<sup>17</sup> Thus Ritterband, Charles E.: Kärntner Chamäleon. Jörg Haiders Auf- und Abstieg in Österreich. In: Internationale Politik, 58 (2003) 4, pp. 23-28, here p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Heinisch, Reinhard: Success in Opposition – Failure in Government: Explaining the Performance of Right-Wing Populist Parties in Public Office. In: West European Politics, 26 (2003) 3, pp. 91-130.

Heinz-Christian Strache<sup>19</sup>. Strache was, for a long time, considered Haider's foster son, and with his eloquent and daredevil style he was the "young Haider", a type of "copy". The original, in turn, decided to form a new party, under the name *Bündnis Zukunft Österreich* (BZÖ – Future of Austria Alliance). Strache for his part became the FPÖ chairman.

Although a significant, yet not predominant, proportion defected to the BZÖ, Strache succeeded at the Viennese Council Elections of 23rd October 2005. Contrary to the poor poll ratings in the previous months, the FPÖ was able to achieve 14.8% of the votes and stem the loss compared with 2001 with 5.3 percentage points. It was obvious that the aggressive campaign "Vienna must not become Istanbul!" was responsible for the success. The FPÖ under Strache continued their anti-Islamic course at the 2006 Parliamentary Election, with slogans like "Home, not Islam!"<sup>20</sup> With posters proclaiming "Affluence, not immigration" and "Welfare state, not immigration", the election campaign placed the themes of "foreigners" and "crime", quite contrarily, at the centre, with a strong focus on protest. In the background was the connection to welfare chauvinism, reflected in the slogan "Social security benefits only for the indigenous population" – Haider's success formula during the 1990s. The FPÖ regards the EU as a threat to their own nation, their model being "a Europe of fatherlands". It thus approves of European integration at a fundamental level, regarding it as a rampart against Islam.

---

<sup>19</sup> Strache, born in 1969, a trained dental technician and the "old man" of a striking students' union, began his career in Vienna city politics.

<sup>20</sup> Strache also vehemently rejects Turkey's accession to the EU, and he sees no reason to justify Islam "in our Christian-European West". Cf. also: FPÖ: *Wir und der Islam. Freiheitliche Positionen zur Religionsfreiheit, zur islamischen Welt und zur Problematik des Zuwanderungs-Islam in Europa*. Vienna: FPÖ, 2008.

The FPÖ was once far more Eurosceptic. In 1999, Jörg Haider initiated a referendum against Austria's accession to the EU.

However, the “death knell”, which was tolled for the FPÖ,<sup>21</sup> proved to be premature, and it demonstrated its structural establishment in Austria's political system. At the 2006 parliamentary elections, the new party under Haider, the BZÖ, founded in 2005 as an FPÖ secession party, just scraped into the national parliament with 4.1% of the vote thanks to the “Haider factor, Carinthia”, where he retained his popularity as Provincial Governor. Even in the subsequent period, the BZÖ was not able to achieve any success outside Carinthia. It was a complete surprise when Haider announced in August 2008 that he intended to enter the general election campaign as top candidate of the BZÖ. The BZÖ's campaign was completely focussed on him personally. The ballot paper stated “BZÖ –Jörg Haider List”. The failure of the grand coalition came at just the right time for him. With the motto “Get back in the ring”<sup>22</sup> he re-assumed his old role as a “fighter” against the red-black grand coalition government. The BZÖ may have lagged behind the FPÖ, but it was still able to achieve a two-digit result (10.7%). Haider consciously chose an ambivalent strategy. On the one hand, he acted in a statesmanlike manner in public discussions and TV duals with other top candidates, referring to his role as Carinthian provincial governor; on the other hand, he deliberately focussed on vague resentments, in particular

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. e.g. Moreau, Patrick: *Autriche. Grandeur et décadence du FPÖ*. In: Blaise, Pierre / Moreau, Patrick (Ed.): *Extrême Droite et National-Populisme en Europe de l'ouest. Analyse par pays et approches transversales*. – Brussels: CRISP, 2004. – pp. 59-125.

<sup>22</sup> Thus Haider, Jörg: “Steige wieder in den Ring” (interview). In: *News* of 14.08.2008, p. 25.

against asylum seekers. During TV duals with other leading party candidates, independent observers had to concede that he was able to consistently state his points using his old wit and rhetoric. As before, he tinkered with an exclusion policy: “If an asylum-seeker is caught in the act, or even makes a confession – why should we still have to wait for proceedings to take place? Anyone who becomes an offender, should leave the country. Otherwise we would have to agree that every asylum applicant in Austria should have to wear an electronic tag so that we would know where he was at any time and he would not be able to go into hiding as happens so many thousands of times these days.” To the counter-question, “Is that a genuinely serious suggestion? Every asylum applicant should be electronically tagged?” he responded: “All those who are criminals, at least. But I could also imagine that we could do it to every asylum applicant. What’s the problem?”<sup>23</sup>

It was in the night of 11th October 2008 – right in the middle of the debates on forming a government that he too was flanking – that Jörg Haider lost his life in a car accident. One thing that was conspicuous in the official reactions to his death was that even those who were his former political opponents including the Vice Chancellor of the social democratic SPÖ, Alfred Gusenbauer, confirmed that he had extraordinary talent. There was a consensus that Haider had left a mark on Austrian politics over the past two decades like no other. About 25,000 people were present at the funeral ceremony – a State funeral with almost religious veneration.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Haider, Jörg: “Da bin ich gerne prinzipienlos” (interview). In: Profil of 25.08.2008, pp. 22-24, here p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> The cult-like veneration of Haider, especially in Carinthia, is also evidenced by a new “Jörg Haider Bridge” and a planned Jörg Haider Park.

