

THE
FAR RIGHT
— IN —
GOVERNMENT

Six Cases From Across Europe





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INTRODUCTION

The Rise of the Radical Right

STEFANIE EHMSSEN &
ALBERT SCHARENBERG

We are currently witnessing a tidal change in global politics. The far right, which seemed to be on the retreat for decades, has staged a huge comeback. From Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines to Narendra Modi in India, from Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland to Viktor Orbán in Hungary, from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey to Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, from Michel Temer in Brazil to Donald Trump in the United States, far-right politicians have risen to the highest ranks of world power. From these newly acquired positions of strength, they have initiated deeply disturbing authoritarian transformations of their respective countries.

The Neoliberal Offensive

In this endeavor, they form part of the same phenomenon: They represent the underside of neoliberal globalization. Neoliberalism is, after all, the latest form of capitalism, and it is deepening the contradictions inherent in capitalism in a very substantial way. We are producing so much more wealth than in, say, 1980, but the working classes have seen nothing of it. In addition, austerity policies have produced a steep increase in social inequality and economic insecurity, in turn undermining notions of community and solidarity, and leading to increased competition and individualism. Even the very notion of “society” has been under threat ever since Margaret Thatcher’s infamous intervention that

“there’s no such thing,” and that “There Is No Alternative” to the policies she championed. And indeed, the neoliberal offensive has reshaped society—it has reshaped our hearts and minds, how we feel, and how we think. Neoliberalism has succeeded in replacing the old hegemony as the dominant system of our age. How can democracy, even just the imperfect democracy we have today, survive this fundamental attack of its core principles?

Over the past few years, and in particular since the Great Recession of 2008, the “progressive neoliberalism” detailed by Nancy Fraser—of the old center, with its liberal rhetoric, technocratic approach, and increasingly empty promises—has rapidly been losing ground. While the left, at least for the most part, has not been able to rise to the occasion, the authoritarian right most certainly has. While the left keeps wondering whether there might be a window of opportunity, the right has decidedly jumped right through it.

As we write these words, the institutions and procedures of democratic governance are being actively undermined, or even removed, by far-right governments. Just take a look at what Trump, Orbán, Erdoğan, and the like are doing: Government accountability, an independent judiciary, freedom of the press, and the right to collective bargaining are all under heavy attack and increasingly looking like ghosts from the past. In other words, the radical right is increasing its attacks on the very essence of democracy, while existing democratic institutions and practices are less and less able to mobilize people for its defense. And that’s why this authoritarian threat is so immediate, and so dangerous.

Neoliberal Economics and Nationalist Identity Politics: A Marriage of Convenience

While neoliberalism, including its “progressive” variant, has failed the people, many if not most of these same people don’t place the blame on it. Rather, the right has largely succeeded in scapegoating minorities, immigrants, liberals, feminists, leftists, or “the elite” (not corporations, of course, but rather academia and showbiz) for the deteriorating living standards and working conditions that are a direct outcome of neoliberal policies.

This twist—substituting economic issues with cultural ones—has worked well for the radical right. The fact that cultural dissatisfaction demands very different policy solutions than economic or social malaise is a main reason for the growing appeal of the far right to the economically powerful. For as long as

dissatisfaction and outright anger may be directed at the weak instead of the strong, it will remain a useful tool to both control unrest and push through policies that further benefit the rich at the expense of the poor and middle classes. Just take a look at Trump's corporate tax cuts.

In general, many among the economic elite (outside the export-oriented industries) seem to be warming up to this marriage of convenience between neoliberal economics and nationalist identity politics espoused by the radical right. This "nationalist turn" is increasingly shaping the discourse in broader society, as well as more specifically among economic elites. The increasing support from the economically powerful further emboldens the radical right and contributes to its success.

The Ascendancy of the Radical Right Across Europe

The political situation in Europe serves as a good case in point of this wider phenomenon. In recent years, right-wing populist parties have grown in strength in nearly all the countries on the continent. In France, National Front leader Marine Le Pen outpaced traditional center-left and center-right parties in the presidential elections of 2017, reaching the second and final election round, where she received about a third of the votes cast. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Party of Freedom (PVV) came in second place in the national election of the same year. Meanwhile, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) shifted from being primarily neoliberal in focus to becoming an outspoken anti-immigrant populist party, receiving 12.6 percent of the votes in the September 2017 federal election and becoming the first far-right party in German parliament since World War II. This continental shift to the right also includes Italy, where the League scored a major success in the 2018 federal election, and Switzerland, where almost 30 percent voted for the Swiss People's Party (SVP).

It is important to note, however, that the radical right is not confined to populist party politics. It rather encompasses everything to the right of the old center-right, which in most countries continues to erode, as do the social democratic parties of the center-left. On the other end of the far-right spectrum, openly fascist organizations like Greece's Golden Dawn, and even outright terrorists—such as Anders Breivik in Norway, or the National Socialist Underground (NSU) in Germany—have increasingly become a serious threat.

There is a certain amount of overlap on both ends of the populist sphere. For example, many members of the populist right, such as Alexander Gauland of the AfD, used to be politicians of center-right parties, and Breivik was once a member of the populist Progress Party. However, the populist right is clearly trying to position itself between the old center-right and the openly fascist, extreme right. To this end, they rage against immigrants and particularly Muslims, criticize globalization and “cosmopolitanism,” and blame liberalism, feminism, and socialism for everything they feel went wrong. In addition, their nationalism places them in fundamental opposition to the European Union. This is the glue that holds together this emerging populist-right pole.

Beyond these points of general agreement, there are many differences, due either to national specifics and path dependency, or to degrees of radicalism. While most are staunchly anti-Muslim, a few, such as Hungary’s Jobbik and even Fidesz, are also anti-Semitic. While some are openly neoliberal, e.g., the Swiss SVP, others criticize many aspects of neoliberalism, for instance the French National Front or the Danish People’s Party. Some are socially liberal, such as the Dutch PVV, while others, including the Polish Law and Justice party (PiS), are socially reactionary. This means that even if the underlying reasons for the growth of the populist right may be similar, individual parties may differ fundamentally in terms of ideologies, constituencies, and policies.

The Far Right in Government: Six Cases From Across Europe

The rise of this populist right is, no doubt, an issue to be reckoned with. Once the far right is in government, things get deadly serious. With this book, we want to take a closer look at what the far right has done in those countries in Europe in which it has either taken over or become part of national governments. How did they manage to get there? What do their constituencies look like? And once in power, what policies have they enacted? We hope these analyses can provide us with insights to help fight the rise of the far right, in Europe and elsewhere.

Kristóf Szombati opens our collection with a scholarly examination of Viktor Orbán’s authoritarian regime in Hungary. Since their landslide victory in 2010, Orbán and his Fidesz party have worked hard to subvert liberal democratic values. They have re-written the country’s constitution, removed checks on the

power of the executive branch, and undermined the independence of the judiciary. Together with the radical nationalist “Movement for a Better Hungary,” or Jobbik, Orbán has portrayed the country's liberals as economically insulated and culturally deracinated, sitting pretty in Budapest and Brussels while the country's “real” citizens suffer from unfettered globalization and constant threats of immigrant invasions. Szombati concludes his contribution on a somber note, predicting that after Orbán's recent re-election this form of authoritarian populism will retain its appeal in Hungary for as long as the promise of socio-economic transformation remains a distant prospect throughout the country's semi-peripheries.

Bartosz M. Rydliński takes up where Szombati left off, appropriately, since Poland's President Jarosław Kaczyński has spoken explicitly about his desire to construct a “Budapest in Warsaw.” While Kaczyński's Law and Justice party (PiS) does not describe itself in terms of far-right ideology, it is openly anti-refugee and explicitly racist, and emerges from what Rydliński describes as an alliance of nationalism and neo-fascism. Indeed, the situation in Poland echoes the one in Hungary, also in terms of its illiberalism and its populist appeal to a disproportionately poorer and rural electorate. The fact that this politics has been married to policies that PiS sells as counter to neoliberalism is something the social democratic left should take worrying note of. As Rydliński concludes, the only real answer to this political twist is socialism or death.

In Turkey, right-wing populism takes on a particular neoliberal twist. As Pinar Çakıroğlu shows, traditional political fault lines in the country have separated conservative religious groups with anti-establishment sentiments from modernist, secular reformers who belong to the culturally liberal ruling elite. Out of this tension emerged an ideological synthesis between Turkish nationalism and Islamist rhetoric that appealed to lower-class voters in economically deprived and religiously conservative provincial areas, thus creating fertile ground for the emergence of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). What is new about the AKP's “new Turkey,” Çakıroğlu argues, is that this particular brand of right-wing populism combines cultural conservatism with economic liberalism in ways that have pushed the country over the edge into becoming a politically authoritarian regime.

Unlike in Turkey, far-right sentiments in Denmark are usually considered part of a “subculture” rather than of a long-established discourse. In recent years, however, right-wing rhetoric has become increasingly acceptable in Danish politics, even when it is portrayed as a “pragmatic” choice rather than an ideological

commitment. Inger Johansen cites the Danish People's Party (DF) as a prime example for a kind of "far-right pragmatism" that remains at a distance from both right-wing extremism and economic neoliberalism. Although the DF often acts like a party of the far right—spouting anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and EU-skeptical rhetoric—Johansen demonstrates how the DF is able to present itself as a mainstream political force. With a political agenda that foregrounds conservative nationalism and the defense of the welfare state, the DF does not only attract disaffected voters from both the right and the left. Its broad base of support has also allowed the party to move the entire political spectrum in Denmark to the right.

Next up, Asbjørn Wahl takes us to Norway, a place where we're not accustomed to thinking about the far right in government, to discuss "Right-Wing Populism, Nordic Style." He describes a Progress Party that, now in its second term in government, skillfully maneuvers between populist rhetoric and neoliberal realism in order to stay in power. Slightly at odds with some of our other cases, Wahl tells us that the country's ruling party has not so much promoted racism in the traditional biological sense, but rather spoken of a heterogeneity of cultures and the right of a people to its identity, thus locating immigration as a universal threat responsible for many of the ills of Norwegian society. In doing this, it has created and come to dominate a "new axis of conflict," centered on values and identity as opposed to redistribution and economic fairness. Wahl closes by challenging the left to take up the fight to reestablish an axis of conflict based once again around class solidarity.

Finally, the concluding piece by Sebastian Reinfeldt focuses on Austria, where—following a coalition between Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in the early 2000s—another right-wing government formed in late 2017. Since the ÖVP's sharp turn to the right under its young leader Sebastian Kurz, the government now consists of two parties whose recent electoral successes are tied to their far-right populist agenda. Their appeal is particularly strong among the traditional mainstream of Austrian society—the lower middle class, comprised of medium-income groups such as white-collar workers or civil servants. This means that the FPÖ is not a "proletarian party" or a party of the lower classes. Instead, it harnesses the fears and anxieties of social groups faced with the risk of downward mobility and economic precariousness. Reinfeldt's point is significant if we want to understand and confront right-wing populism: While the appeal of the far right might lie in its rhetorical ruses against immigrants, elites, and politicians, it is the deep satisfaction caused

by the crisis of capitalism that makes people susceptible to this rhetoric in the first place.

We hope that the unique focus of this book—the far right in government—will prove to be a valuable contribution to the body of literature on the far right, and will also play a role in our shared fight for democracy. For, to fight this trend, we absolutely must understand what the far right has done to make such headway in recent years. In many places, including those discussed in this book, these gains have included taking part in or even taking over national governments, making it possible for them to implement a terrible agenda of hurting the weak and the poor. As of this writing, the momentum is on their side.

Clearly, if we want to beat the far right, we need to reexamine our counter-strategies. And make no mistake, we are convinced that we can turn things around if we come together in forming a broad united front. But if we want to win, the democratic left needs to fight both: neoliberalism and the authoritarian attacks on what's left of democracy. Onward! ■

HUNGARY

Viktor Orbán's Authoritarian Regime

KRISTÓF SZOMBATI

After Viktor Orbán's landslide victory in the 2010 Hungarian elections, the leader of the national-conservative Fidesz party made clear that his intention was to break the mold of liberal democratic rule. Under his guidance, Fidesz set out on a path of unilaterally re-writing the country's Constitution, removing independent checks on the power of the executive, and undermining the independence of the judiciary. Orbán also initiated the move from a neo-liberal toward an interventionist type of governance that works to the benefit of the national bourgeoisie. While these changes were criticized by Hungary's Western European allies and international financiers, they met with the approval of large segments of the electorate, firmly lodging Orbán in the position of Prime Minister. Political forecasts indicate that Fidesz is going to emerge as the victor of the spring 2018 elections.

The collapse of the previous left-liberal government (2002-2010), which had been elected on a program of "welfarist regime change," was propelled by its inability to rectify the high costs of the transition to capitalism by raising wages and pensions. Faced with a sharp spike in the public deficit to over 9% of the gross domestic product (GDP) as well as a slowdown of economic growth, the budget necessitated significant changes. These, however, were postponed until after the 2006 elections in order to guarantee the electoral victory of the Socialist Party.

After the parliamentary elections, excerpts from an exclusive speech by then Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány to Socialist MPs, which were leaked to the media, revealed that the government had deliberately withheld information from

the public. The Socialist Party had been “lying throughout the past one and a half or two years” about the country’s economic decline.

The Prime Minister’s speech exploded like a bombshell, triggering unprecedented street protests, which were brutally repressed by the police force. Together, these episodes left an indelible stain on the credibility of the Socialist Party. They also prepared the ground for a charismatic leader like Orbán to step in and capture the protest vote of an economically and politically disaffected electorate by mobilizing anti-establishment sentiments.

Of course, the free-fall of the government’s popularity could have been followed, as one of Hungary’s leading political scientists noted, “by a recovery, but the 2008 financial crisis that hit Hungary particularly hard made such developments all but impossible.” In October 2008, Hungary was the first European country to accept a guarantee package of twenty-five billion dollars from the IMF. In exchange, the IMF required the implementation of harsh austerity measures, which further dented the government’s popularity and placed Hungary on a downward economic spiral. In 2009, the GDP fell by 6.8%, and the public debt reached 80% of the GDP. The same year, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány was forced to resign and hand over power to a caretaker government.

Although the economic crisis contributed greatly to discrediting the Socialists and their liberal allies, anti-elitist popular sensibilities did not merely arise because of the left-liberal bloc’s renegeing on the program of “welfarist regime change.” “Globalization losers,” especially in rural areas, were frustrated with Hungary’s accession to the European single market. Faced with heightened economic competition and the decline of small-scale agricultural production, resentments toward members of the Roma minority grew, whom many perceived to be the beneficiaries of liberal democratic governance.

Although the liberalization of trade and the emancipation of ethnic minorities were institutionally independent of each other, both were intrinsically connected to the project of “Europeanization,” the hallmark of left-liberal politics in the post-socialist region. Left-liberal elites were increasingly considered to be out of touch with the problems of the “hard-working majority,” which called for a society founded on the principles of gainful work and merit. In the absence of leftist alternatives, many Hungarians felt they were losing ground to “scrounging and thievish Gypsies” while the country’s “unpatriotic elites” had abandoned them. These sentiments found expression in an anti-liberal, nationalist and racist idiom recycled from the archives of historical memory.

