



**“Right-wing Populism in Europe”
Networking conference for activists
and multipliers from churches,
Christian social service organisations
and related partners**

**Brussels, 6th and 7th of
December 2018**



Henning Flad National Working Group on Church and Right-Wing Extremism / BAG K+R), Franziska Schröter (Friedrich Ebert Foundation), Elke Beyer (Diaconia Germany)

More than 60 participants from more than ten different European countries joined in the conference „**Right-Wing Populism in Europe**“ on December 6th and 7th, 2018, in Brussels. The meeting was a **cooperation** of the **National Working Group on Church and Right-Wing Extremism (BAG K+R)**, Eurodiaconia, Diaconia Germany (Project „Shaping Diversity - Resisting Exclusion: Diaconia in Post-Migrant Society“) and the **Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Project against Right-Wing Extremism and EU Office Brussels)**

While its particular approach and influence differs from country to country, the rising of right-wing populism and right-wing authoritarian currents in Europe in general and its government participation in some countries in particular present a considerable threat to democracy and civil society - and even to the future of the European Union.

The conference sought to provide deeper insights into the particular dynamics and developments of right-wing populism and parties as well as the chance for activists to exchange experiences from their work on the ground. Here, they could develop ideas and form networks in order to further strengthen and defend democratic structures in the upcoming years.

1)

In his **opening input**, **Jean-Yves Camus, Political Scientist at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)**, sketched the history of the upsurge of right-wing populist and -extremist ideologies and parties in Europe especially since the 1980s.

He described right-wing extremism as a phenomenon that is not at all new. Yet, since the Second World War the extreme right was pushed to the fringes; its joining in governmental power was unthinkable.

The first party to break this taboo was the Austrian Freiheitspartei (Freedom Party). From the 1970s onward, this party was accepted as a coalition partner by social democrats and conservative parties alike. The 1980s brought a shift, starting in Scandinavian countries like Denmark, Sweden and Norway with parties who protested against „big governments“ and who showed an „anti-establishment“-attitude. Common to them was - and still is - also their resistance against immigration and against the emerging of multicultural (diverse) societies.

Jean-Yves Camus
Political Scientist at the
Institute for International and
Strategic Affairs (IRIS), France



At the core of their ideologies lies the question of „identity“ and an emphasis on a clear distinction between natives and non-natives - the latter being denied the same rights as the natives, so there is a strong focus on discriminatory policies against non-natives. In this world-view, a diverse society and culture brings havoc, chaos and diseases. Thus, resisting this development is not only a matter of keeping „national values“ (as conservatives might have it), but becomes a life-or-death-struggle.

In Eastern Europe this development took even more time: Until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, the extreme right was suppressed, yet clearly existed.

Camus pointed out that it would be wrong to equate the new emerging right-wing parties and movements for example of Marine Le Pen (France), Matteo Salvini (Italy) or Geert Wilders (Netherlands) with the former Nazi parties of the 1930s.

They seek to appear (and are) modernized and are very much aware of the fact that they cannot win any election with a clear fascist (or antisemitic) agenda today. It might turn out, presumes Camus, that in the European elections of 2019 they might not win a majority, but they might be strong enough a minority to block political initiatives of others.

While there are still neo-Nazi groups that are willing to use violence, they are currently still on to the margins, though causing harm and even deaths.



The ideology of nativism
has become mainstream.

The non-neo-Nazi-right is striving for governmental power. Yet, the main efforts are for ideological impact on other groups, not least on those in opposition. And in this they are successful. Whereas their political ideas were still a taboo 20 years ago they have reached the heart of society today.

The ideology of „nativism“ is not only found with the extreme right any more, it has become part of mainstream thought, Camus points out.

For example, social democrats in the past would not have allowed the discrimination of migrant workers in regard to employment rights and equal

pay. This now has clearly changed. The reaction of the „established parties“ is to criticise their own stance in regard to immigration policies and to adjust them.

Especially social democrats notice that right-wing parties are taking away their constituencies, so they are adapting and absorb more and more of their ideas. Marine Le Pen for example is pulling 50 percent of the working class vote - and the other 50 percent do not vote for Macron or anybody else.