The BZÖ profited from the Haider cult at the federal state elections in March 2009. With 45.8% of the vote in Carinthia, Haider's party's record result of 2004 was exceeded by three percentage points, while the FPÖ, with a mere 3.8%, failed to clear the 5% hurdle.<sup>25</sup>

As the proponent of a kind of “politics of resentment” Jörg Haider indeed left a mark on the world of politics in the Alpine country over a period of two decades. He typologically turned the FPÖ into a right-wing populist party, which it remains to this day. Yet Haider scarcely cast a “shadow over Europe”, despite what countless publicists and specialist publications proclaimed.<sup>26</sup> The FPÖ, which tolerates extreme right-wing forces in its ranks, will continue to have an established place in the party system, as shown by the return of the FPÖ under Heinz-Christian Strache – a return which many observers hardly considered possible and which showed major similarities in style and content to the FPÖ under Haider during the 1990's. After its convention in early 2011, mid-way between general elections, the FPÖ had a support according to opinion polls of around 24-29% – on par with the SPÖ and ÖVP, and above the BZÖ. Among people under 30 years of age, the FPÖ had the support of 42%. An opinion poll in May 2011 even showed that the FPÖ would end up on top if elections were held today, beating both the social democratic SPÖ and the conservative ÖVP. Like the True Finns, Strache is currently mobilising against the European bailout.

---

<sup>25</sup> Olt, Reinhard: Mehr als ein letzter Sieg. Das BZÖ gewinnt auch ohne Haider. In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 03.03.2009, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the journalistic writings of Scharsach, Hans-Henning / Kuch, Kurt: Haider. Schatten über Europa.– Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2000.

## Effects: Democracy Disrupted?

When people fan the populist flame they seek to put an end to the political harmony of the established parties: “Populists like [...] to go over the top more than rarely, they also like [...] to take a questionable stand on many issues, and yet they are able to incarnate a critical and enlightening function in connection with the political system, whereby they compel it to react to and debate over what they stand for; and it is not rare for them to compel those involved to correct themselves”.<sup>1</sup> This can result in a change to political debate, together with the traditional practices, be it lingering or abrupt. In this way, populism could have a certain “clean-up effect” on the entire party democracy with its negative side effects, such as clientelism. Populism does not disrupt democracy as such – despite what many other authors claim – rather, it walks a fine line between renewing it and jeopardising it. This means that the problems it highlights – be it the concrete political demands posed by right-wing populist groups or their criticism of the existing party democracy – must be taken seriously. Thus, a debate by the mainstream parties on political content is of central significance.

The rise of populism has some real existing conflicts within modern representative democracies:

1. Populism is the substitute for the eroded Left/Right divide in politics. It replaces it through the populist cleavage of “the

---

<sup>1</sup> Hennecke, Hans-Jörg: Das Salz in den Wunden der Konkordanz. In: Werz, Nikolaus (Ed.): Populismus. Populisten in Übersee und Europa. – Opladen: Leske and Budrich, 2003. – pp. 145-162, here pp. 161-162.

establishment” versus “the people”. They are perceived as false unities and indeed pose a potential threat to the pluralist and constitutional dimensions of democracy.

2. Populism is a revolt against expert-driven, technocratic policy-making.

3. Populism is a revolt against the powerlessness of the political class who have lost all control (forces of globalisation, the financial markets, and the logic of the EU).

Overall, populists show themselves to have solid electoral roots, and they even increasingly garner the favour of voters in some locations, although there are fluctuations. New challengers are entering the fray, as in Sweden in 2010. For moderate rightists, this means that they have to include the tiresome rivals in their alliance considerations if they do not want to lose their potential majority over the leftists. In this way, right-wing populists became “socially acceptable” at the beginning of the decade and were able to participate in government in a number of states, either directly (Austria, Netherlands) or indirectly (Denmark, Norway), or even take it over completely (Italy). In Italy, a special case, the triumvirate alliance consisting of *Forza Italia*, *Alleanza Nazionale*<sup>2</sup> and *Lega Nord* appears to have been successful in balancing anti-institutional sentiment and responsible government policies. The root causes lie in the collapse of the Italian party system during the 1990s. Apart from the cases mentioned above, right wing populists continue to play the

---

<sup>2</sup> Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale fused together in 2009 under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi, to form the party Popolo della Libertà (The Freedom People).

role of challengers.<sup>3</sup> It was not to be expected that right-wing populist parties will “seize power”.<sup>4</sup>

Can anyone draw a dividing line between populism and non-populism? Genuine populist parties and politicians tend to violate taboos, which can have an impact on political debate. As such, they are strong political challengers; a factor which casts the populist challengers in the role of agenda-setters. Right-wing populists have topical influence in the field of culture, in migration policy in particular. Culture-related questions became overheated with conflicts on values. In addition to this, there is potential here to gain political profile such as is no longer possible in the case of economic and social issues. Even basic social questions regarding abortion and same-sex relationships seem to have been resolved, at least in Western Europe.