From Conservatism to National-Populism

The radical nationalist *Movement for a Better Hungary*, or Jobbik, first picked up on these burgeoning populist sensibilities. Founded in 1999, Jobbik struggled to gain traction until the events of 2006 when its leaders realized that the “Gypsy issue” could be used to build a base in the country’s economically depressed, multi-ethnic Northeastern regions. Relying on highly mediated mobilization campaigns carried out by paramilitary proxy organizations, the movement quickly became a credible and powerful force in Hungary’s Northeast.

During the crucial 2006-2010 period, the party’s ideological platform was intensely racist as well as extremist in its outright rejection of liberal democracy. Party leader Gábor Vona declared that he was not a democrat, and some of Jobbik’s paramilitary allies openly advocated for authoritarian rule as a means of overcoming the vicissitudes of democracy. The party’s leadership saw its task in recreating the elite while “the preferences of the median voter [were] often treated with indifference.” Although Jobbik’s leaders positioned the party as the natural voice of abandoned rural voters, using antagonistic language directed at the corrupt establishment, the party’s platform was initially much more elitist than populist.

If Jobbik was not born a populist party, neither was Fidesz, the *Hungarian Civic Alliance*. Launched as an anti-communist liberal initiative, the alliance’s ideological repertoire included a considerable dose of anti-populism. However, in the course of the 1994-1998 electoral cycle, party leader Viktor Orbán gradually transformed Fidesz into a right-wing party that positioned itself as the antipode to a “foreign-oriented” comprador elite.

What Orbán offered was a blend of nationalist and populist ideology. Characterizing “the elite” as both on the outside and on top, he managed to portray Hungary’s liberals as economically insulated and culturally deracinated. For Fidesz, left-liberals were essentially rootless cosmopolitans “concerned with the rights and welfare of distant others but indifferent to the struggles of proximate brothers and sisters.” Their elitist politics, which favored a world without borders, supposedly threatened “the bounded solidarities of nation and community.”

Despite its national-populist rhetoric, Fidesz firmly held on to classic conservative values and supported a project of middle-class formation. Having won the elections of 1998, party leaders openly professed their commitment to

“embourgeoisement” and set about transforming society to realize their vision of a “bourgeois Hungary.” While Orbán proved extremely deft in deploying nationalist and populist rhetoric, remnants of the working and lower-middle classes could not recognize themselves in Fidesz’s initiatives and ideology. This explains why, in 2002, these voters turned to the Socialists, who won the elections by a narrow margin.

After his defeat, Orbán began to reinforce Fidesz’s populist credentials. In 2002, he launched the *Civic Circles*, a loose network of grassroots citizens’ groups tasked with reinvigorating the crestfallen right from the bottom up and uniting its fragmented and warring factions. By offering new frames and practices for Hungarians to feel, think, and act as members of re-imagined communities—the nation, Christianity, and Europe—the *Civic Circles* played a major role in laying the foundations of right-wing hegemony. Jobbik’s would-be president Gábor Vona was initially a member of Orbán’s *Civic Circles* but left after concluding that Fidesz’s leader was not prepared to represent patriotic interests without hesitation and compromise. Nevertheless, by establishing links between previously unconnected actors (such as priests, professionals, pundits, and politicians), the circles helped rightist networks embed themselves into the social fabric.

Orbán’s next important move was to replace the master concept of the “bourgeois/citoyen” (*polgár*) with the concept of “the people” (*emberek*). He launched a number of campaigns that helped position Fidesz as the defender of powerless Hungarians against a sinister left-liberal elite bent on dispossessing the nation. While the strong resonance of its far-right platform in the country’s most depressed regions had allowed Jobbik to achieve an electoral breakthrough at the 2009 European parliamentary elections in the midst of an economic downturn and a growing distrust toward the left-liberal government, Fidesz’s frame resonated strongly with voters. The party’s flagship initiative in 2008, the launch of a “social referendum” aimed at the abolition of tuition fees in higher education and hospital fees, was a stunning success.

The referendum showed that Orbán had managed to dismantle the broad class coalition, which had elevated the Socialists to power. More importantly, it also foreshadowed the possibility of magnetizing disaffected working-class voters to the rightist camp. As Hungary’s sovereign debt crisis and the collapse of the Gyurcsány government guaranteed a historic defeat for the left-liberal coalition, Victor Orbán and Fidesz easily won the constitutional majority in the 2010 elections.

Orbán's Politics of Governmental Power

With his 2010 victory, Orbán immediately set out to realize his openly proclaimed goal of staying in power for the next twenty years. Under his leadership, Fidesz has laid the groundwork for a type of majoritarian rule that preserves a degree of political pluralism while at the same time centralizing political power.

Orbán's own preferred term for this type of governance—"illiberal democracy"—suggests that key democratic principles, such as free (although not entirely fair) elections, and fundamental political liberties (e.g., freedom of conscience, speech and assembly) are preserved. In reality, however, the party relies on a combination of policy regimes and political tactics that mesh together to create an image—although not an actual reality—of a cohesive, purposeful and omnipotent state:

1. an economic policy regime that relies on EU transfers to finance the projects of the “national bourgeoisie,” which is the regime's main beneficiary and plays a key role in the clientelistic networks that sustain Fidesz's power;
2. a “workfarist” social policy regime that rewards those in gainful employment and punishes “welfare-scroungers,” thereby entrenching Fidesz as the party of the “hard-working majority”;
3. a media regime that uses both public and private media to saturate the public sphere with governmental propaganda, which stifles critical voices and rational political debate;
4. an experimentation with corporatism in key state sectors (e.g., the public educational system) that have been drained of financial resources in the last seven years in order to stem out the roots of dissent;
5. a sustained effort to wear down and discredit critics through tactics of harassment, the orchestration of disparagement campaigns and the funding of pseudo-independent pro-governmental NGOs;
6. informal practices of intimidation targeting citizens who work for local municipalities or the state, or who enter into contractual relationships with the state (i.e., the threat to withdraw access to state-controlled resources in case of criticism, participation in oppositional activities etc.).

These pillars are essential to maintaining the cross-class coalition that catapulted the rightist power bloc into power. The Hungarian state does not have enough fiscal resources to foster both middle-class formation and the eradication of widespread poverty, and Fidesz knows that by choosing to concentrate on middle-class formation it could generate widespread social discontentment in the ranks of society. This is why its main vehicles for preserving its rule are to formally adhere to democratic principles, thus refraining from introducing overtly autocratic measures; to place the burden of class rule on the backs of the weakest social categories; to mask its privileging of the bourgeoisie by engaging in national-populist propaganda, which blames foreign-backed elites for the woes of the national community; and to incorporate some strategic elements of popular opinion into its initiatives.

Coinciding with the generalization of class conflict at a time of economic and political crisis, Fidesz's politics represents a fundamental shift in the modality of governmental power toward "authoritarian statism." Clearly located at the coercive rather than the consensual end of the spectrum, the rightist ruling bloc attempts to construct hegemony on the semi-periphery while leaving the outer forms of democratic class rule intact. Yet, authoritarian statism provides only a temporary solution. It keeps Hungary integrated in global (partially German-controlled) production chains by playing on the semi-periphery's "developmentalist illusions," but it does so in a different way than the previous left-liberal elite had envisioned it. Instead of emphasizing the need to liberate a backward society by dropping its retrograde cultural baggage and embracing Western values, it works through compensatory strategies that obscure the semi-periphery's subordination to the center and emphasize the superiority of Hungary's "work-based social model." The by-products and consequences of this coarser kind of class rule remain unresolved: weak growth, the persistence of deep social divisions, the prevalence of pessimism, anger and resentment, as well as a deep distrust of elites.

This indicates that Fidesz's politics of governmental power has three fundamental weaknesses. The first is its dependence on financial transfers from wealthier EU member states. Given Western Europe's decreasing appetite to finance the Eastern periphery and the increasing, although still fragile, momentum behind a "two-speed" European model, it is questionable whether Hungary (together with other countries such as Poland that do not want to take on the yoke of reinforced German-French tutelage) will have enough clout to maintain a relatively high level of financial transfers for "second-speed" countries. A lower

volume of transfers could be compensated with Russian and perhaps Chinese funding, but this would merely amount to exchanging one kind of dependence for another—one that is significantly riskier. Hungary also has a vested interest in maintaining the integrity of the European single market to allow for the Western migration of its surplus labor.

Second, although some commentators have raised the prospect of Hungary's departure from the EU after 2020, such a move would risk generating the kind of widespread social discontentment that the regime is bent on evading at all costs. The long-term problem of the "work-based social model," which provides Western European capital with low-cost production sites, is that it is difficult to see how, in the absence of sufficient fiscal capacities, it could compensate the future losers of robotization. While robotization presents a challenge to most European countries, its impact will be particularly detrimental to countries where industrial production remains a key pillar of the economy, such as Hungary and other countries in the Visegrád group.

The regime's third soft spot is the leader himself. No one in Fidesz has the kind of charisma, credibility or stature that Orbán does. Were he to be forced into early retirement, it is questionable whether his party could safeguard its unity and whether the regime could survive. This, however, is a distant prospect given Orbán's vitality, composure and, not least, his relatively young age.

The State of the Political Opposition

The electoral regime that Fidesz has created rewards the strongest party or electoral bloc. As a result, Fidesz was able to retain a parliamentary majority by clinging on to 2-2.5 million voters, that is, approximately 30% of the electorate. What makes this possible is the polarization of the opposition. Jobbik commands approximately one million voters, and all of the other parties (in order of popularity: the Socialist Party, the green LMP party, Ferenc Gyurcsány's social-liberal Democratic Coalition, and the liberal Together and Momentum parties) together command a bit less than 1.5 million voters. The political program of the far-right fundamentally differs from the center-left blocs', and the anti-fascist dimension of left-liberal ideology continues to act—although with decreasing effectiveness—as a bulwark against the migration of its supporters to the far-right.

This antagonism gives Fidesz the opportunity to impose itself on the overwhelming majority of individual districts, which are distributed on the basis

of a first-past-the-post system and which make up half of the parliamentary mandates. Since the remaining mandates are distributed on a more-or-less proportional basis, the ruling party enjoys an advantage over its rivals for as long as a) it remains the largest force; b) the two opposition blocs remain roughly equal in size; and c) opposition voters do not engage in tactical voting to support the strongest opposition candidate in individual districts. While a) and b) do not appear to be at risk at the moment, there have been local precedents for voter migration from both Jobbik to the center-left and in the other direction too. Yet, there has thus far been no indication of a pending large-scale migration of voters between the two blocs.

Adding up the supporters of the three voting blocs, approximately three million voters remain unaccounted for, that is, slightly less than 40 per cent of the electorate. We have good reasons to believe that these voters will not participate in the next election. Some of them see politics as a dirty game that is better left to others; others have simply stopped believing in the possibility of a better future and see all parties as promising more of the same; and many simply do not have the time and resources to decode the politicking and therefore prefer to stay away from the game.

If we look at Hungarian politics through their eyes, the problem of the political opposition emerges as an inability to overcome voter apathy. There are many reasons for this, including a problem of credibility that plagues both Jobbik and the center-left's "old guard" (the Socialist Party and the Democratic Coalition); a lack of resources afflicting the "new guard" (LMP, Together, Momentum); Fidesz's near total control of the media space; and the negative perception of bickering and disunity in the citizenry.

A short note on Jobbik: In the current populist conjuncture, it is Jobbik, the only opposition party with a powerful grassroots presence outside the capital city, that appears best positioned to replace Fidesz at the helm of power on the mid-run. After the party's entry into parliament in 2010, its leaders did their best to detoxify Jobbik by getting rid of its most racist and extremist representatives and by rebranding the party as an ultra-nationalist populist force. While this strategy allowed Jobbik to break out of its Northeastern bastions and establish a presence in the rest of the country, two serious hurdles to its further rise remain. The first is the skepticism of both current and former left-wing voters toward the genuineness of the party's de-radicalization. The second is the fact that Jobbik has found itself consistently outflanked on the right by Fidesz ever since the latter came to power. The ruling party has firmly established control over the

classic agendas of the European far-right: nationalism, anti-immigration and Euro-skepticism. Taken together, these factors will make it impossible for Jobbik to mount a serious challenge to Fidesz in 2018.

Blueprint for Ruling a Drained Semi-Periphery

Hungary is in many ways a paradigmatic case of why, at this particular political moment, counter-movements to “undemocratic liberalism” tend to take an authoritarian national-populist direction in Europe. Those who have lost out on or feel threatened by the kind of “progressive neo-liberalism” that underpins the project of Europeanization (ardently backed by, among others, most of the social democratic parties) are prone to support movements that promise a return to the bounded solidarities of the national community. They seek protection from elitist projects such as the obligatory redistribution of refugees inside the EU, which ruling elites in the core validate by referring to the principles of solidarity and reciprocity.

Such talk, however, fails to convince the masses who have not benefited from EU monetary transfers or the opening of borders. While they often remain indifferent to the struggles of distant Others, these people are more than anything fearful of “open society.” Due to their negative experience with Europeanization, they demand the restoration of order and “natural” hierarchies. This explains their support for authoritarian experiments and their failure to defend democratic institutions, which they perceive to be distant and ineffective.

While this dynamic has swept the continent, it is Eastern Europe in particular that has witnessed governments adopt tactics that were pioneered by Fidesz in the course of the last seven years the party has spent in power. Amongst these, Poland’s Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Law and Justice (PiS) party, should be singled out. The PiS government, which has been in power since 2015, had adopted Fidesz’s anti-Brussels, anti-refugee and anti-liberal rhetoric. At the same time, it moved to curb the power of the judiciary and to shrink the space available for civic and political opposition.

Together, the Polish and Hungarian governments have the power to shield each other from critique formulated by the European Commission and to prevent the imposition of penalties and fines on their countries. No wonder then that parties and politicians in Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Croatia are increasingly prone to incorporating elements of Orbán’s tactics. For as

long as socio-economic transformation and modernization remains a distant prospect on the semi-periphery, authoritarian populism and statism are likely to retain their appeal. ■

POLAND

Nationalism and Neo-Fascism Under Jarosław Kaczyński

BARTOSZ M. RYDLIŃSKI

Like other right-wing parties in Europe, Poland's current ruling party, Law and Justice, does not describe itself in terms of far-right ideology. Unlike the nationalist conservative League of Polish Families, for example, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/PiS) was in favor of Poland's 2004 accession to the European Union, leading campaigns to actively support voter participation in the referendum. In the early phase of the party's existence, the PiS politicians, instead of using strong ideological slogans, also positioned themselves as guards of the rule of law, enemies of corruption, and representatives of the poorer part of Poland. The slogan, "a Poland of Solidarity," which was directed against the Polish liberals, secured victory for Lech Kaczyński in the presidential elections of 2005. From this moment onward, we can observe a slow but steady takeover of the language and political practice of the far right by the PiS.