Right-wing activists mostly do not seek to establish any kind of dictatorship. Nevertheless, they want to change not only politics, but the system as a whole. The goal is to replace representative democracy with direct democracy, and not only on the local, but on the national level. In allowing referendums on most issues, civil society and parliament would be marginalized - as can currently be observed in Hungary and Poland.



Their strengths lie in communication and media skills (esp social media), which enables them to reach out to the generation of 18 to 25-year-olds. This category of voters tends to reject listening to complicated talks or long lectures of politicians. Instead, they expect interactive content and videos. This also appeals to older people without any academic degree.

The introductory speech was followed by reports on developments in Austria, Sweden, Hungary and France.

2)

Martin Schenk-Mair, Deputy Director of the Diaconia Austria, talked about the concrete impact of the new right-wing populist government on the work of human rights activists in his country. According to him, there are little but ongoing and therefore very effective attempts to intimidate and weaken non-governmental organisations in particular and thereby civil society as a whole.



Martin Schenk-Mair
Deputy Director of the
Diaconia Austria

After a media interview of a human rights expert for example, Diaconia Austria received a letter from government authorities threatening to bring this case to court (the court rejected it). Diaconia Austria is already also experiencing and expecting cuts of the funding of work for refugees and other migrants. Unlike in the past, there exists no kind of „normal conversation“ or consultation with the government any more: „They don't speak with us.“

Schenk-Mair went on describing the most important right-wing players and areas in Austria nowadays. First, the Burschenschaften (student fraternities), around 1.000 persons (only men), are the recruiting area for political offspring. Several of them are members of the cabinet and heads of governmental departments. Second, several far right internet websites like e.g. „unzensuriert.at“ whose former chief editor is now responsible for the strategic communication for the Austrian interior cabinet.

Third, the „Identitäre Bewegung“ (Identitarians) originating in France, a group trying to set up NGO-like activities and non-violent and spectacular resistance forms that appeal to young people and that stands for “ethno-pluralism”: the separation of cultures for their “salvation”.

In his experience, right-wing parties and players constantly talk about „values“: „And the more values are talked about, the less human rights play a role.“ Schenk-Mair indicates that the term „value“ does not stem from the field of ethics but of economics: So it is usually associated with something's worth and its prize, which is - according to Kant - something different than dignity. (Schenk-Mair quoted Immanuel Kant: „Alles hat entweder einen Preis oder eine Würde. Was einen Preis hat, an dessen Stelle kann auch etwas anderes als Äquivalent gesetzt werden; was dagegen über allen Preis erhaben ist, mithin kein Äquivalent verstattet, das hat eine Würde.“). This goes well along with the typical scapegoat-narrative and what he calls the „winner ideology“ of our times, which expects even the losers to identify with the winner.

Schenk-Mair also observes that support for right-wing populism feeds from feelings of powerlessness, shame, envy, and isolation. Referring to Timothy Snyder, he lays out the „Authoritarian Path“, which involves the mobilisation against minorities and poor people and their „othering“, further the undermining of demonstrations and the independency of the Supreme Court, the denouncing and weakening of NGOs and civil society and the pressure on critical thinking.

Schenk-Mair offers „Four Perspectives“ to counter this:

1. Putting people into a position of strength - enabling agency and empowerment (against the feeling of powerlessness)
2. Tackling the fettered opportunities for fulfillment, and uncovering enjoyment that you deny yourself - the worse your own self-denial is, the tougher you will be on the more vulnerable (against the feeling of envy)
3. Recognition: Taking offenses seriously and not glossing over (against the feeling of shaming)
4. Friendship, come together - face to face, at real places, with regular rhythm (against the feeling of isolation)

He also adds that it is helpful in a conversation to identify the underlying negative emotions and then to respond to them - in his experience this very quickly moves the discussion away from identity politics to very concrete concerns.

3)

Journalist and author **Anna-Lena Lodenius** reported on developments in Sweden, where the *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats) are not yet in governmental power, but growing stronger. Since the election of 2018, they are one of the three big parties, which makes it difficult to shape a political majority without them - the Liberals would have to build a coalition with the Social Democrats, which is a fairly new experience for Swedish government.