However, the biggest conflict of values comes in the form of a cultural conflict which has been stylised and simplified as a “clash of civilisations”, which is associated with a rejection of migrants. Islam has been regarded as a global threat ever since 11th September 2001, and this was particularly frequently mentioned in political debate in the Netherlands and in Austria. The established parties see themselves under pressure and often react by tightening immigration policies. When one looks at the government records of populist challengers, the effect is rather modest. Even as junior

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Decker, Frank: Demokratischer Populismus und/oder populistische Demokratie? Anmerkungen zu einem schwierigen Verhältnis. In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich. – Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011.– pp. 39-54, here p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bauer, Werner T.: Willkommen in der Normalität? Anmerkungen zum Wahlerfolg der rechten Schwedendemokraten. – Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2010. – p. 5. – <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/07502.pdf> [30.03.2011].

partners, the populist parties are normally obligated to steer a moderate course. It is easier for them to act in opposition, or, as a minority government supporter – as, for example, in Scandinavia – to keep at a distance from the government policies of the establishment. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders enjoys a similarly comfortable position: he has been able to secure a substantial level of influence on the governing parties by virtue of a “toleration agreement”, but he has no direct responsibility, because he only “tolerates” the minority government. This means that he always has the “exit option” of distancing himself from the government and bringing it down.

Democratic parties certainly cannot manage in a media democracy without targeted electorate populism. The question of what divides democratic and demagogical mobilisation will always remain disputed. However, populism will become dangerous in such a context if it advocates direct democracy in an undifferentiated manner as an elixir. This means that it can easily and unnoticeably result in a violation or suppression of dissent. Thus, populist movements of all shades glorify Switzerland as a model of direct democracy. Under such conditions, the populist postulate, originally appearing naive-progressive, emancipatory and democratic, leads to dangerous propaganda – even in Switzerland itself. Thus, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) in November 2009 made a decisive contribution to banning the construction of minarets constitutionally.

## Germany<sup>1</sup>

### Little to offer Despite Variety and Causes of this

Despite the dramatic decline of people's parties (loss of members etc.) and the development of a structural five-party system, which makes the formation of governments harder, right-wing populism in Germany has generally remained but a side-show, so to speak. Right-wing populist parties in Germany have to date hardly been able to achieve any success throughout the Federation, and they have never yet entered the German *Bundestag*. So far they still have not developed any coherent mobilisation strategy, which would theoretically have to lie between the CDU and the clearly right-wing extremist parties, the NPD and the DVU. The Schill Party, which emphasised the theme of law and order, enjoyed a short period of spectacular success in the City State of Hamburg. Having gained 19.4% of the votes at the 2001 state election, the party, which as a government partner was completely out of its depth, quickly disappeared from the scene once again. The truth was that its electoral success depended on three factors. The first was the fact that the issue of crime which touched on the fears of the citizens created a political opportunity structure in the Hanseatic city. The second was how district judge and party founder Ronald B. Schill was accepted by the bourgeois camp and was even made media-compatible thanks to his catchy nickname "Judge Merciless". The third was the fact

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. covered in detail by Hartleb, Florian: Populismus – zentrales Kennzeichen von Parteipolitik in turbulenten Zeiten? In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich.– Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 105-128.

that Schill was successful at being on close terms with the people thanks to the “zero tolerance” policy that he propagated.<sup>2</sup>

To this point no right-wing populist party has been able to establish itself at federal level in Germany. Compared with the rest of Europe, it means that Germany has a different role, as right-wing populism, organised as a party, still appears immature. Since the brief period of success enjoyed by the Schill Party in September 2001, almost ten years have elapsed without an organised populist party emerging, in contrast to many neighbouring countries of Western and also Eastern Europe.

How can such a situation be explained? Are there no tendencies in the Federal Republic which favour populism? If comparative empirical analyses of xenophobia are studied, there are no findings which sound the all-clear in Germany. A kind of xenophobia which favours right-wing populism is to be found here too. The integration of the East German part of society, for example, generated countless modernisation losers who harbour aversions against foreigners. However, even there, anti-foreigner positions are not articulated publicly; rather, as in Saxony and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, they benefit parties like the NPD, which clearly exhibit aggressive right-wing extremist views and are clearly distinguishable from right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. Even the party *Die Linke* (“The Left”), like the PDS earlier, absorbs some protest votes cast by frustrated citizens or subjective unification losers. Thus, the voter potential of right-wing populists is absorbed by other parties.

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hartleb, Florian: Schill-Partei. In: Decker, Frank / Neu, Viola (Ed.): Handbuch der deutschen Parteien. – Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007. – pp. 374-381.

In addition, Germany's specific political culture definitely also plays a decisive role. The "shadows of the past" are still in the air. As populism in this country has to campaign in an environment marked by a turbulent history, the media develop fears of contact with it, preventing impartial dealings with it and leaving right-wing parties in constant danger of being regarded as being in the same league as the Nazis.<sup>3</sup> Even moderate representatives are put under the microscope and closely examined. This also applies to current developments of right-wing populism in Europe, for example the Netherlands, which are very closely monitored by the German media.