The Polish experience with the far right needs to be understood in the context of a strong anticommunist trend in the country since 1989. At the beginning of the liberal shift, organizations that had been de-legalized in the Polish People's Republic regrouped. Many of them reference nationalist and fascist trends from pre-1939 in their names, symbolism, and political practice. The All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska) or the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny), for example, draw on the legacy of the pre-war nationalists with their anti-Semitic tendencies and hostile attitude toward left

organizations, such as the Polish Socialist Party, the Communist Party of Poland, the General Jewish Labor Bund, and the class-based trade unions. In the early years of the Polish democracy in the 1990s, many far right movements added to their ideological repertoire an oppositional stance to LGBTQ communities as well as to the Westernization process, including Poland's accession to the European Union on May 1, 2004.

Although extreme-right groups have always existed in the Polish parliamentary system, these parties were not usually openly anti-European. They might have supported a ban on abortion or sought to anchor Catholicism in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, but with the fast “march towards the West” even the most conservative nationalists did not openly voice anti-European or anti-NATO sentiments. They knew all too well that that this could thwart their future political plans.

The “Non-Far Right”

In this context, the 2001 entrance of the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin/LPR) into the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish parliament, with a result of 7.9%, shocked the public. Only three years later, in 2004, the LPR achieved a spectacular success in the elections for the European Parliament with a support of 15.9%, thus filling 10 of the 54 seats Poland occupied in the EP. In 2005, the LPR went into a governing coalition with the PiS, a move that resulted in a takeover of LPR voters by PiS-leader Jarosław Kaczyński and his party. These events were followed by the dropout of the LPR from the Polish parliament in 2007.

During its six years in the Polish parliament, the LPR promoted an openly nationalist, xenophobic, and anti-European atmosphere, expressing reluctance towards liberal social attitudes and an ostentatious attachment to the Catholic Church. The LPR should thus be considered a “far right” party in the strict sense, which is not the case for the other major parties of the political right in Poland, including the PiS. Despite their conservative and nationalist attitudes, these parties do not consider themselves part of Poland's extreme right, declaring their status as “non-far right.”

And yet, during the rule of the PiS (from 2005 to 2007 and again since 2015) the political playing field has been characterized by a “primacy of force.” Examples of the PiS's illiberal approach towards democracy include showcase arrests

of politicians involved in corruption scandals; voting in the Sejm without the participation of the opposition (which constitutes an open violation of the regulations of the Polish parliament); fines placed on politicians from competitive political parties for exceeding speaking time during plenary meetings; and not recognizing the rulings of the Constitutional Court.

This move away from the principles of liberal democracy is linked to the nationalist idea of a democratic state of law. In response to the claim by international organizations like the European Union and Council of Europe that Poland is currently undergoing a shift away from the rule of law, PiS politicians insist that these developments are grounded in the will of the nation, which is considered a sufficient enough legitimization to conduct reforms. What is more, the international concern regarding the state of democracy in Poland under the government of Beata Szydło was portrayed as an unacceptable interference in internal issues.

The Alliance of Nationalism and Neo-Fascism

The policy of the PiS government is openly anti-refugee. Just like the other countries of the Visegrád Group—the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia—Poland rejected the EU quota for refugees from North Africa and the Middle East, arguing that immigration threatened the national security of Polish citizens. In 2015, Jarosław Kaczyński of the PiS announced that there are “already signs of emergence of diseases that are highly dangerous and have not been seen in Europe for a long time: cholera on the Greek islands, dysentery in Vienna. There is also talk about other, even more severe diseases.”

By comparing people who immigrate to Europe to the plague, the leader of the PiS clearly employs xenophobic and racist stereotypes. In another instance, he roared from the podium of the parliament that Muslims were introducing their own, non-democratic order in European countries. His point of reference was Sweden where, so he claimed, there existed 54 zones of Sharia law in which the Swedish government exerted zero control. He also claimed that Swedish female students were afraid of wearing short skirt due to the possibility of attacks from Muslim men, and that Muslims were taking over churches across Italy.

This kind of rhetoric, which portrays all “others” as an existential threat to Poland and Polish identity, indicates the extent to which Islamophobia and

xenophobia are essential ideological elements in the political program of Poland's ruling party. What is significant here is how much the ideological views of the PiS resemble that of extreme nationalist and neo-fascist movements, such as the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny), National Revival of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski), the National Movement (Ruch Narodowy), and the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska). These groups organized the annual Independence March in Warsaw on November 11th. Aside from the march's main slogans—including “Poland, the bastion of Europe!”—which called for the defense of Poland's nationalist-Catholic identity, others propagated even more radical views, like those of Jarosław Kaczyński. In this year's march, for example, nationalists chanted aggressively, “Whole of Poland sings with us: f*** off with the refugees,” “Not red, not rainbow, but national Poland,” “One nation across the borders,” “Clean blood,” and “Europe will Be white.”

While we may ponder the extent to which these neo-fascist slogans draw directly on the political narrative of Jarosław Kaczyński—that is, to what extent the PiS's rhetoric serves the far-right movement not only as an inspiration but also as a guarantee of impunity—a more pressing concern is the fact that from year to year the language of the nationalist movements is taking on a more radicalized tone. Earlier this year, a speaker for the All-Polish Youth, and one of the organizers of the sixty-thousand strong Independence March, publicly stated that “the racial factor, the ethnic factor is very important, although we are not racists [...] We are racial separatists [...] Ethnicity should not be mixed [...] We regard the nation as a whole [and] we think that three factors are of importance—the cultural and religious factor, the political factor, and the ethnic factor. We also think, that there should be a two-sided identification and therefore we think that a black person is not a Pole.” This increasing radicalization in both political language and practice, in a Central European country and a member state of the European Union, cannot be detached from the overall political situation in Poland.

The Polish Economy and the PiS

The supremacy of national identity, the shift toward illiberal democracy, and the political successes of the nationalist-Catholic right in Poland cannot be separated from economic issues. Indeed, I suggest that the negative effects of the transformation in Poland—that is, the neoliberal economic policy implemented

by the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska/PO) and the Polish Peasant's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe/PSL), as well as uncontrolled globalization—had a dramatic impact on voting patterns, guaranteeing the PiS's victory in both the presidential and the parliamentary elections of 2015.

Considering the structure of the Polish electorate, it becomes clear that the PiS's supporters are overrepresented in the poorer parts of the country, also called "Poland B." The rural areas as well as small-to-medium cities in the eastern and southern parts of Poland constitute a reservoir of votes that are reliably cast for the Polish right. These are also the areas that paid the highest price in the post-1989 economic transformation of the country. After having voted for the post-communist left, these regions witnessed the fall of heavy industry and collective farms; in response, the disaffected populace transferred its votes to the populist right under the flag of the Law and Justice Party.

An additional element contributing to the political successes of the PiS was the negative impact that the neoliberal policy of the government of Donald Tusk and Ewa Kopacz had on the country. The economic approach of the former center-right government, which had disastrous economic consequences for many Polish voters, included reforms such as raising the retirement age to 67 and equalizing it for men and women; the ongoing commercialization of the health care sector and the higher education system; the chronic underfunding of social policy; scandalously low benefits for people with disabilities and their caregivers; and a focus on the urban development of big cities to the exclusion of smaller to medium-sized cities.

These economic developments, which unfolded during the eight-year governance of the market-oriented, liberal Civic Platform, have fed directly into the political message of the PiS, which is oriented toward the regional level and has a strong class component. In addition, in the face of uncontrolled globalization, the Law and Justice Party made a strong case for advocating for sustainable development as well as for strengthening the poorer regions of Poland. The main points of the PiS's political program, which called for a lowering of the retirement age, the closing of loopholes in the tax system, limiting lawlessness of foreign and Polish capital, and the introduction of financial benefits for families with two or more children, were realized as soon as the PiS gained power. The commitment of the party to move away from the neoliberal paradigm, which had been ruling Poland since 1989, is unquestionably the main reason for the continuous support of the PiS majority government.

Budapest in Warsaw

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I am fully convinced that the day will come when we will succeed, and we will have Budapest in Warsaw.” One year after Viktor Orbán took the Hungarian government, Jarosław Kaczyński, then chairman of the PiS, addressed the electorate of his party. The PiS had just lost the parliamentary elections of 2011.

Four years later, Kaczyński's statement sounds almost prophetic. Letting the example of the Hungarian experience guide its political practice, the Polish right started mechanically copying the “reforms” of the government of Victor Orbán. This, as well as frequent meetings between politicians from Hungary and Poland, indicates the existence of a shared international right-wing strategy concerning both internal and foreign policy. Victor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński spearhead anti-refugee policies within the European Union, and both of them can count on the support of the other Visegrád Group countries when it comes to fighting EU refugee quotas.

Many Polish parties now express attitudes similar to those of the right-wing populist Fidesz Party, including the refusal of liberal democracy, skepticism towards the political-economic establishment, and the belief in their own infallibility. In both countries, the common threads of illiberalism revolve around the curtailment of basic democratic rights, such as the independence of the judicial system, the freedom of the public media, and the separation of powers. In addition, almost all state offices are now staffed with party loyalists.

It is noteworthy that, whereas the takeover of the Constitutional Court in Hungary only took place after Fidesz had gained the constitutional majority, Poland's PiS operates outside the legal framework of the Constitutional Court altogether. Pushing the reform of the political system without having a constitutional majority, the party has managed to paralyze the work of the Constitutional Court in Poland. Actively disrespecting the rulings of the court, the PiS has effectively created legal dualism: The institution was taken over by “double judges” elected by the current parliamentary majority. This situation may lead the next government to declare the various legal acts put in place by the PiS as unconstitutional as soon as the party loses its power.

The Polish-Hungarian “illiberal friendship” also finds expression through the right-wing approach to public media in both countries. Jarosław Kaczyński and Victor Orbán have turned public television, radio, and the press agencies into propaganda machines, which disseminate and amplify the messages of

the authorities. The Hungarian and Polish state information services often broadcast topics in similarly intensified and exaggerated ways. On October 27 and 29, 2017, for example, both countries reported almost identical material on an alleged “network of George Soros,” which supposedly finances the European Union. Both programs argued that the American financier, billionaire, and philanthropist of Jewish-Hungarian origin uses his funds to influence the decisions of the EU organs in order to promote an “open society.” They positioned Soros against the sovereign governments of Poland and Hungary, which cannot accept the unconditional “dictatorship of Brussels.”

The Hungarian move toward filling all positions in public administration with party loyalists also proved to be an important inspiration for the Polish right. While this situation was not necessarily new in Poland—the PiS’s predecessors, the Civic Platform and the Polish Peasants Party, had done exactly the same when they were in power—the current administration operates with a stronger ideological agenda. The party uses ministries and other government institutions, such as the state treasury and diplomatic posts, to raise their own state-party cadres. These bureaucrats are loyal not only for ideological reasons, but also for pragmatic ones: Always confronted with the fear of losing their jobs, they are likely supporters of the party in the upcoming elections.

While the government of Donald Tusk and Ewa Kopacz was not able to create networks of loyal party functionaries, it was not for lack of trying. Rather, many party functionaries simply left for international organizations or the business sector as soon as they realized that the political fall of their party was impending. In contrast, the current autocratic right has brutally taken over the Polish state in the manner of the principle, “We are Poland.” Given that this transformation has surely caused a dwindling sense of solidarity among civil servants, and more specifically a lack of identification with the non-partisan aspects of their work as well as a decreased devotion to the idea of the state itself, rebuilding the non-party character of the state administration will take years.

Non-Neoliberal Policy

The negative effects of Poland’s transformation—three major economic crises in the last 28 years and the progress of neoliberal globalization—contributed to the disaffection of the majority of voters in 2015. The current right-wing government could reap a massive electoral success as a result. Now, in the middle

of its term of office, the party leadership prides itself on having moved away from neoliberal social as well as economic policy and to have introduced social welfare programs, such as Program 500 Plus (PLN 500), which provides financial support to families with two or more children, or PLN 13/h, a newly-introduced hourly minimum wage.

In opposition to the previous neoliberal hegemony, the PiS uses this and other programmatic anti-neoliberal reforms as proof that “another politics is possible.” The ruling party makes the point that the Polish economy has not collapsed after the introduction of this program—despite warnings to the contrary by “independent” experts. There are indeed positive effects of programs such as PLN 500, as we can witness improved living conditions of large families, who often live outside of big cities, as well as an increase in domestic consumption. In addition, women receiving additional child support now have the freedom to refuse to work for scandalously low wages, which helps to make employers understand that workers are not simply victims of their economic dictatorship.

The successes of the government reforms pushed by PiS also serve to prove wrong a number of predictions by economic experts, such as the stubbornly repeated thesis that an increase of the minimum wage and the introduction of PLN 13/h would result in a rise in unemployment. However, the unemployment rate in Poland remains around 6.8% according to the latest data from 2017. This shows that the voters, who suffered from the effects of liberalization, the commercialization of public services, and the weakening of labor vis-à-vis capital, did not migrate to the PiS because they consciously opposed the neoliberal policy of previous governments. Rather, they were attracted to the PiS because they actively embraced its social and economic policy, which is based in an openly nationalist agenda.

Socialism or Death

The question of how to take away power from the Polish right, which is dangerously close to actual extremist right-wing movements, does not only concern Poland's other political parties. It is a crucial issue when it comes to preserving the integrity of Polish civil society, and it has an important effect on international public opinion as well. This is particularly important, as PiS has officially and repeatedly refused to let itself be called a radical or Eurosceptic party. As is common of a right-wing populist party, the current Polish government is also

masking the ways in which it upholds a number of neoliberal policies, which not only support the unfair social order in Poland but also constitute a source of success of more extreme groups, both from an economic and a political perspective.

One important aspect in fighting the Polish right is to seek a new basis for a broad vision of a social Poland within a social Europe. This is a key point in the crucial process of completing the Europeanization process of Poland and, with it, the political and economic emancipation of Polish society. Such a Poland can be an equal partner among other EU members, but it can get there only if its citizens begin to oppose the far right now—by choosing social justice, real democracy, and peace over nationalism and fascism. Only a project of European integration, based on the principles of social justice, solidarity between states, and the renunciation of nationalism in international relations, constitutes a promise for a better future.

At the same time, it is safe to say that the strengthening of existing liberal movements and institutions, which seek to restore the free market, will not be enough to guarantee that we do not witness a takeover of power by fascist groups in the future. In fact, as I would argue, neoliberalism and right-wing populism are two sides of the same coin. In response, the only actual chance we have for building an egalitarian, progressive, and European policy must be found on the left. In Poland, the left is constituted of the big social democratic parties—the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej/SLD) and the Together Party (Razem)—as well as the trade unions, the strongest force of which is the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych/OPZZ). In order to succeed politically, this left can no longer concern itself with infighting over the various shades of red.