Anna-Lena Lodenius
journalist and author,
Sweden



The Sweden Democrats have their roots in the Nazi-movement and were more outspokenly racist in the past, but some years ago decided for reform and now appear as more moderate, using new symbols (a blue flower) and a new vocabulary. They also split apart from its youth organisation *Sverigedemokratisk Ungdom* (SDU, Sweden Democratic Youth) because of its more open racism and right-wing extremism. No local representatives of any Nazi parties were elected. Still, they are very active in violence, crime, and bullyboy tactics.

Nowadays, the Sweden Democrats present themselves as „the only true opposition, because we are the only true people“. They took the old (social democratic) concept of „*Folkhemmet*“ („the people’s home“) that constituted a welfare program as well as a cultural and emotional idea of communal order and solidarity - and revived it for their own agenda. They evoke the image of the „Folkhem People“ who are helpful und cooperative. Though gender equality is still considered as constitutive part of Swedish heritage, Sweden Democrats are changing the debate in that as men and women are „marching together“ against feminism. Indeed, the number of women voting for the party is growing, yet the Sweden Democrats are still the biggest party for working men.



2015 - as in other European countries as well - has been the „year of the migrants“, having a huge impact on the rise of right-wing ideology in the country. The Sweden Democrats stated he other parties were now „facing reality“ after ignoring their warnings for a long time, and would now finally close the borders.

Lodenius sees the need for the governing parties to adopt different strategies of communicating with and about the Sweden Democrats: Instead of letting them frame the political discussions, the Social Democrats as well as the Liberals should engage with their own agendas and visions. They also should not only pay attention to topics like immigration, but also on climate change and other pressing issues of our times.

4)

András Bíró-Nagy, Co-Director and Head of Research of the „Policy Solutions“-Think Tank in Budapest, gave an insight into the **developments in Hungary**. Since 2015, one cannot talk any more about an „illiberal nationalism“, as Bíró-Nagy quoted Victor Orbán, but about a right-wing authoritarian state that seeks to methodically weaken the system of „checks and balances“.

András Bíró-Nagy
Co-Director and Head of
Research of the „Policy
Solutions“-Think Tank in
Budapest, Hungary



Democratic institutions do still exist but are increasingly hollowed out. Media are functioning as mere distributors of government propaganda, as the oligarchy close to the government buys it up (TV, radio, online print media). The rule-of-law-principle has ceased to exist, since all independent oversight positions are now in the hands of Fidesz loyalists (general attorney, media council, state audit office). NGOs are portrayed as „foreign agents“ in order to shrink space for critical voices, their proponents are enlisted and published with names and positions in the media. Bíró-Nagy also talked about reforms of the electoral system in a way that favours the governing party (e.g. „gerrymandering“, unequal voting opportunities for ethnic Hungarians working abroad etc.)

The refugee crisis has been a winning issue for Fidesz and its only topic during the last election. The building of a fence on both the Serbian-Hungarian and Croatian-Hungarian border has allowed Orbán to reframe himself internationally as „the defender of the European border and of Christianity“.

Another reason for the strength of Fidesz is the weakness and fragmentation of the democratic opposition parties.

Viktor Orbán has been re-elected for a third term, his party has won a two-thirds majority in parliament. Interestingly, right-wing populists are now both part of the government as well as of the opposition: The Jobbik party, though undergone a process of moderation, has been outflanked by Fidesz from the right.

One of the challenges Fidesz faces as a governing party is how to remain populist and thus „anti-establishment“ while being in power. With little domestic opposition it needs to find „enemies“ that „oppress“ „the people“ that then needs „protection“. Fidesz finds those „enemies“ outside the original political arena and even outside the country: „Brussels“ (a term Fidesz prefers over „European Union“), multinational corporations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), US-Hungarian billionaire George Soros (with strong antisemitic undertones), migrants (with a focus on the „Muslim invasion of Christian Hungary“), „Western liberals“, critical NGOs etc.



Surprisingly, surveys have shown that the majority of the population is dissatisfied with Hungarian democracy and does not believe in the freedom of the press any more. Yet, there is also a big divide between the perception of Fidesz voters on the one and the other voters on the other hand. Bíró-Nagy observes a wide-spread apathy and lack of faith in parliamentary elections, which in return causes a huge part of the electorate to stay away from casting their ballot.