A Geert Wilders would in any case have problems establishing himself in Germany. After a Berlin CDU party member, René Stadtkewitz, invited the Dutchman for a meeting in October 2010, keeping the exact location strictly confidential and adhering to security requirements, this immediately sparked public protests and steps were taken to exclude him from the party. The result of this was that Stadtkewitz announced the establishment of a new party, with no co-founders, which had no real hope of success. No other challenging parties have so far been able to present a convincing offer, even though the crisis of the peoples' parties provided opportunity structures.<sup>4</sup> In addition, relevant groups are quickly infiltrated, as freeloaders hope for new legitimacy or popularity. Even the moderate populist STATT party in Hamburg, with its quasi-coalition with the SPD, was quickly infiltrated by right-wing extremists on expansion

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Decker, Frank: In Hitlers Schatten. In: *Die Zeit* newspaper of 24.02.2005, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Decker, Frank / Hartleb, Florian: Populismus auf schwierigem Terrain. Die rechten und linken Herausfordererparteien in der Bundesrepublik. In: Decker, Frank (Ed.): *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?* – Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006.– pp. 191-215, here pp. 200-202.

throughout the federation. Finally, prior to the federal elections of 2009, the unsuccessful *Freie Union* (“Free Union”) was infiltrated by former CSU rebel (“the face of Edmund Stoiber’s fall”<sup>5</sup>) and federal state parliament member for the Free Voters (FW) Gabriele Pauli, one of the free riders from the far right spectrum. A similar event happened to the Schill Party in spite of its strong efforts to distance itself from the far right spectrum. However, one party political characteristic of the national conservative, right-wing populist and right-wing radical bloc is so far its organisational fragmentation.

There was even internal mistrust because of personal quarrels; what dominates are differences in programmes and strategies and lacking electoral perspectives. While in other countries various strands of political protest have been successfully merged into a common organisation, in the Federal Republic of Germany such strands run parallel to one another in the form of several parties which take votes away from one another. Historically and currently, a multitude of such groups can be observed on the other side of the right-wing extremist parties NPD and DVU: “Raging Citizens”, “Pro-Cologne”, “Republicans”, “Bremen Must Live” around Joachim Siegerist, “Labour, Family and Fatherland Alliance” around former CDU Saxony state parliamentary representative Henry Nitzsche, formerly the “Confederation of Free Citizens”, now the party founded by Berlin-based Wilders sympathiser René Stadtkewitz. The two city states, especially, proved to be fertile ground for the

---

<sup>5</sup> Former Bavarian Minister President and CSU Party Chairman Edmund Stoiber received criticism from Fürth Councillor Gabriele Pauli following what was an originally marginal spying scandal. As a result of the question raised by Pauli, Stoiber’s further top candidature was called into question. The affair culminated in Stoiber’s resignation.

founding of new parties. However, even after initial successes (STATT Party, Schill Party) the planned expansion throughout the federation was the acid test – and ultimately, the end – of all ambitions.

The major mainstream parties were always able to refer to the economic stability of the “old” Federal Republic and score points with their ability to integrate various levels of society. Until recently, the mainstream parties were regarded as guarantors of economic success and social state welfare. Up until this point, the CDU and the CSU were quick to mop up the floor with any rivals from the “far right”. During the discussion that emerged in September 2010 relating to the CDU’s lacking conservative profile of the CDU and the theoretical chances of a new party, Angela Merkel, as party chairwoman, once again made clear efforts to prevent the formation of any party that was “more rightist than the Union”, thus emulating the tradition of former CSU chairman Franz-Josef Strauß. He always viewed it as his responsibility to prevent the formation of any party right of the Union with “a radical character”.<sup>6</sup>

From an organisational perspective, the founding of new parties in Germany proves to be hard. Anyone founding a party is confronted with a high level of bureaucracy and competitive disadvantages. Among other things, electoral registration is approved by the Federal Election Commission manned by representatives of established parties.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from “Angela Merkel: Rechte Partei verhindern.” In: ntv.de dated 12.09.2010. – <http://www.n-tv.de/politik/Merkel-Rechte-Partei-verhindern-article1471636.html> [02.10.2010].

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Köhler, Jan: Parteien im Wettbewerb. Zu den Wettbewerbschancen nicht-etablierter politischer Parteien im Rechtssystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. – Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006.–(Schriften zum Parteienrecht;30).

One further difficulty is that the federal structure can be identified as something that allows right-wing populists to “let off steam” without attaining success at federal level. For example, there have been nationwide reports of protest movements against the building of mosques in Berlin, Cologne and Munich; however, right-wing populist movements have by no means succeeded in forming an alliance with federal potential.<sup>8</sup> The formal jurisdictions and task distributions between the Federation and the federal states also put the brakes on right-wing populism attaining success at federal level. For instance, the topic of integration affects the field of education, which in Germany is the responsibility of the individual federal states.<sup>9</sup>

## New Opportunity Structures

For a long time, the parties have been able to make the population believe that they are able to act when it comes to reforms. However, the world financial crisis which began in autumn 2008 revealed the constraints on political action presented by budget deficits, record debt levels and heavy additional burdens. The claim of politics to omnipotence suggests that quick solutions are available despite the restricted potential to influence economic processes. Given the background, the context of the problems of the financial crisis is that there are no, or only very limited, controlling bodies within the international finance system. Despite close financial ties between states and a significant resultant

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Schloemann, Johan: Wer hat Angst vorm braunen Mann. Warum sich in Deutschland bisher noch keine starke rechtspopulistische Kraft bilden konnte. In: Süddeutsche Zeitung dated 16.09.2010, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

spread of the crisis, there is no global crisis prevention system in the finance markets. The industrialised countries are confronted by the question of whether or not their massed capacities are sufficient to be able to reasonably monitor the temporary excesses of the free capital flow phenomenon that they had created.<sup>10</sup> At a European level, for example, there is some discussion of economic regulation put forward by Angela Merkel.