This left must cooperate in pointing out the shortcomings of the PiS government and the destructive effects of its nationalist policy. The PiS's failure to implement changes in the tax system (Poland currently has only two income tax rates—18% and 32%), its support for large businesses, and its refusal to invest in social services (such as kindergartens or social housing)—to name just a few examples—all indicate that the current governing practice of the party of Jarosław Kaczyński is far from a politics for the people. In addition, the PiS has cut back aggressively on health care for current and future pensioners, who feel especially vulnerable under the conditions of modern capitalism.

The Polish progressive movements should make these failures the focus of any political attacks against the PiS government. Only by combining various interests—those of the younger and older generations of precarious workers and

trade unionists, of inhabitants of small cities and villages, as well as of politically conscious citizens from bigger cities—will the left be able to take over in Poland.

Socialism or death? I do believe that this will ultimately be the choice. But first we need a broad social-democratic movement, based in the labor movements and a renewed commitment to internationalism, that does the hard work of putting forward an alternative socio-economic model of development. This proposal must have the teeth to fight unfettered neoliberalism and the socio-economic inequality it creates, and to reach the subsoil created by this system and required for the growth of antidemocratic and far-right forces. By doing this, we might hope to get to the roots of the current far-right threat, pull these roots out, and plant the seeds for a better, more just future. ■

TURKEY

How a “New Turkey” Emerged Under Recep Erdoğan

PINAR ÇAKIROĞLU-BOURNOUS

The rise of the far right in Europe in recent years has caused much debate, some consternation, and a fair amount of concern especially among progressives. For the past three decades, most countries in Europe have had relatively stable democracies, but the growing number of right-wing parties in parliaments seems to suggest that democratic governance is being hollowed out from within.

In Turkey, in contrast, the rise of a far-right party to government is less of an exception given that the far-right ideology, even when not represented in government, had always been significant in society. However, while the electoral victory of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/AKP) did not exactly come as a surprise, it is nevertheless unsettling to witness how the crudest form of a far-right ideology has become hegemonic in Turkey. Over the last 15 years, the rule of the AKP has suspended all the checks and balances of the founding principles of the Republic of Turkey as well as many fundamentals of democratic governance. For the progressive camp in Turkey, this was a perplexing situation as a system long perceived unbreakable now came under severe attack.

The emergence of the AKP as a catchall party of the right wing in Turkey and the conditions that gave rise to it need careful analysis. This also means reassessing the nature of AKP's power after the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, which resulted in the government's announcement of a state of emergency. In certain

ways, these recent political developments may highlight how the power of the AKP, which has a broad appeal to different classes and sections of society, is truly hegemonic.

Right-Wing Parties in Turkish History

One of the central discourses that underwrite AKP's stance is the distinction drawn between "Westernizing elites" versus the "suppressed masses." This rhetoric, which has been accentuated and deepened by the AKP, is not new but goes back to the end of the Ottoman Empire. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ruler cadres of the Ottoman Empire, many of which came from military backgrounds, pushed for Westernization and modernization. In order to keep up with Western Europe, they began to introduce a series of reforms in the economic, technological, political, and social spheres.

These reform attempts did not go unchallenged by the long-established factions among the ruling elites. The *ulema* in particular—that is, the community of Islamic clerics who were part of the Ottoman elite class and state bureaucracy, and their extensions in the society in the form of religious orders and brotherhoods—resisted the push for modernization. Not only were the *ulema* afraid of losing their privileged position under a new, reformed system, but they also considered the reforms to be anti-Islamic, an invention of the infidel and a betrayal of tradition. Ever since, the differences between those who support Westernization and modernization and those who oppose it have been at the forefront of Turkish politics. Indeed, the anti-West and anti-elites rhetoric of the AKP bears striking resemblance with this late Ottoman discourse.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his friends founded the new republic. Atatürk, who had a military background, was among the reformers of the previous era, who had taken radical steps against the old *ulema* camp. As part of their reform, they ended the Caliphate, closed down all religious schools (*medreses*) and brotherhoods (*tarikats*), substituted the Latin alphabet for the Arabic script, and replaced the office of the Şeyh ül-İslam (the head of Sunni religious establishment and one of the highest-ranked state officials) with a "Presidency of Religious Affairs" attached to the Prime Minister's office.

The modernist, secular ideology of the Turkish Republic has been criticised widely on the grounds that it adopted top-down methods of forcing a

prescribed nationalism onto the population. A famous analysis described that while the political center of the country with its ruling elite of state bureaucrats, army members, urban professionals, and the new bourgeoisie were faithfully attached to the principles of Kemalism, the periphery, which consisted of the rural masses, held on to traditional values and was highly suspicious of modernisation. In 1950, when the first elections with a multi-party regime were held, the Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti/DP), the only opposition party to the founders' Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi/CHP), won a landslide victory. Their liberal centre-right agenda was directed against the CHP, which had been ruling the country since its foundation in 1923 as a single-party regime. The DP's anti-establishment stance—characterized by its “attachment to private enterprise, majoritarian democracy with a tinge of cultural conservatism, clientelist populism and a western-oriented foreign policy”—and its voter profile, which was mainly composed of an electorate from provincial cities and rural areas, set the basis for the right-wing tradition in Turkish politics.

The AKP's Emergence and Performance

As this indicates, although the AKP was not founded until 2001, the right-wing politics it stands for has a longer history. In this sense, the AKP phenomenon was also crucially shaped by the neoliberal transformation in Turkey, which was put on track by the military regime of 1980. If the goal was to “eliminate any potential threats to the consolidation of the market-orientated reform process,” the new ideological framework behind it was a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis.” Devised by the military junta, this combination of right-wing nationalism and Islam has shaped the political environment in Turkey ever since. Considered a firm barrier against potential sources of instability as well as against radicalized leftist ideology, it was this very framework that encouraged the appearance of liberal-right or center-right parties on the political scene. The Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi/ANAP) government of Turgut Özal, for example, which later became one of the main ideological influences of the AKP, pioneered the neoliberal restructuring of the country between 1983 and 1989. Islamist politics, such as the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi/RP hereafter) of Necmettin Erbakan, but also “informal” Islamic communities or brotherhoods, also strengthened in this period. This is the ideological heritage upon which the AKP is built.

In its early period, the cadres of the AKP rejected the party's direct lineage with the Islamist resurgence and preferred it to be perceived as a "conservative democratic" party. Since the AKP emerged in part from a "modernist" faction of the RP that had a more liberal outlook and leaned towards the center-right, one of the initial incisive moves of the AKP was to distance itself from the narrow focus of the Islamist parties, which were under attack by the secular establishment. Instead, the AKP attempted to paint a more inclusive picture of itself, emphasizing its commitment to liberal values such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, pluralism and diversity, economic development, and free-market economy. Within a year of its founding in 2001, when Turkey was in dire need of stability after having undergone several political crises as well as the economic crises of 1994, 2000, and 2001, the AKP won its first election with an absolute majority.

After its electoral victory of 2001, the AKP underwent a "golden age" characterized by high and inclusive growth, significant reforms on democratization, a "zero problems with the neighbours" foreign policy approach, and increasing regional as well as international effectiveness. Beginning in 2007, however, and lasting until 2011, the party experienced a phase of "relative stagnation," which is linked to the global economic crisis. Even though Turkey's experience of the crisis was less dramatic in comparison to the previous crises of 1994, 2000, and 2001, the country's economic performance was significantly less impressive now than it had been in the previous era. In addition, the government's successes in democratization were mixed while its foreign policy, now with a focus on the Middle East, became more assertive.

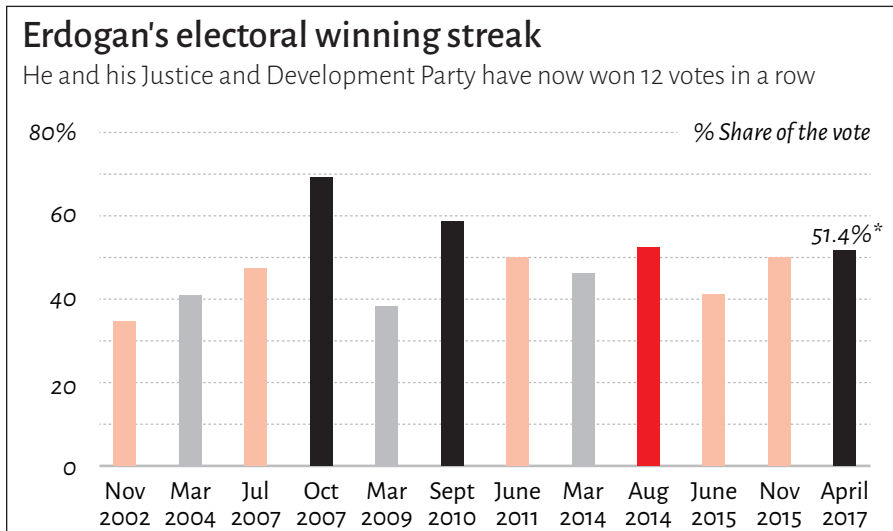
Since 2011, a "real decline" in the party's successes has been noticeable in all of the above-mentioned spheres that lasted until the coup attempt of 2016. The country's economic performance has reached a very risky, unsustainable, and fragile point. Efforts toward democratization have come to a halt while authoritarianism has been on the rise. Finally, the government's highly ambitious foreign policy has created serious security risks as well as destabilized relations with Turkey's neighbours and the international community.

Against this backdrop, it becomes clear that AKP's rise to power was conditioned on both economic and political instability. At a time when society was tired of economic and political crises and was looking for change, the AKP emerged with the promise of economic development and socio-political stability. Drawing on both the right-wing and Islamist political tradition, the party was able to cater to a broad electorate by serving as a catchall right-wing populist party—culturally conservative, politically democratic, and economically liberal.

That this strategy was immediately effective was proven by the fact that the representatives of the old political system—the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti/DSP), the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi/MHP), and the Motherland Party—were practically wiped out. To this day, the AKP uses its past successes as a scare tactic, threatening voters that chaos will ensue in the country once again if the AKP were to lose.

The Political Economy of the AKP

Although the AKP's performance went from a “golden age” and “relative stagnation” to a “real decline,” the party continued to secure electoral wins (see graph). From the analysis above, it is obvious that the economic performance has been very determinant in AKP's success. In fact, a closer analysis reveals that the decline of the country's economy went hand in hand with democratization, which means that while the economic performance began to recede (for whatever



Source: YSK (Supreme Election Council) / *99.5% votes counted

Graph: In the graph, orange columns represent legislative elections while grey columns represent local elections and black columns represent referendums. The red column of August 2014 represents Turkey's presidential election, which was a political turning point given during these elections the president was for the first time elected directly by the people.

reason), so too did democratization efforts. From another perspective, however, the AKP never had any intention of real democracy for all and, despite its rhetorical commitments to democratization, democracy essentially meant majoritarianism. In other words, the party felt justified to govern without any checks and balances as long as it was able to secure the majority in the parliament.

The AKP's unshrinking popular support cannot simply be chalked up to the party's outward experience. Of course, in a society that is receptive to Islamist rhetoric that is both conservative and self-righteous, the charisma of Tayyip Erdoğan—his strong and familiar image—cannot be dismissed as a factor in the party's durable success. The same is true for AKP's increasing social engineering through its control over the media, education system, and local networks of a society that bows to peer pressure.

For the most part, however, the AKP's success has to do with how the party has been able to transform the political-economic base of the country, thereby restructuring society at the core and monopolizing power. Recent protests and other critical incidents in Turkey have had very little significant impact on AKP's political standing. In 2013, for example, the Gezi Park protests—a grassroots movement against the rising authoritarianism of the government—spread all over Turkey. In the course of only three months, five thousand protests took place with the participation of at least four million people. The AKP-led government responded with a brutal crackdown: Police killed eleven citizens and injured more than eight thousand. Nevertheless, presented by the government and media as “an attempt by the secular minority to regain their stronghold in Turkish politics and remove the gains made by the religious-conservative majority in terms of their political rights as well as economic standing,” this massive popular movement was unable to notably impact AKP's politics.

The same year, the AKP also underwent a break with its long-time political partner, the Gülen Movement, an Islamic community with extensive education and civil society network worldwide. The break occurred after the Gülen Movement had made serious allegations of corruption involving the Prime Minister and other leading AKP figures. However, after the AKP had removed a couple of ministers, the incident had no significant consequences and the party retained its attraction for a large portion of the populace.

As this shows, in this newly structured political landscape, the AKP has established itself as the sole determinant of political and economic power as well as of social and cultural hegemony; while, all the opposition has been dangerously marginalised in all the spheres. Given that economic and political stability is

desirable to all people regardless of class origins, the AKP's broad political agenda soon rendered it a catchall party. At the same time, however, the AKP also targeted particular audiences. Its neoliberal agenda of economic development, privatization, and globalization, for example, has been particularly attractive to the upper and upper-middle classes as well as to the petty bourgeoisie, all of whom have been chasing a chance to flourish. The party's anti-establishment and reformist outlook speaks more directly to the marginalized lower classes living in rural areas or at the outskirts of urban centers. Finally, its Islamist-nationalist heritage has been appealing in particular to the conservative masses. However, through the use of extensive formal power at the level of government and, later, presidency, this appeal turned into a dependency relation, in which the very existence of members of different classes became attached to the existence of AKP.

The distribution of rents and the rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie are a case in point. There have been various channels through which space was created for the rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie since the 1980s, in the form of favoring a certain group of Anatolian conservatives in the distribution of economic rents via state mechanisms. In 1990, this group founded its own business association, MÜSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association), sometimes also known as the Muslim Businessmen Association, which marked a break with the established TÜSİAD (Turkish Industry and Business Association) of the old secular elites. MÜSİAD, and the Islamic capital of its members, provided much financial support for the AKP. It should be noted that even during the neoliberal opening of the country, Turkey continued its strong statist tradition of distributing economic rents. Ironically, considering the initial claim of the AKP—of changing this system for the benefit of the many who had been marginalized under the old-style elite system of the Kemalist state—the party actually centralized the distribution of power mechanisms in its own hands in an even more exclusive way. Therefore, the Islamic bourgeoisie consolidated its power only thanks to the AKP. The Islamic elites now “conceived of the AKP as their primary vehicle for social and economic mobility,” allowing them “to overcome their underdog status in a society previously dominated by the secular economic and political elites.”

The local authorities of the AKP also participated in mechanisms of formal rent distribution, especially in the more conservative cities or municipalities. In such places, local governments got involved in various forms of philanthropic activities—from soup kitchens and the distribution of foodstuff to sponsoring the education of children—which were often carried out together with Islamic

brotherhoods. This system did not only exert a strong ideological influence over the lower classes, but it also deepened the connection of the AKP with the lowest strata of the society. At the same time, the expansion of Islamic education, whether in state institutions or in private institutions run by Islamic brotherhoods, created a new middle class whose members now staff the state bureaucracy. It is also mainly the lower and middle classes that benefit most from the improvements in the health care, education, transport, and communication sectors, in particularly at the local level.