5)

The fourth report on a European country came from [Jean-Yves Camus](#), focussing on the [developments of right-wing populism in France](#), especially the *Front National (National Front)*, now re-named *Rassemblement National*.

The founders of the Front National were old neo-Nazis and members of a neo-fascist movement, also including many students. At the beginning, it was rather medium-sized, with a strong anti-communist and anti-left stance.

Later, Jean-Marie Le Pen emerged as a charismatic leading figure who clashed with the „old-style fascists“. His world-view was not shaped by fascism per se, but by colonialism and his activities in the French Foreign Legion in Indochina. Le Pen wanted to form a mass movement against the Gaullist party and was convinced immigration to become the top political issue in the future. In the era of economic growth, he made an equation between the relation of immigrants and people without a job, which was totally new on the political agenda.



At the beginning of the 80s, Le Pen proved to be very unsuccessful with this. This changed, when the Socialist Party under François Mitterrand formed a coalition with the Communist Party, which was a shock for conservatives. In addition, the number of immigrants in the 70s rose dramatically because many post-colonial migrants were allowed to reunite with their families.

Another factor were Le Pens personal charisma and show-like presentation. While Mitterrand talked mostly about the economy and used a very technocratic language, Le Pen claimed the Front National would make France “great again“. He argued against any self-critique or remorse concerning French

colonialism, but instead claimed that this had brought „civilization“ to the occupied countries, and that there was every reason to be proud of „values of the past“.

He was also known for belittling Nazi-crimes. He said, gas chambers had been only a “detail of history”, and he made racist and antisemitic remarks. Those remarks made any coalition with him and his party unacceptable. He remained an outcast, but the Front National gained momentum.

Already in the 1990s, Le Pen pulled a majority of the working class voters.

This is still the case with the Front National / Rassemblement National (since 2018) under the leadership of his daughter, Marine Le Pen.

Yet, there are remarkable demographical changes in her electorate: There are more women (male-female ratio went up to 2:1), and she thrives huge support from young people: Almost 30% of the youth vote for Front National. Another third stems from people working in the civil service, which also indicates a radical change. Other than her father, Marine Le Pen does not opt for a „lean state“ but blames the governing parties for its privatisation. Marine Le Pen receives much support from people living in the countryside and in small cities. Those people are often stuck in areas with hardly any infrastructure and feel disconnected to the developments in the big cities. The Front National is also very strong in the suburbs of Marseille.

The Front National has changed and softened the tone. Marine Le Pen especially understood that antisemitism will keep the party away from any chance to govern, so this has no place there any more. Islam has become the new scapegoat. As a muslim, the assumption is, you will never achieve being French. Immigration and Islam are strongly connected in France, since most migrants to France come from old French colonies that are muslim.

Camus warns that even if the Front National would vanish as a party „tomorrow“, it would leave a huge impact on French politics: Particularly the perception of immigrants and of Islam has totally been changed; the ideas already have left deep marks inside society and politics. He fears, Marine Le Pen could one day disappear and be followed by a new conservative politician who turns out to be far right-wing.

6)

The afternoon session began with a **panel discussion on the question „Is Europe turning right? How to tackle right-wing populism together“**. Participants were **Michaël Privot, Director of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Heather Roy (Secretary General of Eurodiaconia), and Dennis de Jong (Member of the European Parliament, Netherlands)**. The discussion was **moderated** by **Katharina Wegner (EU-Representative of Diaconia Germany, Brussels)**.

All of them describe the rising influence of right-wing ideologies on their political day-to-day work in Brussels. Increasingly, the granting of human rights is attached to conditions that have to be met in advance, which in turn is calling their universal validness into question. The commitment against discrimination is obstructed and increasingly under pressure to be justified. All of them have experience hate speech and bullying directed against themselves or their co-workers.



Michaël Privot (ENAR)

According to Michaël Privot, several factors play a role in the rise of right-wing populism: His organisation's analysis has shown, he recounts, an ongoing economic disparity and the inability to address and to respond to its challenges on the conservative as well as on the progressive side as being part of it. The roots reach further back than the financial crisis of 2008. Privot states the loss of working classes in the aftermath of a more radical and less socially balanced capitalist market. Leaving class analysis and the defense of the working class behind, political debates especially on the left focus solely on values and identity politics, which opened a venue for other parties. Yet, if one talks about values instead of the economy, one cannot talk any more about „right“ or „wrong“ or reality checks.