All the established parties soon demanded models for monitoring financial transactions, and labelled banks and “worldwide finance casinos” as scapegoats. Numerous parties, from the CDU to the Left, almost consensually, held the “greed” of bank managers and financial investors, and the “unbridled markets” responsible for the worst recession since the Second World War. Even back in the general elections of 2005, the then SPD party chairman Franz Müntefering spoke of how “locusts” would descend on German businesses. In his remarks he targeted international financial investors, who, according to him, had discovered the German middle classes in their search for quick money. In this respect, financial investors and bankers are suited to being labelled as scapegoats, as this corresponds to the populist “us” versus “the powers that be” logic. Populism also finds countless starting points for their arguments in real abuses in the age of global capitalism. The shake-up of markets all over the world caused by the spectacular collapse of the US investment bank Lehman Brothers in 2008 is not so much a proof as an indicator of the failure of the system. In the course of the various attempts to stabilise the capital markets, the line separating private and state

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Enderlein, Henrik: Global Governance der internationalen Finanzmärkte. In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, (2009) 8, pp. 3-8.

responsibilities was finally obliterated – a clear violation of the principles of regulatory policy. Populists are also inspired by other real challenges, for example the society-wide problem of the increase of the gap between rich and poor. Terms like new poverty, underclasses and suspended precarity have been discussed time and time again, and politicians and other public representatives are left considering how to offer more opportunities to the unemployed, welfare recipients and “the educationally disadvantaged”. However, it is not just a matter of opportunities; it also involves resentments.

Resentments are, above all, to be found in the long-neglected integration debate. One of the most successful political publications since 1945 – with more than one million copies in circulation and at the top of the bestseller list for months on end – contains provocative theses on every aspect of integration policy. It is claimed that Germany is putting itself under increasing threat due to a combination of birth rate drops, a growing lower class and immigration from predominantly Muslim countries. The book, prominently presented in the premises of the Berlin Federal Press Conference, bears the hallmark of former Berlin SPD finance senator Thilo Sarrazin, who thanks to the broad public response triggered a public debate on the topic of integration such as was previously hardly known in Germany – and almost on a par with that in the Netherlands. The political and social establishment immediately felt challenged by it in such a way that even Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and Federal President Christian Wulff expressed their displeasure and distanced themselves from it. Even the SPD reacted immediately. However, it made heavy weather given the open support of the party base for Sarrazin’s theses, ultimately initiating party expulsion

proceedings. In Germany, a representative of the political establishment is quickly confronted with harsh protests following a taboo violation.

Sarrazin, a born elitist educated in classics and humanities, with an illustrious career as a minister, drew attention in his book to two things he regarded as taboos. He focussed on the debate on social strains caused by migrants from non-Western cultures and – in the same breath – on the way in which educational prospects are determined by family origin.<sup>11</sup> Sarrazin's populist logic functions by violating specific taboos, combined with an element of exclusivism and defamation. However, he does not proclaim himself the spokesman for the average citizen, the "man in the street", as is usual in classic populism: he argues that people who mostly perform physical work are not at all suited to mental or administrative activities.<sup>12</sup> It was as early as 2009 that he made himself a talking point by making disrespectful comments about people on welfare.

In an interview with *Welt am Sonntag*, he answered the general question of whether or not there exists any kind of "genetic identity" thus: "All Jews share a specific gene, Basques have certain genes that distinguish them from others."<sup>13</sup> Later, in the course of a written interview subject to authorisation, he described his own claim as "a load of rubbish" and this too was disseminated by the media. This example shows that one provocative act can earn two-fold media coverage: first the report and then the disclaimer. The

---

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sarrazin, Thilo: Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen.– Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010.– p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Sarrazin, Thilo: "Ich bin kein Rassist". In: *Welt am Sonntag* of 28.08.2010.

media reaction is always a component of a successfully executed and completed provocation. It addresses the level of emotions and motivations by expressing fears of threat or just scepticism towards unfamiliar lifestyles, values and cultural manifestations that are easy to understand even for non-readers. Thus it will come as no surprise that, apparently, the majority of voters for all parties agree with Sarrazin's theses. Although Sarrazin can be certain of the applause of the "far right" thanks to his argument on genetic selection, his socio-democratic roots allow him to personify this taboo violation with credibility.

Irrespective of the "Sarrazin" case, which would probably not be capable of initiating any anti-Islamic protest party due to the lack of skills in rhetoric and masses mobilisation and the populist logic, the debate shows how fragile overall social consensus has become, even in Germany. "Anti-Islamic" feeling has been perhaps the strongest mobilisation motive ever since the German debate on asylum seekers began in the early 1990s; the initial lack of resolution of this debate had for a time lent fresh impetus to the "Republican" party under Franz Schönhuber. In connection with this there are of course real failings evidenced in lack of integration, high crime levels and the establishment of parallel communities, especially amongst Muslim immigrants. The population's sympathies for Sarrazin are born of a typical motive, reflected in the following formula: "Finally, someone who dares to tell the truth!" Sarrazin focuses on real, diffuse attitudes towards Muslim immigrants and reinforces existing clichés. But he has meanwhile rather disappeared from public view after he was allowed to remain in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) thanks to a court decision.

## Populism Sui Generis: East Central Europe

With regard to research in the field of populism, the verdict of regional expert Klaus Bachmann stood firm until recently: “In recent years, only a few authors have sought to cross the former Cold War boundary in their transnational studies and comparisons of populist parties.”<sup>1</sup> It is only more recent accounts that have included the states of Eastern Europe in their studies of the concept of populism.<sup>2</sup> And for good reason: after the Parliamentary elections in Poland and Slovakia in 2005 and 2006, it appeared that populism in East Central Europe was not only ubiquitous, it was also capable of forming a government and a majority. In retrospect, the timing is not surprising: the prospect of gaining EU membership by satisfying the Copenhagen criteria had a disciplining effect on the political elites of the region, dampening populism up to that point. Following EU accession, however, many politicians were able to succeed with simple messages.