Over time this distribution of rents turned into a mutually dependent relationship. In other words, in the current state of the country, it has become very difficult to make a living without having connections to the party or its favored communities, most of them Islamic. Until the corruption scandal and the subsequent break between the AKP and the Gülen Movement, the Gülenists benefited most from the various distributive and staffing mechanisms. In fact, only because of this relationship with the AKP was the movement able to consolidate power to such an extent that it has been widely identified as the sole orchestrator of a coup attempt against the AKP in July 2016.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: Erdoğan's "New Turkey"

In line with its majoritarian approach, the AKP believed that once it had cemented its control over a "legitimate" base it could remove all checks and balances on the government and increase its authoritarian rule. Even the coup-attempt of July 15, 2016, which was intended to threaten if not undo the party's rule, was adapted to justify the AKP's omnipotent position. As Erdoğan put it, "the coup has been a gift from God." To the AKP, it justified the proclamation of a prolonged state of emergency, giving the government unrestrained power through the excessive use of statutory decrees.

What is important to note is that this power has not solely been used to "clear" the state from those connected to the Gülen Movement, who have been targeted as the collaborators of the coup attempt, but also targeted all opposition forces, including MPs, countless local representatives, journalists, academics, and even human-rights activists. What is more, presidential powers have been strengthened considerably while other branches of government, including the judiciary system, have been weakened tremendously. Democratic and

economic rights have also been curtailed significantly and the country's economy, the growth of which had played such a vital role in the early years of the AKP and contributed to its expanding power, is lately undergoing a quite alarming decline. Considering these developments and the excessive powers of the government, the political opposition calls the period after the coup attempt a “civil coup” authored by the AKP.

At this point, the focus of President Erdoğan's political activities is the presidential elections of 2019. He stands a good chance of winning, which would make him the first president of what the AKP calls the “New Turkey.” The result of the referendum of April 2017 has already been celebrated as the end of the old regime and the *de jure* beginning of a “New Turkey” under the presidency of Erdoğan. While it is still unclear what exactly the structure of this new system will look like and how AKP will run it, it would most likely take on the form of “super-presidentialism,” thus resembling the US presidential system, however with a much greater concentration of power in the president's hands and with fewer checks and balances overall. In this regard, the question of what power will Erdoğan acquire that he cannot already exercise under the state of emergency law is a critical one.

Given the expansiveness of Erdoğan's powers under the current system—characterized by the opaqueness of state affairs, a silenced and trivialized opposition, and the state's absolute control over media and mass communication—it is likely that the best-case scenario for the aftermath of the 2019 presidential elections is the legalization of the current state of emergency conditions by making the *de facto* situation *de jure*, which in fact is already underway. The fact that there was no sign of détente from the ruling party after the referendum—despite winning it with a narrow margin—substantiates the view that the AKP does not have any intention of taking on a consolidative role in the new system. Rather, they seem set on ruling Turkey along the country's existing deep lines of rupture. However, although a deep polarization has been fundamental to the AKP's political strategy from the beginning, this path has neared a dangerous tipping point regarding the country's internal balance.

Throughout the years of AKP rule, Turkey has undergone a tragic transformation. What can be observed from the outside at a distance, has immediate and dangerous consequences for those on the inside, who have to deal with the often small but symbolically powerful changes. Some such *de facto* appearances of the “New Turkey” include the increasing oppression of women or the enforcement of an Islamic lifestyle, whether through the education system or simply

by way of neighbourhood pressure. If the opposition forces in Turkey are partly to blame for these developments, because they could not manage to resist and act together at certain critical breaking points, it is still true that right-wing populism was advantaged in some regards. In particular, the populism of the AKP was able to reach its base in ways that allowed the party to consolidate its power precisely because of its ideological “flexibility.”

Finally, we cannot dismiss the crucial role that the direction of global politics plays for Turkey's internal affairs. As the crisis in global political economy breaks traditional socio-political alliances and class structures, politics has become increasingly polarized. In recent years, the rise of far-right populism has also become a problem for Europe, with far-right parties either advancing to power in some countries, i.e., Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Austria, or constantly expanding in most of the rest, i.e., Germany, France, Sweden, etc. Not so long ago, Turkey's distance from the democratic credentials of the EU was the greatest obstacle on the country's way to membership. Nowadays, the validity of those very credentials is nearing a crisis point, while the EU membership of Turkey is practically not discussed anymore, either in the EU or in Turkey. Again, not so long ago, the democratic deficits of Turkey were also seen as a danger for its regional and international role. However, in the age of a growing far right (or what we may call the “Age of Trump”) and of escalating international conflicts, Turkey is no longer an exception but rather more like an early indicator of what is quickly becoming the new norm. ■

DENMARK

The Danish People's Party and the “Pragmatic Far Right”

INGER V. JOHANSEN

In a country where Nazi or fascist tendencies are part of a subculture, the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti/DF) presents itself as one of the less ideological of the extreme right-wing parties in Europe. Although it builds on populist fears of rising immigration and terrorist attacks in Europe, it also appears “pragmatic” in its defense of the country's welfare system at a time when it is under attack by both right-wing and center-left austerity politics. In yoking working class concerns to nationalist sentiments, the party is able to distance itself from right-wing extremism while slowly moving towards the center of Danish politics.

Like other right-wing parties in Europe, the Danish People's Party has scored remarkable and growing successes in recent elections. In 2014, the DF emerged as Denmark's winner in the European parliamentary elections, gaining 26.7% of the vote. In addition, it became the biggest right-wing party in the Danish general elections of 2015. Since then, the DF has been able to retain around 18-20% support in opinion polls for upcoming parliamentary elections. This is especially significant given that the DF declined to join the new right-wing/bourgeois government coalition formed by the Venstre Party, the Conservative Party, and the Liberal Alliance Party.

Now a central player in Danish politics, the Danish People's Party was only established in 1995. Its founders, Pia Kjærsgaard and three other leading parliamentarians, had all been members of the “Progress Party” (Fremskridtspartiet/

FRP), an ultraliberal protest party established in 1972 by the lawyer Mogens Glistrup. After having considerable success in the 1973 Danish parliamentary elections, when it became the second largest party with 15.9% of the votes, the FRP's numbers gradually dwindled. Internal differences and strife contributed to the party's marginalization and ultimately led to its dissolution in 1999.

The Growth of the Dansk Folkeparti

Since 1998, the Danish People's Party has gained a considerable number of votes in a relatively short time period. Moving beyond its first breakthrough of 7.4% (13 seats) in the 1998 parliamentary elections, the party gained 12% (22 seats) in the 2001 elections. In 2015, the DF became the second-largest party in the Danish Parliament (with 21.1% of the vote) and the largest of the right-wing/bourgeois parties.

The ideological break of the Danish People's Party from the Progress Party has been decisive for its success at the national level. Distancing itself from the foolish protest-party spirit and ultra-liberalism of the FRP, the DF established itself as a right-wing party that could be taken seriously and involve itself in real politics. Even though it lacks a long-term strategy, it appeals to voters by presenting a political profile that combines conservative nationalism and xenophobia with the defense of the welfare state. By focusing on social goods and services, such as welfare for the elderly and sick, the DF has managed to distance itself not only from the FRP's ultra-liberalism but also from the "moderate" neo-liberalism of the Social Democrats. As the latter abandoned their primary role as the "party of the welfare state," the Danish People's Party was able to attract a growing number of disaffected voters from both the right and the left.

In addition to running campaigns against bureaucracy, welfare cuts, and the undermining of national sovereignty in the context of Europeanization, the DF also demands more restrictions on immigration, especially from Muslim countries. While its agenda in defense of the welfare state and national democracy indicates that the party's base is composed of the petty bourgeoisie and small capitalists, it has also helped attract a huge number of working-class voters. As a result, the DF now boasts support from a broad cross-section of the population, including many trade union members.

Members of the party are no longer timid about admitting their membership. A study from 2016 shows that the Danish People's Party is now the biggest

working-class party in Denmark—larger than the two mainstream parties—winning the support of about a third (33.7%) of all working-class voters. In comparison, just over a quarter (26.3%) of all working-class voters support the Social Democrats while a mere 14.8% are in support of the Venstre Party. Another demographic shift concerns voter age. While for the longest time the DF had been seen as the party of the elderly, it has recently lost support among pensioners (since 2014, the party lost 4.8% of votes among pensioners), reflecting the fact that the party has shifted its social agenda toward a broader and more general program with a political focus on welfare.

Towards the Center and Beyond

Appealing to a broad segment of society is at the core of the agenda of the Danish People's Party. This finds expression not only in the party's political program, but also in its internal structure. The DF is one of the most centralized political parties in Denmark, and it contains internal squabbling, factionalizing, and strife by immediately expelling those who oppose the party line. While this should be seen as an attempt to avoid some of the mistakes of its progenitor, the Progress Party, members occasionally criticize DF party leadership for too much top-down management and a lack of democracy.

In its attempt to appeal to a broad base, the party has undergone a shift in its political agenda as well, now positioning itself closer to the center of Danish politics. The DF's conscious move away from a more right-wing extremist position meant coming to terms with the fact that several of the party's leaders have personal histories and backgrounds in far-right organizations. It also led to a different political style, which became particularly clear when Kristian Thulesen Dahl replaced Pia Kjaersgaard as the party's chairperson in 2012. Opening itself up to the possibility that the new center-left government had something to offer, the DF formed a "soft" alliance with the Social Democrats, thus allowing the party to play in two leagues, so to speak. Even after the Danish general elections of 2015, when the DF could have entered into a coalition with the Venstre Party, it decided to stay in the opposition, seeking to influence the government from the outside by strategically collaborating with select parliamentary parties.

As a result, the influence of the DF on Danish politics has become massive. Nearly 20 years ago, in October 1999, Poul Nyrup Andersen, Chairman of the

Social Democrats and at the time Prime Minister, declared in parliament, “That’s why I say to the Danish People’s Party: No matter how many efforts you make, seen through my eyes you’ll never be housebroken!” Yet today, the two parties have an understanding, or “alliance,” especially when it comes to welfare policies and matters of immigration. The Social Democrats recently supported a cap on the refugee quota, which constitutes a shocking break with long-time standards of Danish immigration policies. For the first time since 1978, Denmark rejects quota refugees (ca. 500 people annually) from the UN (see *Berlingske*, 13 September 2017).

The Socialist People’s Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti/SF), a party slightly to the left of the Social Democrats, has also pursued a policy of overture to closer cooperation with the DF. Just like the Social Democrats, the SF has tightened its immigration and integration policies. Although the SF remains politically close to the Social Democrats and is a member of the Green European Free Alliance in the European Parliament, the new alignment between the two parties shows the impact of the DF’s program on national politics. This manifests not only in the realm of anti-immigration and anti-Muslim policies, but in broader debates in the media and in a poisoning of the political climate more generally.

Even if the DF loudly proclaims its defense of the welfare state, the party’s actual priorities clearly lie elsewhere. Willing to compromise when it comes to welfare policies and budgetary decisions, it is obvious that a just social agenda is secondary for the Danish People’s Party. Especially on the level of local politics, the DF has often taken a pragmatic stance that makes the party’s political profile hard to distinguish from other parties pursuing austerity policies. This has weakened the party not only on the municipal level, but has also lowered its success rate in opinion polls at the national level. The party’s verbal assurances of opposing welfare cuts simply do not match the reality of their actions.

Extreme-Right Politics in Mainstream Parties

By taking away votes from the mainstream political parties, the DF has managed to move the entire political spectrum in Denmark to the right. It has opened up space on the far right for parties with ultra-liberal or extreme anti-immigration agendas, or both. The Nye Borgerlige (New Bourgeois Party) as well as the Danskernes Parti (Party of the Danes), for example, have “hidden” links to Nazi and other racist groups. While the Party of the Danes was dissolved after it was

unable to collect the 20,000 signatures needed to stand in the Danish parliamentary elections, the New Bourgeois Party received sufficient support to run in the 2017 municipal elections. Even if Nye Borgerlige is currently unable to attract enough votes to enter parliament, it might be close enough to do so in the 2019 elections.

The shift to the right also manifests in legislation in which ever stricter immigration policies around refugees have been codified. Instead of a political program committed to a real welfare agenda, the DF concentrates much of its efforts on campaigns against Muslims. This includes its call for a ban of burkas in Denmark, which is becoming more realistic following a 2017 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in support of a ban on the niqab in public spaces in Belgium. After a heated debate, especially within the Venstre Party, a bill called the “Proposal for a parliamentary resolution on the prohibition of masking and full-length clothing in public spaces” was presented to parliament. Disguised as a more general ban against wearing masks rather than just targeting Muslim garb, the new legislation passed the Danish Parliament with a large majority late in 2017. It received support not only from Venstre and the DF but also from the Conservative Party, the Liberal Alliance and, notably, the Social Democrats. Despite its name, there is no doubt that the new legislative piece is aimed at criminalizing the very small number of Danish Muslim women, estimated to be between 150 and 200, who wear burkas or niqabs.

In line with its anti-immigration stance, the DF has tried to push for Denmark’s withdrawal from the UN Refugee Convention, the European Human Rights Convention, and the UN Stateless Convention. The DF’s claim that such conventions “prevent a tightening of immigration legislation” has found a supporter in the Immigration and Integration Minister of Denmark, Inger Støjberg (Venstre), who has at times surpassed the radicalism of the DF with her verbal attacks against immigrants and Muslims.

Danish legislative restrictions have cut illegal immigration in Denmark from its peak of 23,000 in 2013 to an annual figure of around 18,000 in 2014 and 2015. Despite these measures, the political climate in Denmark remains harsh. The government has now dropped its previous attempt to “modernize” the UN Refugee Convention, instead focusing its efforts on a reform of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). According to Inger Støjberg, the goal is to achieve “a better balance between the protection of human rights and our ability to decide how we organize our society.” The DF recently brought a motion before parliament to remove compliance with the ECHR from Danish legislation, which

the country had acceded to in 1953, with the declared purpose to make it easier to expel foreigners convicted of criminal acts, tighten the rules of family reunion, and curb the rights of “foreigners on tolerated stay” (that is, foreigners convicted of crimes, who cannot, after having served their prison term, be expelled to their home countries where they would risk persecution).

In light of this heightened xenophobia, progressive forces opposing the DF and its policies are currently on the defensive in Denmark, but they do nonetheless exist. The Red Green Alliance (RGA), for example, which is the most significant leftist party in the Danish Parliament, is the most consistently opposed to further restrictions on immigration. In addition, popular movements have sprung up at various moments, including *Bedsteforældre for Asyl* (Grannies Supporting Asylum) and *Venligboerne* (Friendly Citizens), which oppose the rightist and xenophobic trend in the country and have done an immense job assisting and defending the huge numbers of refugees that arrived in Denmark (and elsewhere in Europe) in 2015.