Another turning point were the terrorist attacks of 9/11 - since then the need to justify advocacy work for Muslims, people of colour, migrants, Roma and others became stronger. Although there was always decisive counter balance from the EU parliament, right-wing sympathisers to seep into the administrations have made their work more difficult.

Heather Roy (Eurodiaconia)



Heather Roy observes an increasing conditionality in accessing protection and services in general, and not just for people of colour or other minorities. The current attitude is to see another person as a „burden“ and as a rival who challenges one's own place in society. The last two or three years have brought up more questions to why certain social services are not limited to one's own kin. In addition to this, she notices a rising taboo-breaking in regard to antisemitism etc.



Dennis de Jong (M.E.P.)

Dennis de Jong described the difficulty of dealing with political initiatives coming from the right-wing parliamentary group Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF). So far, the other parties in the EU-parliament see no common ground for cooperation with them. Yet, in committees ENF seeks to propose similar and moderate proposals like the others. Those cannot support it without supporting the ENF, but they also cannot just reject their initiatives. The solution at the moment: They therefore suggest similar but own proposals.

The panel discussion then moved on to the question on how to incorporate many people sympathizing with right-wing ideas.

Dennis de Jong described his and his party's experiences of going from door to door to speak with potential voters. This has become increasingly difficult, because people don't open their doors any more, and they don't vote. Instead, they state their hate and disdain for politics and politicians. Often the argument is made that people don't have social housing because of the immigrants. He refuses to call people out for being racist, but instead asks questions about what the housing company does for them, or if and how they could - together with the migrants - organise as a house or a street to fight bad living conditions: „And that changes the discussion, totally.“ Then the debate would not focus on questions of identity, but on a common objective. The idea is to connect people with shared commitment for the common good.



Katharina Wegner
(Diaconia Germany)

Equally, **Michaël Privot** talked about equipping people with community-building techniques and a common-ground approach with other sectors. In his experience, people respond well to being spoken to with reason and with truth, without any attempt to twist the argument. There is no need to reduce complexity - „just take your time“.

Heather Roy admitted to be struggling with the concept of dialogue when outspoken representatives of right-wing populism or even right-wing extremism are concerned, and is skeptical what the point of it might be - especially since they almost never enter into a real debate but enumerate their prepared statements. Still, even if a right-wing politician might not be convinced by an opponent's argument, somebody in the audience might be.

Heather Roy then spoke of the importance of building networks with other people and other groups, also outside of the „usual peer group“. She criticized what she perceives as an „incredibly internal looking way“ of the churches who in her mind need to discuss more what role the churches and their institutions can play in civil society and democracy as a whole. Diaconia alone has more people working for the organisation than Volkswagen, it has a strong

infrastructure - so it could have a huge impact on the advocacy of human rights and democracy.

The audience encouraged the idea, that the building of new networks among the various players of civil society and the strengthening of old connections will be a crucial factor in facing future challenges from right-wing populism. Diaconia with its resources, with its properties, church centres, and its people could be a driving motor against discrimination.

The panelists agreed that growing faith and confidence in one's own particular (counter-)narratives - including the Christian one of equality, solidarity, community, love and hope - can be supportive. Michaël Privot added that narratives fall quickly flat if they do not get filled with details.



Heather Roy (Eurodiaconia),
Katharina Wegner (Diaconia
Germany), Michaël Privot
(ENAR) and Dennis de Jong (M.E.P.)

Somebody in the audience pointed out that hate obviously is a big trigger in the political debate and even considered a political emotion - then why should love not be? Heather Roy supported this idea suggesting to ask ourselves how it would show to speak and think of the „ultimate power of love“ in regard to our economies, to working place conditions etc. in contrast to the current objective of „growth“. How would „trust“ be translated in this context, how „hospitality“?