In Poland, the victory of the Law and Order Party (PiS) led to the formation of a populist coalition government. Both the party and its coalition partners – the agrarian left-wing populist “Self-Defence” (Samoobrona) and the nationalist Catholic League of Polish Families – aroused talk both before and after the elections by their populist and

---

<sup>1</sup> Bachmann, Klaus: Populistische Parteien und Bewegungen in Mitteleuropa. In: Decker, Frank (Ed.): Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv? – Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006.– pp. 217-232, here p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bugaric, Bojan: Populism, liberal democracy, and the rule of law in Central and Eastern Europe. In: Communist and Post-Communist, 41 (2008) 2, pp. 191-203.

sometimes even extremist stagings. Just how quick such fluctuations continue to be is shown by the fact that the coalition parties, Samoobrona and the League of Polish Families, have already once again lost all their significance. In Slovakia, as well, following the parliamentary election of 2006 a government emerged led by left-wing populist Minister President Robert Fico. It formed a coalition with a far right group, the Slovakian National Party (SNS). Similarly, the Fidesz Party in Hungary, generally classified as bourgeois, showed itself to be nationalist folkloristic, anti-elitist and anti-capitalist in the parliamentary election of 2006, hoping in this way to gain a victory as the governing party. However, it failed to achieve this aim. In contrast, the party under the leadership of Viktor Orbán was able to win a two-thirds majority at the 2010 parliamentary elections.

Prior to the 2010 parliamentary election, Orbán, with a significant majority of his party and the renewed office of Minister President in view, scarcely dissociated himself from right-wing extremism which had gained strength. He did state that every vote for the right-wing extremist Jobbik was a wasted vote – however, not for reasons of the “dichotomy of democracy and extremism”. Rather, he made power political manoeuvres, posing the rhetorical question: “What can a party with, at best, 10-15% of the votes achieve?”<sup>3</sup>

In the Czech Republic, the conservative People’s Democratic Party (ODS) tried out a Eurosceptic course. Once, as a government party under Václav Klaus between 1993 and 1997, it supported the Czech Republic’s EU agenda. In 2002, crises within the party and the move into

---

<sup>3</sup> Orbán zu Jobbik. In: Pester Lloyd dated 09.02.2010.–  
[http://www.pestertloyd.net/2010\\_06/06orbkritik/06orbkritik.html](http://www.pestertloyd.net/2010_06/06orbkritik/06orbkritik.html) [10.02.2010].

the opposition led to the demission of Klaus, opposed within the party by Mirek Topolánek, as party chairman. During this phase, the Eurosceptic voices, articulated to a significant extent by Klaus, intensified. He was, surprisingly, elected to the position of President of the Czech Republic in 2003. In 2008 he proclaimed himself to be an “EU dissident”, but no longer had a majority of the vote in the party that was significantly defined by him. At the end of 2008, Klaus turned down the offer of Party Honorary President when he realised that he no longer had a majority in his party. As a supporter of the EU reform process, Minister President Mirek Topolánek was initially able to gather a majority within the ODS behind him, so as to be in a position to manage the EU Presidency in the first half of 2009 as compliantly and as noiselessly as possible. Of course, Klaus attempted to counteract this approach; for example, he announced that he would not display the EU flag on Prague Castle. Klaus referred to the first Irish “No” vote in the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty as a “victory of freedom and reason over artificial, elitist projects and European bureaucracy” and said that, to him, the Treaty of Lisbon was “as good as dead”.<sup>4</sup> He opposes the reform treaty because he sees in it an extensive disempowerment of national sovereignty. During a state visit to Ireland in late 2008, he tried to ally himself with local opponents of the reform treaty. Klaus also expressed his standpoint in the Austrian tabloid *Kronenzeitung*: “I’m for Europe too – and I highly value my position within the culture and civilisation of Europe – but Europe is not the same as the EU and Brussels. EU representatives have no right to acquire Europe for themselves, but that is exactly what they are consistently trying to do, and that for me is the main

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Schmidt, Hans-Jörg: EU-Dissident Klaus düpiert Iren. In: Die Welt newspaper of 13.11.2008.

problem of our time. Europe belongs to us all, not just to them.”<sup>5</sup> Klaus called the European election of 2009 superfluous. The ODS, meanwhile, profited from its emancipation from its dominant father figure Klaus; it won nearly 32% of the vote and was clearly the strongest outfit in terms of votes. None of the Eurosceptic lists standing for election, who had mobilised against the Lisbon Treaty and were secretly supported by Klaus, made it over the 5% hurdle.