Populism and Realpolitik

And yet, compared to other European extreme-right parties, the DF is not actually a very populist party. Having mainly won over former liberal *Venstre* and Social Democratic voters in the parliamentary elections of 2015, it might in fact be the least populist of the extreme-right parties in Europe. Similarly, in the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections, when it gained 26.7% of the overall vote, the DF did not attract any EU-skeptical supporters of the radical left. Interestingly, after the elections the DF joined the EP group of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) as opposed to the more right-wing and EU-skeptical *Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy* (EFDD). The latter includes EU-exit advocates like Britain's UKIP, but the DF resolved that joining a more extreme group would harm the party's political standing and strategy.

This choice is completely in keeping with the party's aim to become an influential party at the political center. The same is true for the party's conscious strategy to capitalize on popular disaffection with the mainstream parties because of their support for austerity policies, disregard of national sovereignty, and uncritical position regarding the EU. Indeed, the DF proved very skillful in linking voter disaffection to the social dumping provoked by immigration from Eastern Europe, which occurred as a result the EU's free movement of labor within the

single market. The Danish People's Party simply connected itself to the general EU skepticism that is prevalent among a broad section of the Danish working class and many other voters.

This becomes particularly clear when paying attention to the contradictions between the party's verbal assurances and the reality of its politicking. As already suggested, the DF is EU-skeptical on a rhetorical level only; it is not actually opposed to the EU as an institution, and it is not anti-capitalist. To the contrary, it is in favor of the single market but proposes that it be reduced by introducing a welfare opt-out. Similarly, although the DF strongly disapproves of social dumping, it does very little to oppose it, in fact often voting against countermeasures. Its elected representatives in municipal councils have made compromises too, including many cuts to public welfare. Thus, while the DF promotes itself as a centrist party and professes to defend social welfare, it acts like a right-wing party. The tension between this centrist program on the one hand and right-wing rhetoric on the other reflects the party's populist tactics, which essentially leaves intact the voters' view of the DF.

This has made it possible for the DF to make a huge impact on the Danish political landscape. Already under the former bourgeois government of 2001-2011, and after having gained between 12-13.9% in the elections, the DF used its parliamentary position to influence government to promote and implement restrictive immigration policies. This has led to a serious deterioration in the political and economic condition of immigrants and refugees in Denmark—a situation that the subsequent Social Democratic-led government did near to nothing to change. Indeed, under the center-left government (2011-2015) with its austerity measures and ensuing popular disenchantment, the DF was able to win over many Social Democratic voters.

Ever since, the DF has maintained its position as the strongest right-wing party in the Danish Parliament, and it continues to actively support the rule of the new right-wing bourgeois government. However, even after having gained a huge number of votes in the 2014 EP elections, the party's strategy to shape these votes into a stable electorate has not yet proven successful. Is this because the DF's tactic to promote anti-immigration sentiments in the other political parties has backfired? In other words, with more parties working with anti-immigration platforms, has it become more difficult for the DF to promote a distinct profile? Or do the contradictions that I have highlighted between the party's "official" program and its concrete policies curb the party's political success?

The Far Right in Northern Europe

The progress of the DF seems to be part of a larger reorientation in Danish as well as European politics. As many new political groups are being established, the mainstream parties continue to lose ground. This is even true for the radical left in Europe, whose impressive gains following the 2007-2009 financial crisis have largely come to a halt while the far right continues to grow rapidly across the continent.

Yet, when considering which specific policies the various right-wing parties in Europe seek to promote, it is important to note that there exist clear tactical as well as political differences between countries. The most significant dividing line tends to run along the issue of whether or not a party is in support of Nazism/fascism. The other distinction is usually made depending on whether a party is in pursuit of an ultra-/neo-liberal or a social agenda.

Although there are a number of European extremist parties with specific Nazi or fascist tendencies—especially in countries with a history of fascism—most right-wing parties have political programs that are broadly oriented toward cordoning off individual countries from immigration and restricting the “contamination” of their people by other cultures. While this is to some degree aimed at scaring off new immigrants and refugees, in Western Europe there remains popular resentment against Eastern European migrants in search of jobs within the EU. Based in particular on opposition to social dumping, we have most recently seen the full scale of such resentment in Britain.

While the Danish People's Party and other extreme-right parties in Europe do not seem to be cultivating extensive international relationships, they certainly nurture their own, inter-European relations. After the electoral successes of populist and right-wing parties in Austria and several Eastern European countries, the DF sent out congratulations. It merely dissociated itself verbally from the French Front National because of their anti-Semitism. Ties also exist between several parties of the Nordic far right, which are relatively strong at the parliamentary level. In 2012, the Danish People's Party, the Finnish Perussuomalaiset (True Finns), and the Swedish Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) established a social-conservative political group called “Nordic Freedom” within the Nordic Council. The Sweden Democrats are politically close to the DF, although they are still a far cry from gaining governmental power because the other parliamentary parties of Sweden refuse to collaborate. The True Finns managed to win government power together with other political

parties, but this arrangement did not last long and ended in the party's internal disintegration.

The relationships between the Nordic right parties are not without complications. The DF has a somewhat troubled relationship with the Norwegian Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party), which secured a second term in government (together with the Norwegian Høyre, or Right Party) in 2017 and is probably the most successful of all the Nordic right parties. One possible explanation for this poor relationship is that the Norwegian party is more neoliberal than it is right-wing, thus remaining at a certain distance from the DF's program.

Strategic Perspectives

As the history of the DF has shown, the development of extreme-right parties in Europe is not a recent phenomenon, but their presence has become more visible and their strategies more successful during these recent years of crisis. The increase in migration as a consequence of Western intervention and wars in the Middle East has also undeniably contributed to the growth of the DF. Today, the far right of Western Europe feeds on crisis, turbulence, migration, terrorist attacks, increasing inequality, social insecurity, popular fear, and mistrust of mainstream politicians unable—or unwilling—to handle the situation.

Given this overall disposition, the specific factors that have contributed most strongly to the success of the DF can be identified as follows: the party's adaptability; its careful control of tactics and strategy; its ability to avoid alienating voters by staying far enough away from extremist positions (such as fascism and Nazism); and its rejection of ultra-liberalism and promotion of a social agenda. Through this combination, the Danish People's Party has reached many of the goals that it shares with other far-right parties in Europe, most importantly to increase its impact on national immigration policies (in particular concerning Muslim immigrants); to create a more xenophobic political climate more generally; and to promote both nationalism and EU-skepticism.

It is by no means easy to offer even provisional predictions regarding the future of the DF. In the November 2017 municipal elections, the DF experienced a sharp decline in voter support (leaving it with only 8.8 % of the overall vote compared to 10.1% in the 2013 municipal elections). This result came as a huge shock to the party, which had hoped that their win in the parliamentary elections would benefit the party on the local level. However, as it turned out, the “soft”

alliance of the DF with the Social Democrats did not pay off in the municipal elections. In fact, after ruling party Venstre began implementing harsh austerity measures, many voters turned away from them in the local elections, contributing to a victory for the Social Democrats.

In contrast, the DF did not fare well in the concrete, pragmatic sphere of municipal politics. Confronted with the “Budget Law”—the implementation of the EU fiscal compact, which almost the entire Danish Parliament voted for in 2012 despite the fact that Denmark is not a Euro/EMU member country—the Danish Parliament has placed severe constraints on the spending power of municipalities. The results are unpopular cuts in social and other public spending as well as ensuing privatizations, which the large majority of parties including the DF have to accept at the municipal level, thus compromising their own anti-austerity positions.

The defeat of the DF in local elections has had a spillover effect at the national level. Opinion polls from October to November, 2017, show a small but clear downturn. It is doubtful, however, that this will constitute a crucial turning point in the party’s performance. Previous ups and downs in support for the DF indicate otherwise. In addition, all the factors that contribute to the existence of these extreme-right parties are still present, and nothing suggests that the crisis in Europe will end anytime soon.

And yet there seems to be a limit to how “extreme” the Danish right can be if it wishes to continue to attract voters. The right-wing New Bourgeois Party, for example, was unable to break through in recent municipal elections, gaining only one seat in spite of considerable media attention. The lesson is that a right-wing program centered on stoking xenophobic sentiments and driving ever harsher proposals against immigrants may no longer be sufficient to make significant progress for a party like the DF. Given that many Europeans continue to find themselves with increasingly few economic opportunities—despite the caps that have been placed on immigration—the DF needs a rethink. The general turn to the right of the entire Danish political spectrum can no longer address the precarious economic situation of the majority of voters. After all, the increasing divide between a growing working class and a small but ever wealthier upper class across European societies is not caused by immigration, cultural takeovers, or weakened borders—as right-wing rhetoric likes to suggest—but by the effects of ruthless neoliberalization. ■

NORWAY

Right-Wing Populism, Nordic Style

ASBJØRN WAHL

The Western world is in political upheaval: The extreme right and right-wing populism are on the rise. Social democracy and what remains of the political left find themselves in a deep political and ideological crisis. Yet, it is not just social democracy that struggles. The entire political regime that emerged in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II is breaking down—on both the right and the left—as a result of the disintegration of the historical compromise that used to exist between labor and capital and which was so crucial to post-war political development.

Not surprisingly, this happens at the time of a neoliberal offensive of capital, which targets the working class with massive attacks on trade unions, and also the general population through the major curtailment of social rights. As social democracy and the political left fail to understand the crisis, leaving them unable to fight these attacks, the resulting discontent, insecurity, and fear among broad segments of the population have to a large degree been channeled into a political turn to the right. The extreme right and right-wing populist parties were quick to exploit this situation, securing electoral wins for themselves in a number of European countries.

In order to meet this political challenge, we need thorough analyses of the character of right-wing populism and the external conditions of its growth as well as of the ways in which the political left fails to address the problem. As the Norwegian case demonstrates, not all right-wing parties take on extreme forms but rather operate under the banner of moderate right-wing populism. The Progress Party, which is now in its second term in government, skillfully

maneuvers between populist rhetoric and neoliberal realism in order to stay in power.

Historical Background

Over the past thirty to forty years, various articulations of extreme-right or right-wing populist parties have developed across Europe. They have different characteristics and reflect the varying circumstances of the places in which they develop. The Norwegian Progress Party, which has undergone many transformations since it was first established in 1973, shares many features with other right-wing parties in Europe. Its establishment was inspired and influenced by Mogens Glistrup's founding of the Danish Progress Party the year before. There are, however, also significant differences between the Norwegian Progress Party and other right-wing movements in Europe. Having experienced in-fighting and ruptures over the years, the party continues to struggle with a number of internal tensions between different groups and political tendencies.

The start of what would eventually become the Progress Party was more or less a one-man show. Initially, the party name even included the name of its founder: Anders Lange's Party for a Strong Reduction in Taxes, Duties, and Public Interventions, or ALP. Anders Lange was a reactionary political activist, agitator, and journalist. Through most of the 1930s, he had served as secretary of a right-wing political alliance called the "Fatherland League," which many considered to be a fascist organization. During World War II, however, he joined the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation of Norway.

The new party broke with the strong post-war political consensus around the welfare state by criticizing the high costs and bureaucracy of universal welfare services, which they sought to replace by more means testing. The party's message was simple: cheaper liquor; no development aid for "the blacks"; women are unsuitable for political work; cut taxes and fees; fight against the abuse of social security. The political platform simply consisted of 14 points, all of which started with the phrase "We are fed up with..." It was well known that the party leader supported the South African apartheid state. According to many sources, the party also received financial support from the apartheid regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia.

Only five months after the party was founded, ALP received 5.1% of the vote and won four MPs. Clearly, there existed a growing group of dissatisfied people

in the Norwegian welfare state. Of those who voted for the party, 17% were first-time voters, 12% had abstained in the previous election, 46% came from the Conservative Party and 30% from the Labour Party. Socially, 22% were self-employed, 32% were white-collar workers, and 46% were blue-collar workers.

ALP was founded at a moment of great political turbulence and internal turmoil in a number of other Norwegian political parties. In 1972, Norway had its first referendum on whether it should become a member of the European Economic Community (EEC), a question which deeply divided political parties as well as many other organizations in Norway. The fight surrounding EEC membership not only politicized society, it also polarized the political debate, creating deep splits between ordinary people and the elite, which overwhelmingly supported Norwegian membership in the EEC. The victory for those who opposed membership caused a political earthquake, and it has been formative for political developments in Norway ever since.

The opposition to Norwegian EEC membership was mainly left leaning, which means that the political left benefitted most from this political debate. One outcome was the establishment of the Socialist Election Alliance—an alliance made up of the Socialist Peoples' Party, the Communist Party, a faction of the Labor Party, and a group of independent members—now called the Socialist Left Party, or SV. In the same election in which the ALP for the first time achieved representation in parliament, this new left party experienced an even bigger breakthrough—with 11.2% support and 16 MPs. There is no doubt that this strengthening of the left was also a contributing factor to the creation of the new right-wing populist party. The Labor Party was deeply divided over the EEC referendum, with its leadership in favor of Norwegian membership and most of its members opposed. As a result, the Labor Party wound up as the big loser in the 1973 election, with 35.3% of the vote (down from 46.5% in the previous election).

However, both of these new political parties experienced defeat in the following election in 1977. The SV was crushed, losing 14 of its 16 MPs, while many people considered the ALP a gathering of “village fools” who were difficult to take seriously. Under its controversial leader, the party received only 1.9% of votes and lost all of its four MPs. A reestablishment of the party was already underway, however, and in January 1977 its name was changed to the Progress Party. As the party's founder had died only one year into its first parliamentary term in 1974, Carl I. Hagen became the party's new leader in 1978. He played a dominant role as “the party owner” until he stepped down from party leadership in 2006 and ended his career as an MP in 2009.

It was under Carl I. Hagen's leadership that the Progress Party, which had started out as a rebellious party of dissatisfaction and discontent, made it into its second term of coalition government in Norway. The party has even achieved something that few other parties—right or left—have been capable of while in government: It has more or less maintained its electoral support from the 2013 election (16.3%) in the 2017 election (15.2%).

Neoliberal Economy, Reactionary Culture

As the Progress Party developed during the 1980s and 1990s, a number of internal conflicts between different tendencies came to the surface. Firstly, the party leader, Carl I. Hagen, became inspired by the neoliberal ideology of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Thus, the Progress Party took ownership of this ideology—of so-called economic globalization and free trade—more so even than the Conservative Party. Secondly, an anti-establishment, anti-bureaucracy, anti-state, and increasingly anti-immigration populist tendency grew increasingly strong in the party. Thirdly, a new socially oriented conservative Christian tendency also developed within the party. Add some political and sex scandals, and it is easy to understand why Carl I. Hagen had such a challenge in his main aim to prepare and lead this fragmented party into government. In order to do this, he had to balance these three tendencies and dampen some of the extreme expressions of particularly the liberal and the populist tendencies—with mixed results, not least because the leader himself occasionally struggled to dampen his own expressions. Inside the party, disputes regularly ended in open fighting, leading to both exclusions as well as breakaways—and the Conservative Party continued to hold them at arm's length.