Dennis de Jong brought into consideration to be attentive towards the strong prevalence of anger, which he usually perceives as a cry for attention: „If you see an angry person, the best thing to do is to show interest. Usually people don't expect this.“

7)

The second day of the conference began with the **input** of **Andreas Umland, Political Scientist at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, Kyiv, Ukraine**. He addressed the Russian influence on the extreme Right in Europe – “Russian” meaning all Russia-connected powers, both governmental and non-governmental. This influence is multi-layered and not easily or clearly allocated. It ranges from meetings of top-ranking right-wing politicians with Russian statesmen (Putin and Salvini, Putin and Marine Le Pen etc.) over to Russian-speaking media outlets abroad as well as the granting of loans (to Front National and potentially others). This phenomenon is relatively new to the Western public, who had before rather focused on the influence of the Western Far Right on Russia.



Andreas Umland
Political Scientist at the
Institute for Euro-Atlantic
Cooperation, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Umland recaps the intertwined and interdependent German and Russian history of thought, tracing various points in cultural and political history: German Romanticism and Nativism as well as Russian Slavism in the 19th century and the huge impact of the German conservative revolution on the Russian Far Right, the Zarist Empire, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Stalinist regime, the epoch of Soviet Union and finally the Russian Federation. He also briefly touched the Molotov-Ribbentrop-contract and ideas of Neutralism and Pan-Europeanism in the post-soviet period.

Umland gave special attention to the ideologies of Eurasianism and Neo-Eurasianism. He described the first as a „meta-ideology“ of isolationism, emerging in the Russian empire in the 1920s that perceived Russia as a separate culture versus a hostile Romano-Germanic culture (cultural landscape).

The post-Soviet Neo-Eurasianism of current days – as developed by neo-fascist Aleksandr Dugin and supported by Vladimir Putin – according to Umland is but a distortion of the „classic“ Eurasianist idea. It can be described as a geo-political concept advocating a European-Asian Empire under the leadership of Russia. In its bi-polar world-view, the opponents are not the „Romano-Germanic“ regions but the US that has to be fought in a „Final Battle“ – meaning also: Russia could unite with Western Europe.

The followers of Neo-Eurasian ideology have extensive networks in the West. With their help, representatives of the Russian regime (politicians, diplomats, journalists...) have established links with Far-Right forces in the EU, United States, Turkey and other countries.

So, what role does Russia play in the success and legality of the far right in Europe?

Meetings with high profile Russian politicians and invitations to conferences have offered status to European right-wing politicians and provided their followers with the impression of having international contacts and political relevance.

In their rhetoric, Russia also functions as a model and provides an alternative for organising society. Russian media also provide the Far Right with access to a large global outreach, there is also huge interference by Russian bots in social media. The extent of direct financial support for right-wing groups still remains unclear.

Yet, the Russian support is not sufficient to explain the success of the rising of right-wing populism and extremism in the West.

Umland also described the ambivalence repercussions this has for Russian policy: For example, neo-Nazi connections and statements by the Western Far Right can be embarrassing for Russia. In the Ukrainian context it is very important for Russia to portray itself as anti-fascist and the Ukraine as fascist.

Umland believes the reasons for the support of right-wing groups by Russian powers lie in the estrangement between Putin and the West since the mid-2000s. Putin is driven rather by tactical and pragmatic interests than by ideological reasons, explains Umland. His primary interest lies in his relationship to the Russian public as well as in the strengthening and stabilisation of his authoritarian and kleptocratic regime, less in his relations to Western governments. The destabilisation of the latter nevertheless also strengthens his own position.

Umland noticed the following objectives (goals) of Putin:

- Putin needs allies in the EU and in national parliaments who speak out against sanctions against Russia.
- Putin needs commentators from the West but also for the international audience who justify Russia's policy. Since „mainstream“ journalists, academics and politicians are less and less available for this purpose, representatives of the Far Right come into play.
- The major motivation for supporting the success of the Far Right is that it creates disarray among the nations, thus undermining the European Union and NATO

In its posture, Umland said, Russia presents itself as an authoritarian and nationalist regime, however, this does not necessarily have to reflect the beliefs of Putin and its regime from the inside.