The parties of East Central Europe are highly disparate. Within a right-left spectrum, they are classified as right-wing and left-wing populist, as extremist, liberal, conservative or even as nationalist populist (because of their nationalist folklore) due to the difficulty of classifying them ideologically and economically. The big difference from Western Europe is that national resentments are not directed against the virtually non-existent immigrants or Islam, but against “enemies” within. Campaigning is directed especially against the Roma people who are still not integrated, especially in Hungary,<sup>6</sup> Slovakia and the Czech Republic, as well as in Romania. This development is favoured by the fact that, so far, almost no post-materialist values associated with a loss of traditions and a national reference framework have spread in Eastern European societies. However, one common ground with populist parties in Western Europe lies in the “personality” factor – Eastern European parties too are fixated on their charismatic leaders. Here, the authoritarian-led parties function entirely according to populist logic. Once

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Klaus, Václav: Interview. In: Kronenzeitung of 20.08.2008 (also downloadable on his homepage [www.klaus.cz](http://www.klaus.cz) [20.11.2010]).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Barlai, Melani / Hartleb, Florian: Die Roma in Ungarn. In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (2009) 29-30, pp. 33-39.

in a while the hour of the populist “seducer” strikes even here, as voters and followers hope for a “saviour”.

Unlike Western Europe, nationalist traumas are still present, for example, in Hungary, with the Trianon Treaty of 1920, which still evokes ideas of a Greater Hungary, making these socially acceptable and usable for populists. For this reason, populism is taking centre stage and is finding considerable approval among modernisation and transformation losers. There is also little faith in the institutions. In the still turbulent political landscape, feelings against parties and the establishments can be easily exploited and used. All these factors have given succour to populism in East Central Europe.

# Policy Recommendations

## Strategies of the Mainstream Parties

Populist parties are not just “small mainstream parties”;<sup>1</sup> they have essential characteristics which do not apply to “mainstream party”<sup>2</sup> types. As such, protest parties are primarily attractive to voters who want to teach other parties a lesson or so-called modernisation losers; they are critical and hostile towards (traditional) party democracy with its established parties. Populism professes to represent a hypothetical, homogenous will of the people and reproaches rival parties for – allegedly – sabotaging this. This gives rise to a type of general accusation which is aimed not against party democracy as such, but against its status quo and against a malaise caused by an overstretched party state. For populist politicians, priority lies not with the concerns of a given population class – let alone the common good – but with their own personal success. Populists have to first supply a convincing answer to the critical question of accountability which is addressed to them. A simple appeal to the “people” is not sufficient in this regard.

The most common demand in this context is that Christian and Social Democratic parties should hone their programmes

---

<sup>1</sup> Leggewie, Claus: Nationalpopulisten auf dem Vormarsch. In: Leggewie, Claus / Meier, Horst (Ed.): Verbot der NPD oder Mit Rechtsradikalen leben? Positionen. – Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002.– pp.169-175, here p.175. Claus Leggewie speaks misleadingly of “small mainstream parties” in order to express, rightly, that right-wing populist parties address both globalisation losers and globalisation winners.

<sup>2</sup> The so-called mainstream parties (“catch-all parties”) want not only to integrate a single socio-economic group; they want to be able to potentially include as many groups of a socio-economically diverse electorate as possible. One defining trait of mainstream parties is that the ideological and programmatic claim steps back in favour of the aim of maximising votes, and the interests were cumulatively introduced.

in order to remain clearly distinguishable from one another. The argument also relates to the question of social justice and preservation of wealth in the context of an increasingly internationalised economy. Furthermore, the questions of a modern environmental policy in the national and international context, educational justice and the finality of Europe lie at the centre of consideration and discussion. Yet there are major problems standing in the way of such an aim. Given the wide variety of political expectations and priorities within the population, the task of gaining and, above all, securing a large voter potential for the long term by means of specific portfolios and aims basically appears difficult, maybe even impossible. With regard to the organisational strengthening of parties, there are various proposals which aim to make membership more attractive and to make procedures within parties more transparent and open. In this respect, populist party types are already heading in new directions, as shown most clearly by the single-member party PVV under the leadership of Geert Wilders. Mainstream parties also frequently have to contend with losses of members and new blood. To a certain extent, the first steps have already been enacted in this respect or are at the planning stage. However, the extent to which such activities will be able to halt the decline of the major parties and their organisational weakening has yet to be determined.<sup>3</sup>

Another particular challenge is the division and fragmentation of society. This puts pressure on the mainstream parties, which have to implement ever greater integration measures in order to further bond the various

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Wilp, Markus: Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien in Deutschland und in den Niederlanden. In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich. – Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 129-162.

groups and environments. The drifting apart within the mainstream parties shows the cracks in our society. This means that the fragmentation process within the mainstream parties should constitute a wakeup call. The social cohesion that establishes the solidarity of our society is basically under fire. Populism is a chancy response to deep social trends and changes, which should be taken very seriously. It constitutes an alarm signal that something fundamental is missing when it comes to representation, political communication by the current political, cultural and economic elite, and dealing with turbulent social developments. But it can also be regarded as an alarm signal that there is something fundamental missing within such developments. What we need is a new social pact between the privileged and the vulnerable non-privileged: a pact defined by socio-economic security (based on the proud preservation of the ideals of the welfare state) and cultural openness (an international orientation against xenophobia and against introspective nationalism, but still upholding national democracy). Such a pact could constitute an answer to populism.<sup>4</sup>

One further demand is that the established parties should embrace the topics raised by populism, thus depriving these movements of their foundation. This was successfully implemented in France at the 2007 parliamentary elections. The performance of the *Front National* was relatively weak since Nicolas Sarkozy took up Jean-Marie Le Pen's major topics like violence, immigration and national identity. This is

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. on this paragraph Cuperus, René: Der populistische Dammbbruch. Die niederländischen Volksparteien unter Druck. In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich. – Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 163-178.

educational for other European countries too which are also exposed to variants of a more or less pronounced form of populism. However, one can also see in this strategy a danger to democracy: if populist topics are established in the democratic mainstream, then values like equality, the protection of minorities and free speech are at risk. In any case, many European governments are adopting stricter immigration policies. In Belgium, for example, the Vlaams Belang brought about a change to existing migration and integration policy despite its lack of government involvement (by means of a so-called *Cordon sanitaire* of established parties). Comparing the “power recognition” of these parties, it differs from country to country, a wide range of tolerance (minority government practiced in Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands), coalition (Italy, short-term in Austria and the Netherlands, only under consideration in Finland) and strict *cordon sanitaire* (Belgium and France). It is hard to say what the right strategy is. Empirically, populist parties often lose credibility in government whereas they have a good position in minority governments (“power without responsibility”).