Immigration to Norway was very low at the beginning of the 1970s, when the party was established. In 1975, a ban on immigration was introduced. However, immigration started to grow in the 1980s, and in 1987 anti-immigration policies for the first time became an important issue for the Progress Party in the local election campaign. This proved to be a great electoral success for the party, with its support doubling to 10.4%. Since then, the anti-immigration card has been played in nearly every campaign—with the possible exception of the 1993 election.

On this occasion, a big group of young, well-educated, and ambitious liberals had joined the party. They worked systematically within the party organization,

took over its youth wing, and were able to conquer many important positions in the party. At an early phase, the party leader sought an alliance with this liberal tendency in order to “hunt down” some of the extreme anti-immigration populists and get them out of the party. As soon as that was done, it was the liberals who threatened the internal balance. The leader thus turned against them as well, and a brutal internal struggle followed. At the 1994 party congress, a ruthless internal confrontation took place, with the result being that the youth organization was simply closed down by the party. The liberals were defeated, and they gradually disappeared. After having excluded some more members with extreme anti-immigration attitudes, the party was more or less consolidated on a platform of neoliberal economic policy and conservative/reactionary policy on culture and values. It is worth noting that the party has always upheld a rather hostile attitude to the trade union movement, as well as to trade union and labor rights.

The Progress Party has repeatedly been accused of being racist, something they have strongly denied, and with some justification. The party has not technically promoted racism in the traditional biological sense. At the core of its message has rather been the heterogeneity of cultures and the supposed right of a people to its identity. As such, immigration is presented as a universal threat that is supposedly responsible for much of the economic, social, political, and cultural ills in society. In the process, xenophobia and Islamophobia have taken center stage, and Norwegian culture and traditions have been idealized. At the same time, in order to be accepted into government, the party leadership has been eager to dampen some of the worst excesses of xenophobia, and this has been underlined by the exclusion of members who have stepped over the invisible line that has been established.

As part of the efforts to be seen as a non-racist or non-extremist party, the leadership has also been very careful about which parties to co-operate with in Europe. Right-wing extremist parties like the French Front National, the Freedom Party of Austria, or the Dutch Party for Freedom have been kept at a distance. Neither does the Progress Party have any formal relations with the Swedish, Finnish, or Danish extreme right or right-wing populist parties. The long-serving party leader, Carl I. Hagen, has even insisted that the party should be located somewhere between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, a statement which has not convinced many people. In any case, the Norwegian Progress Party has been widely viewed as, and in many ways is, one of the more moderate right-wing populist parties in Europe.

Parallel to the attempts to clean up the party by getting rid of some (but not all) of the most extreme voices, the leaders fought hard to achieve respect from other parties, particularly those on the right and center right, which still did not want to do business with them. At the beginning of the 1980s, Norway had a minority government led by the Conservative Party (two small center-right parties were included later on). Even if there was no formal agreement, this government was in reality dependent on support from the Progress Party. The party leadership, however, did not like that its support was more or less taken for granted. As a result, in 1986 the Progress Party supported the opposition by voting down the center-right government on a minor question of higher gas fees. A Labour government took over, and the Progress Party had successfully demonstrated to the Conservatives that they would have to talk to them if they wanted support.

Another important strategic step was made when the party declared that it would only support a government in which the Progress Party itself took part. In this way, the party made itself more important—and essentially unavoidable—in a political situation where the only way to achieve a majority for a right-wing government was through some kind of coalition. With a slightly polished façade, a broader political platform, and a modernized public relations policy, the party gradually increased its support. Since the middle of the 1990s, its results in parliamentary elections have varied between 15 and 23%. In this way, the Progress Party has established itself as one of the three biggest parties in Norway (see the election results in the table below), alongside the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. In an opinion poll in 2000 it even reached 33% support and for a time became the largest party in Norway. It is worth noting that this happened when Norway had its most right-wing social-democratic government, under Jens Stoltenberg's leadership. In 2006, Siv Jensen, on the more moderate liberal wing, replaced Carl I. Hagen as party leader, thus removing another barrier against cooperation with other parties. The Progress Party was prepared for government. However, it would take until 2013 before the dream was realized.

Year	1973	1977	1981	1985	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005	2009	2013	2017
%	5.0	1.9	4.5	3.7	13.0	6.3	15.3	14.6	22.1	22.9	16.3	15.2
MPs	4	0	4	2	22	10	25	26	38	41	29	27

Table: The Progress Party – Parliamentary Election Results

The Progress Party: A Symptom or a Cause?

How was it possible that a right-wing, anti-establishment, populist party could grow to become one of the three biggest political forces in Norway, a peaceful, highly developed welfare country that has consistently been, and remains, at the top of all kinds of international rankings for “best country in the world to live in?”

To understand this, we cannot only look at the right-wing populist party itself—its conspicuous rhetoric, its blaming of all ills on “the others,” its simple solutions to all problems, and its seductive messages. All these elements are of course important if we want to understand the rise of right-wing populism. There are, however, important economic and political developments that have created space for this right-wing extremism and populism. Without going into depth here, we have to understand these political tendencies against a backdrop of two particularly important developments. One is the end of the stable and rather socially peaceful economic development in Western Europe during the post-war period—including high economic growth and power relations that made it possible to share the increasing wealth in society. The other is the changing political landscape as it has developed in the wake of the economic crisis and stagnation that increasingly characterizes capitalist economies since the 1970s.

The end of the post-war era was marked by great economic and social upheaval. The oil crisis, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system of monetary management, increasing inflation and stagflation, and growing unemployment—in short, the new crisis in the capitalist economy—produced changes that contributed to a rise in confusion, insecurity, and fear among people. Even if the effects of the crisis were milder in Norway than in most other Western countries, they were nonetheless present and pointing in the same direction, and Keynesian economic policy was no longer able to stave them off. The welfare state came under strong criticism for not being able to deliver, and for being too bureaucratic, top-down, and costly. The relatively stable class compromise between labor and capital that had dominated Western Europe in the post-war period started to unravel. Among the capitalist interests in society and their political servants, neoliberalism was seized on as the ideology that they thought would help them emerge from the crisis and return to more stable profitability.

Large parts of the labor movement, on the other hand, became trapped in the ideology of social partnership—the belief that capitalists had achieved a

higher degree of reason, in which “they realized that cooperation was better than confrontation for them as well” (as is often expressed still by labor leaders in Norway). As such, the crisis and the subsequent neoliberal offensive of the 1970s and 1980s came as a surprise to those social-democratic parties which had been both de-politicized and de-radicalized during the post-war period. For the most part, these parties had simply changed, from being mass organizations representing and mobilizing workers into becoming administrators of a class compromise in decline—and their social basis had changed accordingly. So also was the case with the Labour Party in Norway.

Rather than mobilizing for progressive responses to the crisis, in the form of increased democratic control of the economy, these parties were overrun by the neoliberal offensive and adopted more and more of its ideology themselves. This also strongly influenced the trade union movement, which was closely connected to the Labour Party. This was the beginning of the end of the class compromise in Europe, and it opened a new era of attacks on—rather than further development of—the welfare state. Contributing to this is that the political parties to the left of social democracy have also been unable to develop visions and propose solutions, further inhibiting the generation of enthusiasm and making it more difficult to mobilize for alternative, left responses to the crisis.

Given this deep political and ideological crisis on the left, it has been forces on the radical right that have capitalized on people's feelings of insecurity, exploiting their fears and worries for their own ends. The Norwegian Progress Party has been proficient in this regard, channeling people's discontent against other groups in society—be they single mothers, people on social benefits or, increasingly, immigrants—rather than against the real causes and driving forces behind the problems. The party presents itself as *the* party that supports ordinary people—against the establishment, against the elites, and against the old, mainstream, ruling political parties.

Influence on National Politics and Parties

Even if the Norwegian Progress Party, together with its coalition partner, the Conservative Party, lost some of its support in the parliamentary election of September 2016, they are still in government, now for a second term. Many political commentators in the media and on the left have predicted the Progress Party to meet more problems than has been the case. Obviously, the exploding numbers

of Syrian immigrants in 2015 helped to secure the support of the Progress Party, which was on its way down before this crisis (it won only 9.5% in the local elections in 2015, almost 7 points down from the previous parliamentary election). Another reason was the lack of opposition from the Labour Party, which has neither been able to develop alternative progressive policies to mobilize people for real solutions, nor to confront the Progress Party where it is weakest, in economic and social policy.

In any case, there is no doubt that the shift from raw populism to so-called “responsible government policy” has been hard for the Progress Party. The difference is remarkable between the alternative state budgets that the party used to come up with while in opposition and the official budgets they are currently coming up with in government. The fact that the party leader has become the Minister of Finance does not make this easier. However, the party is good at trivializing politics. Rhetorically, to its voters, it focuses on trifles like road tolls, tax-free quotas at airports, and the unrestricted use of water scooters at sea, while the big and principled economic and structural questions are dealt with in the back rooms.

In order to dampen some of the dissatisfaction from their own populist members, the party leaders are also practicing some kind of double communication, a two-track political road in which the party can be interpreted as both for and against the same proposals. The Progress Party's members of government can thus unanimously support a proposal while its members of parliament simultaneously oppose it and try to change it in parliamentary committees. A political commentator characterized this as a new form of parliamentarism, in which the party seems to be “only partly in government.” No doubt, this can be both demanding and risky, particularly in the long run.

The Conservative Party, however, has gone a long way in accepting this practice from the Progress Party. The Conservative Prime Minister has been surprisingly tolerant of this double-speak by ministers from the Progress Party, even to the point of accepting one of the party's most outspoken anti-immigration politicians as minister responsible for... immigration. In this way, the party can continue to nurture discontent with the existing order and spread fear of “the other,” of immigrants and particularly Muslims, and of the unknown. Polarization and stigma are among their political tools. Due to the harsh immigration rhetoric, the Christian Democratic Party—on which the minority coalition government is dependent in order to achieve its majority—has refused to support the government through a general agreement, as it did during the government's first term,

and will now only decide from case to case. This means that the government is now in a weaker position than before the recent election.

Dominance of the New Axis of Conflict

The Progress Party has changed a lot over the years. It started with opposition against high taxation and public bureaucracy, and continued with often-legitimate criticism of the poor-functioning elements of the welfare state, such as meaningless rules and top-down treatment of citizens in public offices. However, by the end of the 1980s, the party had been transformed from a tax protest party into an anti-immigration party, but still based on a neoliberal economic program, including support for economic globalization and free trade. It stood for a rupture of the political landscape, and thus began to intrude into most of the core support groups of existing political parties.

All through its history, the Progress Party has contributed to an increased political polarization. It has effectively turned groups in Norwegian society against each other, and it has always played the immigration card in election campaigns, in a cynical and calculating way. There is no doubt that it is exactly on immigration policies that the Progress Party has had the most influence on other political parties, including the Conservatives and Labour. There has never been a big gap between the anti-immigration policy of the Progress Party and that of the Labour Party. The latter has more or less consistently followed the Progress Party's lead, just a few steps behind. The big difference is at the rhetorical level, where the Labour Party tries to soften its message while the Progress Party openly represents the hard-liners; the actual political differences are minor.

Indeed, while the Norwegian Progress Party has taken its largest share of voters from the Conservative Party, in terms of its social basis it is more like the Labour Party. According to the election survey of 2013, the Progress Party electorate consisted of 61% men and 39% women. 22% were workers, as opposed to 14% in the Labour Party. The biggest difference between those two parties, in terms of social basis, is that while the largest group of supporters of the Labour Party is public sector employees, for the Progress Party it is private sector employees—both around 40%. The modernization and the “cleaning up” of the party to prepare for government has also led to a huge increase of voters with higher education—from 14% in 2001 to 27% in 2013. In addition, the party has been able to mobilize a high number of non-voters. Some commentators insist that the

party is being “normalized,” and there is no doubt, compared to earlier days, that it has scaled down some of its most extreme policies. However, the very harsh anti-immigration rhetoric from some in the populist camp is still a big political challenge, as well as a problem in its relations to other parties.

The Progress Party both promotes and exploits one of the big socio-cultural changes in Norwegian society, namely, the new axis of conflict. This is now centered on values and identity, as opposed to the previous economic or redistributive axis. The shift of axis has great influence on the relationship between the Progress Party and the Labour Party. Many of Labour’s voters are on the left of the redistributive axis, but on the right of the identity one. If the latter is viewed as more important than the former, the Progress Party can be seen as an alternative. Or, maybe more correctly, if the Labour Party is no longer able to come up with an interest-based policy—a class policy that addresses the insecurity, social decline, and loss of power and influence at the workplaces that people experiences in their daily lives—but rather lets itself be drawn into a moralistic discussion on immigration with the Progress Party, and on that party’s terms, then the case seems lost. Large groups of workers will continue to be pushed into the hands of the far right, without a left which can understand that the class compromise has come to an end; which is able to prioritize the social struggle; which can come up with visions, programs, and policies that create enthusiasm and optimism; which is willing to confront and mobilize against its adversaries. And indeed, much suggests that a solution to the “far right problem” primarily has to be found on the left. ■

AUSTRIA

The Normalization of Right-Wing Populism

SEBASTIAN REINFELDT

Since 1986, Austria has been the production site of a political machinery that manufactures opposition, domestic and international enemies, and fragmented interpretations of society on a daily basis. Using the FPÖ (the Freedom Party of Austria) under its late leader Jörg Haider as its prototype, this political machinery generated enough voter support in 2000 to catapult the far-right populist party into its first term in office as part of a coalition government. Now, in December 2017, we have seen the FPÖ return to power, securing a number of ministries as well as the post of the vice-chancellor.

In the years between, however, something remarkable has occurred: The conservative ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) leader and new chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, has successfully adopted many of the FPÖ's methods and integrated them into his own election campaign. The October 2017 elections have thus given rise to a new political formation: a government consisting of two right-wing populist parties.

However, this new government will hardly be able to build on the experiences of its first coalition, which brought the two parties together from 2000 to 2005. For this earlier coalition emerged as the result of an unexpected maneuver at the negotiation stage that pushed aside the election's winning party, the SPÖ (Austria's Social Democratic Party). By contrast, in 2017 we witnessed a planned and well-prepared takeover of power. Moreover, the coalition in 2000 had virtually no time to prepare as its cooperation with the far-right FPÖ was met with initial sanctions by the EU that cornered it for months, leaving little room for anything other than defensive politics.

This time, though, both parties have prepared well for their return to power. Especially in the run-up to the elections, many Austrians saw a black-blue coalition as the only alternative to the ruling grand coalition between SPÖ and ÖVP. With a combined 58% of votes cast in its favor, the new government now has a comfortable majority in parliament and strong public backing. This explains why extra-parliamentary protests against the black-blue government have so far been fairly muted.

Planned Well in Advance

Coordinating their election campaigns helped both parties pave the way for this new coalition, but support for a black-blue partnership is also partly due to the politics of the previous government. The grand coalition had repeatedly given in to FPÖ and ÖVP demands, even adjusting government decisions and draft legislation from the Council of Ministers, all of which helped to bring typically far-right issues to the mainstream. Right-wing policies are now considered “normal,” a perception that the new government can now capitalize on.

The FPÖ itself is neither a newcomer nor a political ephemeron. The party's performance in elections over the past thirty years has been impressive. Voter support has grown steadily, from 9.7% in 1986 (the year Jörg Haider took charge of the FPÖ) to 26.9% in 1999. Following its spell in office from 2000 to 2005, popular backing dipped briefly, but recovered very quickly. Before the run-up to the elections in October 2017, support for the FPÖ was at 30%—until Sebastian Kurz, foreign minister and head of the ÖVP, also took to the political stage with his own bag of right-wing populist tricks. Kurz won 31.5% of votes, which has now made him chancellor of a conservative and far-right coalition government.

But even back in 1986 when right-wing populism in Austria was just on the rise, the two right-of-center parties, the ÖVP and FPÖ, were able to secure 51% of votes after only a short election campaign. Still, support for the far right reached an all-time high in the history of the Second Republic in the October 2017 election, when these parties took over a combined 58% of the vote.

While the FPÖ's right-wing populism emerged over the course of its emancipation from the German nationalist “Third Camp” with Jörg Haider at the helm, the ÖVP's approach towards populism in its struggle for political power has been much more strategic. Before I analyze whether or how this “strategic populism”

also translates into a “populist” style of government, I want to take a closer look at the social basis that has supported the rise of the FPÖ.

The Social Basis of Right-Wing Populism

The FPÖ had already secured a resounding success for itself in 2016 when its candidate, Norbert Hofer, won the presidential elections after just two rounds, taking almost half of all votes. Post-election polls showed that support for the far-right candidate among workers—i.e., people with a regular employment status that is subject to social insurance contributions—was as high as 85%. In the subsequent national council elections in 2017, the FPÖ came in first, winning 59% of the vote among workers, while the social democrats (SPÖ) were left to pick up only 19% and the ÖVP 15%. Pollsters from the SORA Research Institute concluded in their analysis that the FPÖ had been particularly good at gauging sentiments among this voter group and using them to their advantage, with over 80% of workers stating they were not content with the federal government’s work, and 54% saying they felt Austria was a “somewhat unjust” country.

Still, the FPÖ is not a “proletarian party.” Most of its officials have upper-middle-class backgrounds; many were socialized, and remain organized, in fraternities. This means the party is effectively driven by people cultivating their right-leaning and right-wing convictions. These German nationalist fraternities, which continue to attract public criticism, serve as the FPÖ’s recruitment pool for filling political key positions in the ministries.

Despite the broad backing it has found among workers, the majority of FPÖ voters are in fact part of the new middle class. The party reaches out above all to a clientele that can be referred to as the lower middle class—a milieu that comprises around 25% of the Austrian population. In social terms, it encompasses the traditional mainstream of society: People with secondary education, medium-income groups, many low- and mid-level white-collar workers and civil servants, as well as self-employed people with small- to medium-sized businesses. These people believe they are facing downward mobility and are afraid of losing their livelihood. In their belief that they are playing by the rules in the game of life—attending school, getting an education, finding employment, pursuing a middle-grade career—they end up blaming “the others” for their fears. The FPÖ in turn is perpetually rallying against “others,” against “foreigners”—and, in the same breath, against “them at the top.”

By the mid-1980s, the grand coalition's power apparatus had effectively neutralized any form of resistance and opposition against right-wing populism by means of a circuitous logic that enabled the system to rein in any criticism. This allowed the political caste, which in Austria consists mainly of SPÖ and ÖVP members, to regularly dodge effective democratic control. Instead, it demanded active political subjection, and used political avowal as its means of sanctioning all forms of belonging. And so, through the Austrian social partnership system (comprising the Chamber of Labor and the Economic Chamber), political power and subjugation now reaches all the way down into the microphysics of power; into community gardens, firms, and offices. This explains, at least in part, why the independent and radical left in Austria has remained comparatively weak and politically insignificant to this day.

Pawns of the Far Right

The FPÖ in contrast—and this is a crucial factor behind its success at the polls—was already making an impact before it came into government because it was able to present itself as an alternative to this “system” and shape the mainstream political agenda with its issues. Under increasing pressure from the FPÖ, the previous SPÖ/ÖVP government responded by adopting authoritarian, restrictive, and repressive measures, especially in the area of its social and refugee policies—that were essentially based on FPÖ demands. It decided, for instance, to tighten its asylum laws to give authorities the power to detain asylum seekers in so-called registration centers. The old government also changed the “security laws,” making it possible to restrict civil liberties. It introduced a ban on face coverings in public spaces, which was touted as a “burqa ban,” although so far it has only affected scarf-wearing bikers and pedestrians, and people in advertising costumes. On the one hand, this law is a textbook example of a purely symbolic politics—a piece of legislation that has no impact and costs nothing. On the other hand, this “burqa ban” effectively realized one of the central demands put forward by the oppositional Freedom Party of Austria.

Several federal states have also made the state-provided minimum income more difficult to access. Political moves such as these are warmly applauded by the tabloids, a section of the population—and of course the FPÖ. For measures such as these are at the heart of its politics; after all, the FPÖ (and in its footsteps

the ÖVP) has been campaigning for years to get rid of guaranteed minimum benefits, or what it sees as the social security blanket.

The Crisis of Fordism and Its Jetsam

The background to these political disruptions is shaped above all by the crisis of Fordism. Neoliberalism's solutions to the crisis first reframed—and then transformed—the relations of production to fit its mantras of self-responsibility, team work, liberty, flexibility, and entrepreneurial spirit. New power relations are now slowly emerging, gaining acceptance, and being incorporated.

These developments have put Austria and other countries on a path that excludes an increasing number of people from the very welfare system that used to provide them with a social safety net, forcing them instead to join the great scramble for increasingly rare full-time jobs and their social security benefits. The number of one-person businesses has risen sharply, for instance. Statistics compiled by the Austrian Economic Chamber currently list 305,000 such businesses with over 500,000 employees, most of which are active in the construction, services, commerce, and consulting sectors.

Against this background we can observe the machinery of right-wing populist discourse spread throughout the country, absorbing criticism and discontent. But while its rhetoric may sound just as neoliberal as the previous governments, it simultaneously condemns the political nepotism that gives lazy politicians access to empty political posts which they only use for their own gains. And it uses the same clamor with which it opposes “them at the top” to turn against socially vulnerable groups and refugees. In such moments, the self-declared “homeland party” assumes a social guise, such as when it calls on politics to set aside “Our money for our people.”

And yet, the party is reducing the circle of those who are to have access to social welfare, which in turn has only helped to further fuel the neoliberal “race of all against all.” This helps us to identify a strategy that can be referred to as “populist antipopulism,” which simultaneously laments and exacerbates “the breakdown of society”—a strategy not only embraced by the FPÖ's leader, H.-C. Strache, but also by the new chancellor and head of the ÖVP, Sebastian Kurz. This shows that the neoliberal project has entered its authoritarian, far-right, and “post-political” phase.

The ÖVP's March to the Right

Sebastian Kurz's party started out with an interesting definition of its target group: Mobilizing the periphery against the center, and the rural areas and small town against the capital, it has been drawing up a geopolitical front, especially in the way it addresses the treatment of refugees. This front line establishes a kind of screen narrative that serves to mask the classically neoliberal austerity program envisioned by the ÖVP.

This is how Kurz entered the election arena. In the early months of 2017, broad segments of the population were dissatisfied with the government that he, as foreign minister, was also part of. The 31-year-old then accomplished a remarkable feat, launching an oppositional discourse against his own government while managing to keep his reputation intact all the way through to October 2017. In Austria's political imaginary there were therefore two parties running for parliament: the FPÖ, which was the actual opposition in parliament, and the ÖVP, which, after many years in government, decided to rebrand itself during the election campaign. The once-black ÖVP then re-emerged as the turquoise "Movement for Sebastian Kurz," with refugee policy as its signature issue. It primarily set out to destroy the "welcome culture" that had proliferated across Austria in 2015 and displace it with authoritarian legislation. Mr. Kurz used his position as foreign minister to position himself as the defender of the nation's borders—although Austria, an EU member, in fact has no EU borders to protect.

Far-Right Populists in Government

The first black-blue coalition lasted five years, from 2000 to 2005 (with Jörg Haider's newly-created "Alliance for the Future of Austria" (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich) assuming responsibility for government affairs in the last months while the FPÖ went into opposition). This coalition was driven by four objectives: to uphold traditions, radicalize policy areas, strengthen emerging trends, and aim for political transformation.

Yet despite its promise of a fresh approach to governing Austria (its government program bore the sub-heading "Österreich neu regieren"), the coalition's five years in power turned out to be remarkably consistent with the work of earlier administrations, both in style and in content. The only change it did make was in the way it set about pursuing its policies. Instead of building on a set of

common social values, as past governments had done, it set the stage for its own form of large-scale, mass-media-driven conflict management. This shift especially affected the social partnership system, the essence of which has nevertheless survived, and which remains key to ensuring Austria's unique form of social peace and stability. In a departure from the previous SPÖ-ÖVP government, the new administration has also rewritten substantial parts of Austria's fiscal, pension, and family policies, introducing measures that effectively amount to a bottom-up redistribution of taxpayers' contributions. The coalition has moreover sought to reinforce traditional family roles by paying parents a childcare allowance of EUR 400 if they choose to raise their children up to age three at home.

However, its promise not to take on new public debt seems, especially with the benefit of hindsight, to have been mere propaganda. Still, in other policy areas the coalition has embraced trends that had been felt earlier on—although the ways in which these policies tie in with the previous government's work tend to be masked by its populist rhetoric. One of these past trends has been the privatization of state-owned businesses, which erupted into one of the largest corruption scandals in the Second Republic. It is for this reason that today, criminal courts and other institutions are still investigating the impact of the first ÖVP-FPÖ government. In the dock are ÖVP and FPÖ politicians, as well as top-level executives and financial lobbyists. Large public contracts (including Austria's order for Eurofighter jets, or the privatization of the state-owned real-estate company Buwog between 2002 and 2004) have also given rise to serious allegations of corruption that are still waiting to be settled in court.

The idiosyncratic social partnership, which until now has not been subjected to reform, was a major reason why the 2008 economic crisis only had a relatively mild impact on Austria. The economic data shows signs of temporary dips, but the economy was spared the severe disruptions that hit South and Southeast Asia, for instance. While unemployment in Austria stood at 6% in 2016 (reaching its peak in the observation period between 1995 and 2016), it fell to a low again in 2017, i.e., in parallel with the run-up to the elections. With companies' order books currently full, the country is making a strong return to economic growth.

The new ÖVP-FPÖ government is thus assuming power in an economic situation that has not been this positive in a long time. The acceptance of right-wing populist discourse has therefore been fueled less by widespread impoverishment than by a general feeling of wanting to defend, and preserve, the status quo. What people want to see preserved is their level of prosperity and their reliable welfare system, both of which—and the assessments are generally correct

here—are now at risk. The population appears to be bracing for dramatic shifts that could affect the labor market in particular.

Shifting responsibility—and the blame—for the dismantling of the welfare state onto refugees and migrants has thus been the biggest success of the black-blue discourse machinery, which processes initially understandable negative expectations for the future and transforms them into ideological constructs. While refugee policy certainly dominated the election campaign, it is not by chance that the government has chosen to sideline this topic in its first months in office (although public appearances such as Mr. Kurz's meeting with Hungary's President Victor Orbán in late January 2018, in which they pledged to coordinate their countries' responses to the refugee crisis, have attracted front-page coverage). Contrary to its announcements, the government in fact added to the occupation shortage list, which details manual trades in need of qualified workers, giving as many as 150,000 people from so-called third countries (i.e., non-EU-member countries) the possibility to legally seek work in Austria. Government, it seems, cannot be built on ideological constructs alone.

Since the black-blue government took power in December 2017, political debates have been haunted by the long specter of national socialism. The FPÖ's above-mentioned pool of German nationalist fraternity members, teeming with recruits who tend to identify with national socialist ideology, has come to dominate the public debate. Udo Landbauer, the FPÖ's lead candidate in Lower Austria, was forced to resign from his political posts shortly after elections for the Landtag (state parliament) because he was found to have authorized the publication of a songbook containing openly anti-Semitic and deeply racist lyrics for a fraternity called "Germania." Similar scandals are only waiting to happen.

Backed, however, by a stable majority both in and outside of parliament, the new governing partners appear to be preparing for more than one term in office.

For now, the only source to help us make sense of their political plans is their policy program. And compared with the course the first right-wing government embarked on between 2000 and 2005, this program seems to have reset the compass. Unlike then, it has announced changes to social and labor-market policies that are firmly neoliberal. Yet this is less a turn in direction than a straightforward continuation—and escalation—of the policies carried out by the previous SPÖ-ÖVP government. Its plans include the introduction of a kind of "Austrian Hartz IV" to create a pool of browbeaten job seekers to fill low-paying jobs. People who have exhausted their entitlement to unemployment benefits are currently eligible to claim unemployment assistance, which allows them to

maintain a decent standard of living. But the government now wants to eliminate unemployment assistance, which would leave long-term unemployed people only able to claim needs-based benefits (“guaranteed minimum resources”). Entitlement, however, requires people to give up their car and deplete their savings down to EUR 4,000. The administration also wants to cut guaranteed minimum resources after a number of Austrian states introduced changes that limit families’ claims to EUR 1,500 in monthly benefits. These plans will affect guaranteed minimum resources for recognized asylum seekers as well, which are to be reduced to EUR 365 (plus an EUR 155 “integration bonus”) per month, and in future could be provided in kind rather than in cash.

The coalition also seeks to increase working hours, which under certain conditions would allow employers to raise the limit to 12 hours per day and 60 hours per week (up from the current 10 hours per day and 48 hours per week). “Safety” is a major issue in the coalition agreement, mentioned over one hundred times, but mainly to justify surveillance and social control measures across all areas of life. It refers therefore not to social safety nets, but to public safety, which is used as a *pars pro toto*.

Opposition to these plans has been faint, concentrating primarily on highlighting the FPÖ’s affinity with the ideologemes of national socialism. This is an important move, but it will hardly be enough to throw the government off course, let alone out of office. Extreme positions of this kind are only able to thrive because they are supported by a much broader and increasingly socially accepted far-right populism that masks the government’s neoliberal agenda and its social cutbacks, which affect all but the richest segments of society. Resistance to the presumable core of this government’s project—its social and labor market policies flanked by authoritarian domestic and security policies—remains minimal outside of established political channels. But the central question of how stable and permanent this government will ultimately be hinges precisely on this political constellation. And given the government’s broad public backing, the prospects for the future are quite dim. ■

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