8)

The last input of the conference was given by **Franziska Heinze**, expert at the **German Youth Institute**, who **introduced the programme „Live Democracy!“**. Since 2015 this German governmental and federal programme supports initiatives, associations and other players of civil society who are working towards the aim of a diverse, non-violent and democratic society. It has become one cornerstone of the government's objective to counter extremism and radicalization and to support democracy. The funding for 2019 amounts to €115,5 million in total.



Franziska Heinze

German Youth Institute

„Live Democracy!“ focusses on sustaining structures but also assists pilot projects and is – also due to the federal structure of the German state – active in big cities as well as in rural areas all over the country.

Currently, it supports 16 federal democracy centers, 35 nationwide NGOs and more than 100 pilot projects. It also is engaged in local „partnerships“, bringing together currently 261 local and municipal authorities and decision-makers with people active in all aspects of civil society. Starting from local conditions and problems on the ground, they develop a strategy addressing the specific situation at hand. The sponsored authorities are supported by free advisory and coaching services.

„Federal Democracy Centers“ started to support the development of regional advice networks, which would link the advice and support services for victims or people who seek to exit violent and anti-democratic groups. Those incorporate experts from government sectors and areas of (civil) society such as youth social work, the police, the judiciary, psychology, science, churches, government departments and ministries.

The characteristics of this programme lie in its multicentric focus with a huge range of initiatives, aims and participants. „Live Democracy!“ also is engaged in research, public relations, monitoring and evaluation. It is important for the government to follow the guidelines for prescription of neutrality. However, to engage in democracy is something that has to be done by civil society anyway and cannot be assumed by the state or the government.

9)



The conference ended with an **intense exchange and cooperative consultation** among the participants about further networking and approaches to counter right-wing populism and to strengthening of democratic convictions and structures. **Moderated** by **Franziska Schröter, Friedrich Ebert Foundation**, and **Henning Flad, National Working Group on Church and Right-Wing Extremism (BAG K+R)**, the group discussed experiences and best practices in their own field of work.

The participants also developed ideas of how to use this particular conference as starting point for further meetings and networking through small (online-) infrastructures, the exchange of brief professional and personal expertise of each participant, and through additional annual conferences. It was also suggested to use Eurodiaconia in Brussels as a „hub“ for strengthening democratic policies and thus to strengthen its voice in European institutions.

Building stronger European networks among initiatives and NGOs and other organisations and institutions was one key objective. There were also strong claims made to encourage churches and parishes to look for partnerships and collaborations outside of their own field, to broaden perspectives and to sustain diverse alliances.

Another impulse sustained the conviction that it will be necessary to build bridges by talking less about differences in world-views and ideologies - conflicts that are almost impossible to be resolved - but instead to focus on very concrete conflicts and problems and their practical solution while engaging all parties involved.

In conclusion, the participants of the conference were convinced that Diaconia, churches and other democracy-oriented NGOs and initiatives can draw on substantial resources - not least in regard to strong and inclusive narratives, histories and experiences of reconciliation and healing, and their many engaged members.





Partner sites

National Working Group on Church and Rightwing Extremism:

www.bagkr.de

Diaconia Project »Shaping diversity - Resisting exclusion: Diaconia in post-migrant society«:
www.diakonie.de/journal/modellprojekt-vielfalt-gestalten-ausgrenzung-widerstehen

Eurodiaconia:

www.eurodiaconia.org

FES Brussels:

www.fes-europe.eu

FES Project against Right-wing extremism:

www.fes.de/forum-berlin/gegen-rechtsextremismus

Related links

(mentioned during the conference)

Collection of publications regarding church and discrimination by BAG K+R (mostly German)

www.bagkr.de/online-bibliothek

Literature on the topic of right-wing extremism and related fields by FES

www.fes.de/forum-berlin/gegen-rechtsextremismus/publikationen

ELABE polls and info on the "Yellow vests" (french)

www.elabe.fr/tag/gilets-jaunes

Russia and the Western Far Right:

Anton Shekhovtsov

www.tango-noir.com

Literature picks (selection)

(2019) Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira: Populism and the economy. An ambivalent relationship.

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/15244.pdf>

(2018) Triumph of the women? The female face of the populist & far right in Europe

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/14636.pdf>

(2018) Reclaiming action. Progressive strategies in times of growing right-wing populism in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Germany (includes Sweden chapter by Anna-Lena Lodenius)

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/stockholm/14617.pdf>

(2018) Who votes right-wing populist? Geographical and individual factors in seven German state elections

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/wiso/14560.pdf>

(2017) Stöss, Richard: Trade unions and right-wing extremism in Europe.

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/13464.pdf>

(2017) Greven, Thomas: Right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism in the U.S. and Europe.

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(1964) Hannah Arendt: "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship", in: Responsibility and Judgement, Schocken Books; a Division of Random House; Inc. New York 2003.

Occasion and Objective

In recent years churches and diaconia in Europe have been important actors and partners in civil society, politics and educational institutions to fight right-wing extremism, discrimination and hate. The extent of involvement varies, but in times of growing populist tendencies, this common cause and engagement is more important than ever. There is also an increased desire to form alliances, exchange of ideas and come together to fight hate in all its forms.

The phenomenon of right-wing populism poses a relatively new challenge to European politics and societies, as populists are not only in the margins of our societal and political structures any more. Populism is increasingly mainstreamed and many European countries have seen the rise of populism in society and in government. Populist parties and movements are aiming to influence the European agenda in a negative way and in extreme cases can sabotage and paralyse well-established democratic structures and decision-making processes.

Situations vary from country to country, and so do the counter strategies and approaches. Networking, joint strategy planning and the exchange of knowledge and plans of action are vital to strengthen positive democratic powers in the whole of Europe.

This conference wants to bring together high-profile stakeholders from the churches and diaconia in Europe, from civil society and politics to join in a mutual effort to keep human dignity, civil rights and democratic values at the heart of our societies. It wants to provide a space for exchange, for debating which strategy is working and which one is not. We will discuss recent developments under the hypothesis that the different things happening might not be so different after all – that there are at least some common roots and similar causes.

Organisers:

National Working Group on Church and Rightwing Extremism (BAGKR)
Diaconie Deutschland, Project »Shaping diversity - Resisting exclusion: Diaconia in post-migrant society«
Eurodiaconia
Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Project against right-wing extremism
Friedrich Ebert Foundation, EU Office Brussels

Conference venue

House of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD)
Rue Joseph II 166
B-1000 Brussels

Registration

Participants are asked to organise their travel arrangements individually. Costs of board and lodging for registered participants will be covered by the organisers. There is no participation fee for this event.
Please register at: <https://bagkr.de/applicationneurope/>

Contact and Information

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Programme

Thursday, 6th December 2018

10:00 am	Introduction & Welcome by the Organisers	
10:30 am	Opening Input »What we are dealing with?« Terminology, phenomena and a general overview on the current situation in Europe regarding right-wing populism and extremism Prof. Dr. Jean-Yves Camus , Political Analyst and Associate Research Fellow at The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)	
11:30 am	Country Reports Austria Martin Schenk-Mair , Deputy Director Diakonie Austria	
	Sweden Anna-Lena Lodenius , Journalist and Author	
12:45 pm	Lunch	
1:45 pm	Country Reports Hungary András Biró-Nagy , Co-Director and Head of Research of Policy Solutions	
	France Prof. Dr. Jean-Yves Camus , Political Analyst and Associate Research Fellow at The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)	
3:00 pm	Coffee Break	

Programme

Friday, 7th December 2018

9:30 am	Introduction into Day 2	
9:40 am	Input »The Russian influence on the Far Right in Europe« Dr. Andreas Umland , Political Scientist, Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Kyiv, Ukraine	
10:40 am	Coffee Break	
11:00 am	Presentation »How the programme „Demokratie leben!“ (Live Democracy!) shapes democracy and civil society in Germany« Franziska Heinze , Programme Evaluation »Demokratie leben!« (Live Democracy!) German Youth Institute (DJJ)	
12:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm	Exchange and Cooperative Consultation »What to do, what not to do« Henning Flad , Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Kirche und Rechtsextremismus Ingo Grastorf , Diakonie Deutschland Franziska Schröter , Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Florian Tuder , Eurodiaconia	
3:00 pm	End of Conference	

Wednesday, 5th December 2018

For those arriving in Brussels early, there will be a non-formal, unofficial opening of the conference (at own cost) with a get together dinner (7pm) and a reception (9:30pm)

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