Representative democracy is based on pluralism and the entry of a populist into a system polarises opinions. For non-populist parties and politicians in the ranks of the mainstream parties, this means an immense challenge: they have to avoid broad simplification and yet make the complexity of the matters in question understandable<sup>5</sup>, as the great, now deceased, thinker Ralf Dahrendorf stated. At the same time, they have to strive for popularity without making themselves champions of every cause which makes the tabloid headlines in a type of “consternation

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dahrendorf, Ralf: Acht Anmerkungen zum Populismus. In: Transit. Europäische Revue, 25 (2003), p. 160.

democracy”. It is possible to believe that the current rise of populism is just a temporary aberration on the road to normal “European” party politics. An alternative explanation is that there is a process transcending Eastern Europe of profound political transformation. Traditional programmatic parties gradually give way to new, situational political players. In this new brave world of populist politics there is no need for coherent party platforms and stable loyalties.

### Political Education

Due to the polymorphism of populist manifestations, there are difficulties associated with orienting political education exclusively concretely “against populism”, as indicated at the beginning. An involvement with populist parties does not guarantee recipients immunity to the seduction tactics of a new group which might use particularly insidious methods. Integrating the topic in lessons on Nazism and extremism, for instance, would miss the heart of the problem. The more recent successes of right-wing populist parties were in fact not the result of propagating a neo-Nazi programme, but of seizing upon populist campaigning strategies and, in programmatic terms, reducing them to socio-populist protest.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the simple dichotomy “us upright democrats against evil, anti-constitutional extremists”, popularly used in politics, does not apply.

Anti-populist political education must aim to be education in democracy; it must also be seen as a cross-sectional task.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lewandowsky, Marcel: Politische Bildung und Populismus. In: Wielenga, Friso / Hartleb, Florian (Ed.): Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich. – Münster etc.: Waxmann, 2011. – pp. 219-234.

Its ideal aim must be to educate people until the campaigning strategies of populist parties are not taken seriously at all. In this process, it must attempt to replace the defensive attitudes in political and cultural matters to which populism has recourse with socio-political tolerance and democratic knowledge and awareness. Given this, it is necessary for political education to seek to cooperate with social, religious and cultural interest groups to integrate them into their work on the ground.

One fundamental trait of populism lies in its defensive attitude towards the political system and its identification of scapegoats. “Us” against “the powers that be” – this populist slogan is aimed against representative bodies and thus classical institutions. It can only be counteracted if education in the processes and fundamental values of democracy begins at an early age and this task continues, wherever possible, in the sense of lifelong learning. Of course, instruction must be designed in such a way that this offer will meet with interest and be accepted. Incidentally it should also usually include the increased communication of skills for dealing with the mass media. At the same time, it must nurture trust and awareness in dealing with the institutions of representative democracy. This applies not only to elections and parties. More than ever before, the workings of democracy at a national, European and international level must be taught in schools, but also elsewhere. The populist temptation to reinterpret the complexity of the political system as the corruption of individual players or as undemocratic must not be allowed to catch on.

Populism includes an intrinsic component aiming to undermine civilisation. The task of political education must

be to oppose this, and it is only political education that can do this. Of course, these remarks can only be initial considerations when it comes to political education efforts. They represent an attempt to formulate key points as to how to deal with the chameleon-like phenomenon of populism. It will be the responsibility of a variety of disciplines to go into these more deeply and to develop concepts.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

## The Author

Dr. Florian Hartleb, born in 1979, is a Research Fellow at the Centre for European Studies (CES) in Brussels. From 1999 to 2003 he studied political science, law and psychology at Eastern Illinois University (USA) and the University of Passau, and gained his doctorate from TU Chemnitz in 2004. He subsequently worked as a consultant in the German parliament (Bundestag) and as a Research Associate at TU Chemnitz. He also co-authored three high-school textbooks and was awarded scholarships from the Konrad Adenauer and Hanns Seidel Foundations. In 2010 he was appointed Professor of Political Management at a private university in Berlin. His research areas include populism, political parties and extremism in the European Union as well as political leadership.

Recent Publications: Populismus in der modernen Demokratie (coedited with Friso Wielenga). Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich, Münster 2011; Nach ihrer Etablierung. Rechtspopulistische Parteien in Europa. Begriff – Strategie – Wirkung, Zukunftsforum Politik, Sankt-Augustin/Berlin 2011; Auf der Suche eines anderen „good governance“: Die Kritik(er) der Globalisierung, in: Tilman Mayer et al (eds.): Globalisierung im Fokus von Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Wiesbaden 2011; A new Protest Culture in Western Europe?, in: European View, 10 (2011) 1, S. 3-10; A thorn in the side of European elites. The new Euroscepticism, Centre for European Studies, Brussels 2011.

Contact: fh@thinkeurope.eu



Konrad  
Adenauer  
Stiftung



CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES