



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conference on

The rise of the extreme right and the future of liberal democracy in Europe

*9-10 December 2011
Cercle-Cité, Luxembourg*

Introduction

The Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies (LIEIS) convened a conference on 'The rise of the extreme right and the future of liberal democracy in Europe' on 9-10 December 2011 in Luxembourg. Approximately 30 participants from across Europe debated in the course of six sessions the origins and consequences of the rise of far-right politics as well as the crisis facing different liberal democratic models.

This event is part of a series of seminars which bring together scholars from different academic disciplines and intellectual traditions to discuss pressing problems that affect the whole of Europe. In recent years, the LIEIS has organised workshops and colloquia on religious and ethnic conflicts and the treatment of the Roma.

In his introductory remarks, Armand Clesse, director of the LIEIS, said that the whole of Europe is seeing the rise of the extreme right and the spread of far-right ideas that are affecting official policies and also popular mentalities. It seems that this is part of a long, historical evolution that can be traced to the nineteenth century. It also appears that the post-1945 era never properly addressed this legacy, as evinced by the lack of 'de-nazification' in Germany and 'de-vichyisation' in France. Moreover, there is no general liberal foundation of this system that we call democracy in Europe. Democracy can be compatible with populism, far-right extremism and worse. The presence of strong extreme-right parties in most countries of Europe is surely correlated with rising levels of xenophobia and even racism.

Perhaps most worrying is the tendency for extreme right rhetoric to become mainstream: far-right ideas are absorbed by other parties, even on the left, as indicated by the discourse on '*l'insécurité*' in France and the progressive '*dérive sécuritaire*'. At the same time, it seems that the extreme right is beset by numerous internal tensions and contradictions, with most

movements being anti-European and opposed to multiculturalism while others support a form of European supremacism and propagate Islamophobia but not always general xenophobia.

At the end of his introduction, A. Clesse also emphasised the nature and the objective of the conference: first, to have a lively and critical exchange of ideas and, second, to come up with new concepts that can provide a more objective analysis and inform alternative policies.

The discussions were divided into six sessions: first, the present situation – is the extreme right on the rise? Second, what kind of challenge, if any, does right-wing extremism pose for liberal democracy? Third, what are the main reasons for the success of the extreme right and is liberal democracy in crisis? Fourth, how does – and how should – liberal democracy respond? Fifth, is liberal democracy a model for the 21st century? Sixth, what policy recommendations and conclusions can be formulated?

I. The present situation – Is the extreme right on the rise?

The first session sought to provide an analysis of the present situation and a candid assessment of whether the extreme right is on the rise. A number of speakers examined the evolution of far-right parties and movements in different European countries.

In his presentation, Jean-Yves Camus argued that the changes made by Marine Le Pen since taking over from her father as the leader of the *Front National* (FN) have been largely cosmetic. She has distanced herself from his anti-Semitism and his remarks about the Nazi occupation of France. Instead, the main targets of her attacks are Muslim migrants and the EU elites. This reflects a certain generational change but the fundamental political platform remains the same. In terms of popular support, the FN has established itself as France's third strongest political force, with about 15% in the 1995 presidential and 16.9% in 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen beat the then Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin to the second round. While his result in 2007 was lower, the polls indicate that about 17% will cast their vote for Marine Le Pen in 2012. It looks as if she will do better than her father in 2002 and there is a chance she'll make the second round. What will happen between the presidential vote in April/May and the parliament elections in June 2012? It seems clear that Le Pen wants nothing more than for Nicolas Sarkozy to lose. If that happens, the conservative right will approach the FN – at least at the local level. Parts of Sarkozy's own party – the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) – will say that they lost the elections because they failed to reach an agreement with the far right. For this and other reasons, the FN will remain a significant movement. The key question is whether the party will be able to break the republican pact and join forces with the mainstream right.

Matthew Goodwin examined the situation in the UK and suggested that the recent evolution is very interesting. The British National Party (BNP) polled relatively well in the most recent European and local elections (2009 and 2011), and it achieved much better results in the 2010 general election in parts of London than had been anticipated. The split that has been developing since then is not about ideology but about fraud. Moreover, the far-right grassroots movement has gained momentum over the past year and a half or so. In fact, there is a faction of well-organised people trying to occupy the ground that has been apparently vacated by the BNP. That includes the English Defence League (EDL). In terms of the profile of voters, there is a very strong overlap in the electorate between more established parties like the BNP and more grassroots movements like the EDL but until now neither any group nor any figure seems

capable of exploiting this potential. Montserrat Guibernau added that with the Tories in power, immigration policy is changing but the Conservative Party, so far, has failed to reclaim the symbols used by the far right. Besides the electoral system that favours large parties, the UK also differs from other European countries in that no extreme right party is comparable with the FN, Italian post-fascists or the Austrian FPÖ.

According to Larry Siedentop, one core feature is the sheer fluidity of opinions among the supporters, activists and voters on the far right. This raises questions about the notion of ‘extreme right’ and its origins in the interwar period, especially the twin forces of nationalism and anti-liberalism. At the same time, it is hard to see how nationalism differentiates the far right from other parties or movements. Nor is it so clear that leading extreme right figures such as Geert Wilders are illiberal. After all, they portray themselves as the last bastion of Enlightenment values against the alleged intolerance of the elites and the medieval thinking of Muslim migrants. J.-Y. Camus disagreed with this point, contending that the FN may no longer be perceived as extreme right but that at its core it is deeply illiberal. On the one hand, Marine Le Pen is moving the party to the centre right but on the other hand she wants the state to get almost total control of the economy.

Sarah de Lange suggested that the Dutch believed for a long time that they were immune to the extreme right. That changed with Pim Fortuyn who was polling 17% in 2002 but he was murdered even before the elections took place. His party then disintegrated amid infighting. Now Geert Wilders’ Party for Freedom – the PVV – is one of the leading right-wing parties in Europe. Currently it is supporting a minority government that consists of the conservative-liberal VVD party and the Christian-Democratic CDA. Without holding any cabinet posts, the PVV has an agreement with the governing parties on which policies it will endorse, granting Wilders substantial influence on government decisions and Dutch politics as a whole.

For Koen Abts, the Flemish case illustrates the rise and fall of the extreme right. In 2004, the far right party *Vlaams Blok* (VB) amassed almost one quarter of votes but its support has been decreasing ever since. More recently, a new nationalist, but not extremist party – the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) – has entered the political fray, using a populist style and campaigning in favour of Flemish independence and against both crime and immigration. The VB was characterised by internal tension and some of its leading figures convicted for cases of discrimination. Debates about rival leaders and the direction of the party further undermined the VB’s credibility and led to the loss of its dominant framing as ethno-populist force. With higher credibility than the VB, the N-VA is capable of capturing broader political support and is becoming a democratic party alternative to the extremist right. The cordon sanitaire that was put in place by the other parties against the VB has condemned the extreme right in Flanders to permanent opposition and makes it looking irrelevant in the long term.

Marcel Lewandowsky remarked that, compared with other European countries, there is no strong extreme-right party in the whole of Germany. Since reunification, only some parts of the country have seen extreme right parties succeed regionally and locally. By contrast, the *Republikaner* have been in decline for many years, and no extreme right-wing party has emerged nationwide. The reasons that explain this puzzle include organisational weakness and a robust media discourse against fascist thinking. This, coupled with a number of populist voices in the mainstream parties, seems to reduce the ‘demand’ for a new party. The prominent member of the Social Democrats Thilo Sarrazin broke a taboo by speaking out in such strong terms against

immigration in general and Muslims in particular. It seems that there might be as much as 25% of support for a party that would represent his widely shared views.

In his intervention, Florian Hartleb argued that Austria is a very interesting and instructive case because of the prototype of party leader. Jörg Haider transformed the FPÖ into a right-wing populist party and his success destroyed the old consensus party system dominated by the social-democratic SPÖ and the conservative ÖVP. Grand coalitions tend to be unpopular and end in scandals, so a comeback of the FPÖ under its current leader Heinz-Christian Strache is very probable. He is a copy of Haider – young, clever, charismatic and an effective campaigner. Unless there is a reversal in trends, the FPÖ looks to come a close second (25-29%) in the next elections, just behind the SPÖ (30%). If so, then Strache will be in government and most likely form a coalition with the ÖVP. In some sense, that would mark a certain kind of reunification of the two right-wing parties but the popularity of the FPÖ (especially among young people aged 25-30) is in large part by default – as the ‘mainstream’ parties have neither vision nor strategy. More fundamentally, Austria did not properly address its Nazi past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) or undergo a full ‘de-nazification’ after 1945.

Jozsef Bayer analysed the contemporary situation in Hungary and reported that the far-right party Jobbik has about 11,000 activists and received about 20% of the vote in recent surveys – 17% at the most recent elections. For people aged up to 30-35, support is as high as 40%. What explains this success? Most of all, it is ‘bread-and-butter’ issues and everyday concerns such as employment, income, housing, education and welfare. Another important reason is Jobbik’s fight against political corruption and the fact that Gabor Vona is a charismatic leader who has mobilised many young activists. Moreover, Jobbik advocates a strong state, with a key role in the national economy, seeking to reverse the de-industrialisation of the 1990s and 2000s. Its strong anti-immigration and anti-Roma stance is also popular, because of the high rate of unemployment, which is especially high among the Roma population. The former bipolarism of left versus right has been undermined by Jobbik and other anti-ideological parties. The mainstream party Fidesz has in the meantime lost so many votes that it might not be able to govern without Jobbik after the next election (a situation similar to Austria during the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition). F. Hartleb contended that the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is still respected among the European People’s Party’s (EPP) leaders (as evinced by his participation in the EPP meeting in Marseille ahead of the European Council) and that Fidesz rejects the label of being a far-right party.

These presentations were followed by a short discussion about liberalism. In relation to L. Siedentop’s remarks, Mark Almond spoke of the rise of discredited liberalism. Each time when an economic crisis hits Europe, people see the model for what it is – a bubble cycle of boom, bust and deflation. In the 1920s and 1930s, the policy of deflation brought about the decline of liberals and the rise of extremists. The same may happen in the wake of the 2008-09 recession, as the technocratic leaders of Greece and Italy are implementing the deflationary politics of austerity that is championed by the centre right. In Britain and Ireland, there is growing discontent with Polish, Baltic and other East European mass immigration but so far not with Pakistani or other extra-European migrants. Paradoxically, Gianfranco Fini, a former defender of Mussolini’s anti-Semitism, appears to be a supporter of Ariel Sharon and contemporary Zionism.

For S. de Lange, the emphasis on liberal values by far-right movements makes a cooperation with mainstream parties possible (e.g. in Denmark and the Netherlands), but the latter would get a bad reputation if they cooperated with the extreme right. Guy Kirsch wondered what exactly a

right-wing party is. If social democrats are xenophobic, nationalist and even racist, then what is the right? Finally, Eric Weaver pointed out that it is somewhat ironic to have a series of country reports on Europe. This shows that the project of creating a European Union or identity has clearly not yet succeeded at all. At the same time, the extreme right from different European countries will never unite, so for now Europe can be safe in the knowledge that most far-right parties and movements won't seize power in the near future.

II. Right-wing extremism as a challenge for liberal democracy?

The second session turned to the question of what kind of challenge, if any, right-wing extremism poses for liberal democracy. A number of participants argued about the meaning of liberal democracy and discussed the nature of the challenge posed by far-right politics.

J.-Y. Camus reported the results of a survey on populism (both left- and right-wing) following the 2002 presidential elections when the FN candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the second round. Two interesting findings can be highlighted. First of all, there is a growing disconnect of the elites from the populace. Second, there are three key differences between extreme left- and right-wing populism. The extreme left views political parties as a key mechanism to change countries, whereas the extreme right relies more on movements. There is also an extreme left-wing commitment to the parliamentary system that represents the people. By contrast, the right has so far championed direct 'democracy' linked to a leader. The extreme right is characterised by ethno-centrism (not necessarily racism or anti-Semitism) and by mixo-phobia (Taguieff). Similarly, K. Abts suggested that ethno-populism is true in a number of countries: the antagonism between ethnic groups, the centrality of the 'people' and the importance of the 'other' (defined in ethnic or even racial terms).

In his remarks, E. Weaver asked what exactly the centre right is. In Hungary, the centre right is statist and socialist, nationalising banks and industries. As such, the party Fidesz is not fascist, but authoritarian, which is another characteristic of the extreme right. Yet at the same time, authoritarianism can also apply to the extreme left. So it is hard to generalise about what kind of specific challenge the far-right poses to liberal democracy. F. Hartleb agreed and added that the left-right dichotomy is hard to maintain in the current situation. For example, the right and the left are divided on issues such as religion but these differences also apply to the centre right such as the Christian Democrats and the Conservatives who are variously more or less religious but are united in their support for traditions and institutions. Likewise, populism and cognate phenomena characterise both the far left and the far right. Allied to this is a series of features like anti-elitism, a low regard for institutions and a lack of clear, coherent ideology. As for extremism of the left or the right, its mark is a strong(er) ideology such as fascism, racism or national-socialism.

Adrian Pabst argued that the rise of extremism on both the left and the right in Europe is largely the result of the triumph of liberal centrism. Over the past 40 years or so, the left has won the social-cultural contest and the right the economic-political contest. But far from leading to 'cultural wars' well-known of the USA, both the left and the right have in fact espoused a form of liberalism or even libertarianism that focuses on individual choice in the marketplace whose anarchic effects are policed by the central state. Since the 1990s, the social-cultural liberalism of the left and the political-economic liberalism of the right have converged to produce a form of post-ideological, centrist pragmatism that is best represented by the politics of the 'third way'. In

reality, this centrism masks the neo-liberal ideology that fuses the strong state with the free market and views the citizens as reflexive, negatively choosing consumers who are unconstrained by the bonds of family, tradition and locality. As such, the triumph of liberalism has turned citizens into clients and spectators who do not participate in politics through membership in parties or other organisations but instead see it politics as an extension of the culture and entertainment industry that is obsessed with celebrity, PR and spin. In this process, liberal democracy has mutated from a series of universal principles of liberality into an ideological consensus that is intolerant, illiberal and ultimately undemocratic. All this has undermined a genuine contest of ideas and policies, thereby radicalising the extremes that reject the prevailing liberal creed.

M. Guibernau concurred that in the current crisis facing the European Union we are maybe going to be told soon that there is only one course of action. So the distinction between the left and the right in Europe will be blurred. This would certainly lead to a return of authoritarian methods of government, not fascism but rather certain modes of governance. At the same time, there is a shift towards the right. The movements of the far right are anti-establishment, defend some form of national preference, advocate ethno-pluralism (i.e. they see cultural diversity as valuable but oppose hybridisation) and call for anti-immigration (not all forms of immigration but generally anti-Islam).

In his remarks, M. Almond drew the distinction between those who play the parliamentary game and those that want ultimately to abolish it, i.e. those who purport to represent the people even if the people don't know who represents them. To speak about the extremes presupposes that we know what is 'in between', but the victory of liberalism has blurred the boundaries. Moreover, it is no exaggeration to suggest that there is a parallel between the 'hard' totalitarianism of Soviet communism and the 'soft' totalitarianism of the neo-liberal settlement. This has engendered an unprecedented level of popular apathy that is less due to the satisfaction of wants than it is due to disillusionment, alienation and the 'death of the habitual'. Thilo Sarrazin encapsulates the convergence of left and right. So far Europe has not witnessed the rise of extreme leftwing populism, but even so figures like Hungary's Victor Orban are adopting a series of leftwing populist policies. In the 1980s, middle-aged men lost their employment as a result of Thatcher's neo-liberal reforms, whereas now it is predominantly the youth. For the young generation out of work and utterly alienated from politics, the 'opium of the people' is in fact opium!

Similarly, Christopher Coker argued that fascism was a form of reactionary modernism, using the tools and methods of modern ideology but not buying into the displacement and alienation that characterise modernity. That is why the contemporary extreme right exhibits a profound ambivalence vis-à-vis the modern age. The fascism of the 1920s and 1930s sought salvation. As such, it was a 'political religion'. Today, certain forms of fascism focus on the question of manliness that seems to be under threat from the forces of modern feminism and 'social progress' such as equality legislation. For example, the Promise Keepers and Islam represent a reaction against the 'effeminisation' of society (as it was also the case in the 1920s and 1930s). Moreover, there is no contradiction between authoritarianism and democracy. After all, most so-called mature democracies are very young. Britain has had a democratic system for merely 80 years. Today, liberal democracies suffer from the consequences of the ongoing financial crisis. They can no longer deliver on the promise of prosperity and are reduced to the management of risk in the hope of providing a modicum of economic security. Technocracy, which is the ultimate abdication of real politics, is not just true of Greece and Italy but has in reality spread

across the rest of the West. The loss of electoral politics and participation has empowered a vast and growing array of non-elected actors such as central banks, welfare agencies, lawyers, accountants, managers, etc.

Miroslav Mareš defined extremism as anti-constitutional and anti-democratic. Rightwing extremists are opposed to equality and therefore try to institutionalise inequality, whereas left-wing extremists defend equality and thus try to erase all forms of difference. Beyond the better known extremes, there are also some marginal movements such as royalists or national-conservatives in France as well as neo-Nazi parties such as the NPD in Germany or former neo-Fascist party *Alternativa sociale* led by the grand-daughter of Mussolini. In particular, the Eastern parts of Europe are seeing the rise of some very successful irredentist movements (e.g. Slovenia), paramilitary units/movements (e.g. Hungary, Serbia, Czech Republic and Russia) and a greater focus around sentiments such as homophobia whereas in the West Islamophobia is the dominant feature. Since the 1980s, the extreme right terrorism has been linked mainly with the neo-Nazi part of the extreme right spectrum. The new ideological, strategic and tactical impulse originating from A. Breivik is yet to find a complex response.

According to Nicolas Lebourg, the new radical right is not a ‘political religion’. It defends a variant of populism and the idea of ethnos-demos but it is not the same as statist fascism. Instead, it is focused on social and societal questions. This is also a fundamental ideological change, from a statist ideology to social questions, as evinced by a new party/movement in Catalonia. This point was in some sense reinforced by Lila Caballero who linked the shift from state to society to a move towards certain centre-right positions (populism, apathy and alienation). As such, populism can be seen as a parasite within democracy that undermines the foundation of liberal politics.

Alexis Crow took a different line, arguing that one key difference between Europe and the USA is indeed statism. The Tea Party movement is anti-government and seeks to work through religious associations, whereas most extreme-right movements in Europe are statist or view political parties as key, but not religious associations. Connected with this is the importance of ‘culture wars’ in the USA opposing liberals to conservatives. By contrast, on ‘God, guns and gays’ Europe is not at all characterised by the same level or intensity of political confrontation.

According to Victor Weitzel, multiculturalism and the climate of tolerance are under threat across Europe. For example, Berlin schools are teaching Holocaust lessons in classrooms where pupils wear T-shirts with the ‘martyrs’ of Hamas and Hezbollah. A new authoritarianism is on the rise that combines populism with power in a very potent and dangerous mix.

In terms of the situation in the Baltic region, M. Almond insisted on the need to distinguish between Lithuania, on the one hand, and Latvia and Estonia, on the other hand. Lithuania has granted citizenship to all, including ethnic Russians. By contrast, Latvia and Estonia have restricted civic rights to ethnic Latvians and Estonians. So it seems that Russophobia, like anti-Communism, are both acceptable. There is a conflation of Russian-ness with the ‘evil empire’ of the USSR, all of which is reflected in remarks about Vladimir Putin. In short, these countries and their EU masters practice double standards: there are EU funds for certain monuments in the Baltic states that celebrate fascism or even national-socialism. Latvia has seen a huge wave of emigration towards Britain, Ireland and elsewhere in Western Europe but also immigration – including from rich Russians who buy Latvian/EU passports. Thus, one can suggest that “les

extrêmes se touchent”: the extremist far-right and the extremist far-left in Greece oppose the national government and the EU, which may also be true for movements in Bulgaria.

In conclusion of the second session, Herman van Gunsteren suggested that the conference discussion had so far forgotten elections. Definitions of what the far right is or what liberal democracy means are essentialist, whereas a focus on election is more nominalist. Election outcomes are sometimes, even very often, quite surprising and tell us more about a political system than abstract theories. L. Siedentop contended that the avoidance of elections is becoming a fine art in Europe, both at the national and the EU level.

III. Reasons for the success of the extreme right – Is liberal democracy in crisis?

In the first part of the third session, the discussions continued to focus on the challenge posed by the extreme right to liberal democracy. M. Goodwin suggested that it is not just economic grievances but also and predominantly questions of national identity and society that explain the rise of the far right and the crisis of liberal democracy, in particular the shift of focus from unskilled, middle-aged workers in the 1980s to young, skilled people who find themselves out of work. This creates a large pool from which the extreme right can recruit supporters.

L. Caballero explained that CounterPoint is a think-tank that is concerned with the cultural dimension of phenomena such as populism. Following on from M. Goodwin’s remarks, she said that there is a distinction between purely economic grievances and other motivations. This distinction goes some way towards explaining the differences in attitudes and voting behaviour. There is a loss of trust in people and institutions, which is more generalised among European populations. And then there are also more specific factors that shape the behaviour of those who support or are close to extremist movements. Mark Littler described the work of the think-tank Demos as focusing on political and social questions, with a number of recent projects investigating Islamic fundamentalism and the growth of populist politics in Europe. He outlined the findings of Demos’ recent pan-European study of populist groups, identifying that they have shown that the erosion of national identity and values – including the traditional, secular values of the European Enlightenment as well as those of Christianity – have influenced the growth of support for populist groups. Similarly, he identified that the loss of trust and confidence in government and in other people is also on the rise and that this accounts for some of the increase in support for populist movements. As F. Hartleb pointed out, the recent Demos study mentions that most supporters of extremist far-right are young and skilled workers. Most reports that focus on Western Europe do not show this dimension and thus fail to offer a comprehensive perspective.

In his intervention, M. Almond spoke about the far right in the Ukraine and Russia. A lot of the exuberant Ukrainian nationalism – in part supported by the West – has lost its zest. The incessant squabbling amongst the leaders of the ‘Orange Revolution’, coupled with relative stability under Victor Yanukovich as Prime Minister and now President – led to the end of reformist movement and seemed to quieten down nationalist agitation. On the whole, the break-up of the Soviet Union was fairly peaceful and accepted by the Russians. As such, the legacy of the Russian Empire and the post-Communist context shifted the focus away from the nation or ethnic composition towards territory and identity, with fears of separatism and territorial disintegration. More recently, United Russia and Just Russia have emerged and established themselves as elite

parties, whereas the so-called Liberal Democrats and the Communists retain a popular base and local membership. Putin is a nationalistic politician who remains very popular. Of course, there were many problems with the parliamentary elections on 4 December 2011 but what about Mikhail Saakashvili's score of 96% in Georgia? One could suggest that "sometimes the bad guys have a point".

In the South Caucasian context, it is worth saying that any pan-Turkic expansion to the East (Central Eurasia) has been thwarted by links between Eurasian countries and Russia. As Dostoyevsky said, to the West Russia was barbarian, to the East it was the bearer of civilisation. Likewise, secularism and democracy raise fundamental questions about Turkish identity, which is closely linked to the violent break-up of the Ottoman Empire. In this the Turks are not unlike Hungarians who also suffered during the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

M. Mareš suggested that there are various forms of nationalism within Hungary. The threat of foreigners and the presence of Roma are the main factors that shape extreme-right parties. Private security companies and their employees also often happen to be members of far-right extremist movements. Russia is seeing normal nationalism but also a much more aggressive militant scene with high rates of killings of immigrants and foreign students. Paradoxically, these national-socialist movements and skin-heads use the swastika that was so hated during the Nazi invasion and occupation of the USSR and the Soviet struggle against fascism.

Another issue that was raised by E. Weaver was that of border issues, which are not settled on the Balkans, including in Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo. Croatia has issues with Bosnia, so besides Cyprus, Croatia will be a full EU member-state with unresolved territorial disputes.

F. Hartleb remarked that after recent elections, two new parties have entered parliament or government in European countries. First, the so-called 'True Fins', who compared with the *Front National* or *Vlaams Belang* are not racist but Eurosceptic. Second, the Danish social-democrats have formed a minority government that is supported by populists. Minority governments are very comfortable for populist parties granting them influence in some policy fields while being able to reject responsibility for other government policies. How dangerous are extremists? Anders Breivik was a member of a populist party but left it because he considered it to be too moderate.

In the discussion that concluded the third session, a number of points were made. First of all, is Europe seeing a rise in racism today? It seems that one of the founding members of Fidesz has called for pogroms (J.-Y. Camus; A. Clesse). Second, what about the tension between the freedom of expression, on the one hand, and limits to the free speech of extremists, on the other hand? (J. Bayer; M. Almond; E. Weaver). Third, we cannot assume liberal democracy in many European countries. What does the rise of the extreme right reveal about liberal democratic systems? There is thus a potential contradiction between democracy and liberalism. Many movements are democratic but illiberal. As such, democracy is just a set of institutions and elections. Immanuel Kant himself recognised that democracies can be aggressive. Thus, the value of democracy is threefold: instrumental value (John Dewey's 'cash value of ideas'); existential value (e.g. the best form of government); absolutist value: being democratic in relation to human dignity (when people are unemployed or, worse, unemployable), as C. Coker argued.

IV. How could and should liberal democracy respond?

In his introductory presentation, L. Siedentop argued that the response from liberal democracies has been feeble and, worse, complicit. This is evinced by the EU's reaction to developments in Hungary. A number of challenges have to be addressed, and a greater openness with the demos is needed. There are at least five distinct areas of discontent. First of all, the process of European economic and political integration has affected not just national interests but also national identity. It has become increasingly difficult to cope with such transformations. Identity formation is complex and takes a long time, but European elites have been frivolous in assuming that European identity is simply added to national identity. Second, Europe and the rest of the West have seen a perversion of liberalism into an economic discourse and the predominance of utilitarianism. Linked to this is an inflation of individual rights and consumerism, i.e. an obsession with prosperity and the satisfaction of wants.

Third, behind the financial crisis lies the crisis of representative democracy: who decides what, how and why? National parliaments remain the repository of sovereignty but sovereign power has been eroded, and the European Parliament with growing competencies has failed to establish its own legitimacy. Fourth, the issue of immigration is still a taboo. There is an insufficiently open space for critical debate about aspects of belief and community, for example in relation to Islam – without being branded anti-Muslim. Fifth, Europe's social order is eroding. This raises questions about the extent to which 'shared beliefs' are a necessary precondition for a stable political and social order, L. Siedentop concluded.

According to S. de Lange, part of the problem in conducting research has been definitional, but many characteristics are now widely accepted as applying to far-right extremist parties. The normative question is what could and should liberal democracies do to respond to phenomena as varied as populism, nativism or nationalism and xenophobia or anti-immigration. It is important not just to look at Hungary or Italy but also other cases to get a sense of just how widespread extreme-right ideas are. M. Lewandowsky said that political education against populism is key. The approaches of the 1990s won't work and the challenge is how best to foster citizenship in order to avoid anti-establishment populism.

F. Hartleb suggested that technocracy and populism fuel each other. European governance and even now or in future some European economic government under Franco-German leadership will be the dominant mode of liberal democratic politics. Populism, on the other hand, calls for direct democracy and a return of power to the people. Far from being diametrically opposed, these two approaches are complicit or at the very least linked, as the shift from Silvio Berlusconi to Mario Monti illustrates.

For A. Crow, values and norms are cultural expressions of the same, perennial values. The trouble is that the West has failed to re-value its values. In terms of the old distinction between tolerance and toleration, the West has gone too far down the road of the latter and neglected the former. A. Pabst agreed and added that compared with Locke, toleration today is virtually synonymous with moral and cultural relativism, which in turn masks the absolutism of a certain liberal creed that is atomistic and utilitarian. As such, the dominant liberalism is illiberal and the prevailing model of democracy is post-democratic. The illiberalism expresses itself in the form of intolerance towards those who reject the socio-cultural and economic-political liberalism that has prevailed since the 1960s. Post-democracy is reflected in the collapse of mass membership in political parties, a historic downward trend in voter turnout and a growing disconnect of people

from the elites that purport to represent them. Liberal democracy relies on abstract formal values and standards that hollow out the social bonds and civic ties binding us together. V. Weitzel made the point that as long as shared ends are missing, liberal democracies will become more illiberal and more post-democratic. With fundamental links dissolving, Europe is suffering a collapse of the hierarchy of norms.

From a sociological perspective, K. Abts said that the bonding and structuring (in terms of tradition, culture, religion, etc.) is changing dramatically. That is why a number of sociologists such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens speak of organised *versus* fluid or liquid modernity. The question is whether we are seeing a Europeanisation, nationalisation or individualisation. Other developments include demands for more collective rights, an increasing sense of insecurity and a growing number of people who could be described as the ‘losers’ of modernisation and the internalisation of the consumer economy. Thus, there is neither a heterogeneous electorate nor a concrete alternative for which vulnerable or reluctant voters would opt. In principle, most Europeans are in favour of multiculturalism but in practice they are against the collapse of different group identities at the level of localities, regions and nations.

J. Bayer mentioned the classification of democracy according to the ‘Dahrendorf school of thought’ and said that liberal democracy is only one of many models. Democrats need to confront the fact that the outspoken ideology of Fidesz is to combine authoritarian state socialism with rightwing radicalism. So far neither the EU nor national governments have been able to address the problem of angry young men who have no prospect for a proper future.

C. Coker asked what the high ground of liberalism in the 21st century might be. Building on John Dewey’s work, the American philosopher Richard Rorty developed the political tradition of pragmatism that defends liberal principles and practices in terms of irony – a narrative since the Enlightenment that requires story-telling and belief. The problem is that the last 30 years or so have not seen any story telling, belief or re-valuation of values. Here H. van Gunsteren interjected that the high ground of liberalism and the low ground of democracy are linked through the individual, personal exercise of the right to a free vote.

At the end of the fourth session, E. Weaver argued that the EU undermines liberal democracy by not acting on a number of issues. First, the UK and torture in Libya. Second, Italy’s action on the island of Lampedusa and the treatment of migrants. Third, Greek border guards. Fourth, France and its differential treatment of Eastern European immigrants, damaging the legacy of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*. Across Europe the far right is affecting both the centre right and the centre left.

V. Is liberal democracy a model for the 21st century?

The fifth session explored various ways in which liberal democracy is a desirable and viable political model for the 21st century. The discussions touched on the principles of liberal democratic politics and also on the practices at the EU and national levels.

M. Guibernau argued that the extreme right has affected mainstream parties by setting the agenda for the political spectrum as a whole, notably on immigration and welfare. Faced with this challenge, liberal democracy has failed to find an effective answer. It is possible to distinguish democracy as a method from liberalism as content. The tension between liberal and

illiberal tendencies raises the question of both tolerance and toleration: what kind of limits are needed to both in order to preserve the liberal order?

H. van Gunsteren warned against the danger of merely being defensive: democracy and liberalism cannot afford just to carry on with business as usual. The real challenge that is posed by the extreme right is that of the resilience of democracy. Neither firewalls nor a *cordon sanitaire* will work. Here S. de Lange suggested that the resilience of democracy is in large part dependent on well-functioning political parties, in terms of mobilisation and representation. The trouble is that mainstream parties have become more populist and thus fail to distinguish themselves fundamentally from the extremism of both left and right. Indeed, the far right has had substantial influence on government policy (e.g. the FPÖ in Austria), whereas others use their rhetoric to shape the terms of political debate (e.g. Lega Nord). Most radicals in Europe have one foot in and one foot out of the political system, frequently using the courts to try to get their way.

This led to a discussion about the gulf between rhetoric and policy. On the one hand, the FN under Marine Le Pen has become more moderate (on the Second World War and anti-Semitism) but, on the other hand, less radicality has also meant a loss of edge. In terms of policy, the governing UMP has adopted much of the FN's rhetoric but not the actual measures. As a result there might be a backlash by some voters. Far-right parties demand not just a stop to immigration but also compulsory repatriation, whether enacted by the EU or member-states (J.-Y. Camus). In the UK, there are certain trends in relation to the issue of immigration. First, many more think that it is a pressing problem and that no government is tackling it. Second, government targets to cut net migration are hard to deliver (low skilled immigrants from EU member states, asylum seekers and refugees have rights that need to be respected) and this fuels popular discontent (M. Goodwin).

On the EU level, J. Bayer said that there are no effective sanctions in case of violating fundamental democratic and/or liberal principles, as illustrated by the Union's inaction over Hungary's new media law and other violations. Without a federalist or confederalist system, the EU will be incapable of protecting the rule of law. F. Hartleb contended that national politics continues to call the shots. Chancellor Merkel claims that there is no alternative to Europe, with the result that the extreme right will use the EU to mobilise against the elites. Moreover, consensus models of politics/democracy on the European continent and in Scandinavia might now lack popularity, and that's what the conflictual approach of extremist parties is exploiting. M. Almond went further and argued that a lack of consensus in the UK at the time of Thatcher marginalised extremist parties. The combative nature of extremist politics today tends to clash with the cosy consensus of the contemporary partocracy, which is why we aren't seeing much popular resistance against the extremes.

In his intervention, N. Lebourg said that immigration and Islamophobia are symptoms of a crisis of the state that goes back to the 16th century. Then European powers enshrined the principle 'In the prince's land, the prince's religion' (*cuius regio, eius religio*). Now, by contrast, the state is seen as permissive. Similarly, the Third Republic in France tightened policy following certain incidents, but many thought that the assimilation of foreigners into French culture (e.g. Polish and Spanish Catholic) was impossible. Nowadays the debate rages over the extent to which countries can be multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith. Perhaps the greatest danger to liberal democracy in the 21st century is the confluence of popular demand and the conviction of the elites. There is thus no need to have a far-right party. The economic turmoil reveals even

more clearly the crisis of state legitimacy and the lack of checks and balances that can discipline the elites.

At this point the discussions briefly turned to the British case. A. Pabst talked of the collusion of state and market in promoting immigration for the purposes of cheap labour. Perhaps the most striking illustration was the case of the Home Office (the Ministry of the Interior) in charge of fighting illegal migration, which outsourced the cleaning of its office buildings to a private subcontractor that employed illegal migrants. The demand for cheap labour from both big business and big government might explain why successive UK governments have failed to use safeguards in order to restrict migration, which was allowed under EU rules and was used by countries such as Germany in the wake of eastern enlargement in 2004.

L. Siedentop agreed and added that British policy has been a combination of duplicity and naïvete: duplicitous because all the main parties prefer cheap labour to the indigenous working class and naïve because the government estimate of immigration from Eastern Europe after 2004 was 15,000 – when in reality it came close to one million. Crucially, the state is not the same as the government, with local authorities – both political and administrative – on the receiving end of the decisions taken by the executive branch in London.

This was followed by a brief exchange on France. According to J.-Y. Camus, both the language and the mentality of the far right and the extreme right in France and elsewhere are largely shared with the far left and the extreme left. For example, similar perceptions about relations between France and Algeria or the alleged backwardness of Islam can be found on all sides of the political spectrum. Likewise, Islamophobia transcends the left-right divide. N. Lebourg said that the best way to confront extremists is to unmask their leaders but not to trivialise all of their ideas. In the early 1980s, electoral reform eliminated the FN from parliament, thereby excluding 20% of the population from political representation. To absorb some of the extremes, the far left was given jobs in journalism and business.

A. Clesse intervened to say that the inflammatory rhetoric of figures such as Pim Fortuyn, Theo van Gogh and Geert Wilders has served to radicalise the situation, which is also why they secretly want more immigration. They have poured oil on the fire and promoted a dangerous form of far-right fascism. H. van Gunsteren disagreed, contending that Theo van Gogh was not a far-right extremist. He engaged in provocation, which is a widely used technique. His rhetoric was irreverent and blasphemous, but that did not make him a fascist.

For M. Almond, there are two types of the far right: first, the peasant far right that is anti-modernist (anti-metropolitan and anti-liberal) and, second, the promiscuous far right that defends post-60s liberties, including sexual and cultural freedoms. It is equally important to draw a clear distinction between religion and folklore; e.g. honour killings or attacks on members of communities who are seen as devious. Linked to this is the tendency for the police to intervene in cases of domestic violence but not in situations that might be seen as ‘racial’ or religious intervention.

C. Coker reported that a US general had recently warned about civil unrest in response to the ongoing eurozone crisis and the disintegration of the European social model. In some sense, technocracy replaced the aristocratic element that Alexis de Tocqueville called for. In fact, technocracy is meritocratic but it disconnects the state from the nation. More recently, a new partnership between groups (private, public, and voluntary sector) has replaced the social

contract and so excluded the masses. Both the majoritarian principle and the practice of mass democracy have largely gone. Crucially, historical narratives are now missing. Transnational progressivism (à la Habermas) is commodifying and even reifying the nation-state, which remains the main repository of sovereign power and legitimacy.

A. Pabst spoke of the principles of liberality that are universal, such as freedom of expression, fair detention, fair trial and *habeas corpus*. By contrast, much of political liberalism rests on abstract, general standards and values such as equality of opportunity and reflexive, negatively self-choosing individuals. Linked to this is a non-secular defence of freedom that does not privilege negative freedom (freedom from coercion) but instead makes room for positive freedom – shared, collective ends and commitments that people make individually and also in groups. Crucially, liberal democracy tends to subsume the mediating institutions of civil society under the twin rule of the national state and the transnational market. As such, the liberal settlement subordinates social bonds and civic ties to formal rights and contracts. However, a whole host of informal practices and mediating institutions such as religious groups, associations, corporate bodies and guilds are more primary than states or markets. There is also an international ‘association’ or ‘family’ of nations that cuts across the artificial boundaries of national states and provides a concrete, real alternative to abstract notion such as post-national cosmopolitanism.

VI. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The final session consisted of a tour de table and an exchange of ideas about policy proposals. A. Clesse launched the discussions by arguing that to treat everyone the same is to treat some unfairly. It is not about the freedom of expression or conscience but about treating people properly and with dignity. Treating everyone the same has led to attacks on Muslims who are weak, excluded and despised. In part this explains the mentality in the German debates about the so-called ‘*Dönermorde*’ and the growing role of the ‘*Verfassungsschutz*’ in the surveillance of certain communities, especially Muslims. It seems that in relation to the ‘*Dönermorde*’, the police gave false information depicting the victim as a criminal.

On religion, there was a debate about loyalty and civility. M. Guibernau said that religion implies dogma, which has to be believed unquestionably. That is why rival interpretations of dogma have led to religious wars and ‘martyrs’. Faced with different types of authority, the question of loyalty arises: are believers loyal to the nation-state or to their religious community? Here one could suggest that the state is a political institution and the nation is a cultural community. Moreover, there are states without nations and nations without states. It is nations and the citizenry that legitimate the state. But both nations and states face a crisis. C. Coker argued that many societies rest on a social contract between the individual and God. Linked to this is the principle of toleration: matters of faith cannot be part of the political agenda because matters of faith – dogma – are beyond rational debate. By contrast, political ideas can be argued; the space for this is civil society and the mode is that of civility, which has dramatically declined. The Nazis thought that there was no such thing as moral conviction outside ideology or religious dogma. We are perhaps witnessing a wholesale collapse of values and moral convictions. In this context, are unconventional options such as faith schools a solution or a problem? The dominant liberal consensus is suspicious of both civil and political religion because each lacks moral fibre and cannot uphold civility

In relation to democracy, A. Crow suggested that the ‘irony’ is that liberal democracy allows us to question the principles of the very system that guarantees them. Institutions have become ‘ghost houses’ (Nietzsche) that lack the kind of ‘living culture’, which is indispensable to vibrant societies. Beyond the modern dichotomy of certainty *versus* doubt, late or post-modern politics is concerned with risk management. According to K. Abts, liberalism and populism are incompatible and diametrically opposed: the former defends freedom and equality, whereas the latter promotes repression and discrimination. Nor is democracy in terminal crisis. On the contrary, there tends to be a decrease in the tolerance of extremists as countries move from an informal to a more formal political space. Democratic systems also have a series of filtering mechanisms such as social movements, the media and education that mitigate extremist, extra-parliamentary groups and parties. As such, one of the most effective ways to oppose far-right and extreme right forces is not to impose a blanket ban but rather to implement administrative sanctions and a *cordon sanitaire*, i.e. non-cooperation in a situation of electoral competition.

The focus of the discussions shifted to conclusions and policy recommendations, notably in relation to parties. M. Littler noted that UK-based populist movements like the English Defence League are not contesting elections. He identified that Maurice Glasman was right to suggest that the Labour Party must engage with the legitimate concerns of disgruntled, white working-class men who feel that they have been betrayed by the ruling elites, and that the UK has, historically, practiced the politics of the *cordon sanitaire*. While this has served to limit the electoral success of people like Nick Griffin who was not allowed to appear on BBC prior to his election as an MEP, the key challenge to mainstream parties is whether and, if so, how to engage with the marginal groups that might vote for populist parties. Moreover, he argued that the state can make significant movement towards his goal by increasing the provision of citizenship education, noting that all institutions need to play their part in instilling fundamental civic values necessary for facilitating greater engagement.

According to F. Hartleb, what matters most is the local and grassroots’ level that can ensure a certain embeddedness in civil society and help scrutinise the party leadership. But there are cases where there was too much protection, e.g. in Germany. Today there is no problem with right extremism in Eastern Germany as a whole but only in some small parts. The NPD and other parties are not a threat but 20% of its members are public sector workers, which is a worrying tendency.

M. Lewandowsky argued that from a practical perspective, it does not matter so much whether parties are far extreme rightist or not but what the perception of their voters is, especially the many voters who are young women living in suburban contexts. Those perceptions can have a much longer-term and pervasive impact than the actual positions of parties or movements. N. Lebourg went further and suggested that identity blends the biological with the cultural (e.g. race and religion in the case of the Jews). The far right has a coherent discourse: against modernism and in favour of a certain revivalism that draws on palingenesis – the rebirth of a new man. Moreover, the far right and the extreme right operate a segmentation of the electorate by adopting a different discourse for each community. At the same time, the reality of diverse sources of loyalty requires a new sense of national unity if the mainstream parties want to challenge the far-right’s attempt to arrogate to itself the monopoly of patriotism.

L. Siedentop argued that the liberal defence of democracy can and must be far more robust. The key to liberalism is the idea of voluntary association. As such, liberalism is not heartless, atomistic and individualist, as in utilitarianism and economism. Instead, it holds to a conception

of human agency that has Judeo-Christian roots but was best formulated by Kant's categorical imperative. According to this tradition, liberalism is about the defence of liberty, linked to equality and reciprocity. At its best, US federalism seeks to limit and correct the power of the nation state. The power of the executive branch of government is limited as a result of the checks and balances that include the constitution, local government and voluntary associations. Ultimately, it is the idea of self-government that reinforces local, individual liberty. So from outset, liberal federalism rests on both rights and responsibilities, whereas much of late modern European politics is merely concerned with entitlement. Finally, secularism in the US and Europe also differs: the former is about discovering belief and worshipping freely, whereas the latter opposes anti-clericalism to absolutist Church authority. Liberalism needs to rediscover its Christian roots if it is to cope with the religious revival at home and abroad.

A. Clesse concluded the final session by speaking of the spectre of apocalypse that might haunt Western societies. Liberal democracy no longer offers the prospect of a decent society that provides a foothold for its citizens. It is addicted to a certain kind of economic growth that it cannot generate. Even in countries that look stable and prosperous like Norway or Switzerland there are many people who lack hope. Perhaps Harold Macmillan's "We've never had it so good" won't apply any longer to the West.

Concluding remarks

Three broad conclusions can be drawn from the conference discussions. First of all, the rise of the extreme right is not limited to the growth in the support for parties and movements but extends to the spread of certain mentalities, popular views, stereotypes and prejudice.

Second, the influence of far-right and extreme-right ideas is much more pervasive than the occasional electoral success of extremist parties. It is mainstream parties of the left, the right and the centre that have embraced those ideas without necessarily adopting all the policies.

Third, liberal democracy can be compatible with populism and even mutate into illiberal post-democracy. As such, the question is less about the future of liberal democracy itself as other forms of liberalism and democracy that can confront the extreme right and offer alternatives to the kind of centrist pragmatism that is complicit with populist politics.

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March 2012

Conference on

The rise of the extreme right and the future of liberal democracy in Europe

*9-10 December 2011
Cercle, Luxembourg*

Programme

Friday 9 December 2011

- 09.00 – 09.15 Welcome and introduction
- 09.15 – 10.45 **Session 1: The present situation – Is the extreme right on the rise?**
- a. Country trends
 - b. Structural changes in European politics and society
- 10.45 – 11.15 Coffee Break
- 11.15 – 12.45 **Session 2: Right wing extremism as a challenge for liberal democracy?**
- a. Inside the party system
 - In countries: success at elections and government participation
 - In Europe: formation of a European right
 - b. Outside the party system
- 12.45 – 14.15 Lunch
- 14.15 – 15.45 **Session 3: Reasons for the success of the extreme right – Is liberal democracy in crisis?**
- a. Dysfunction/failure of democracy and the rise of political alienation
 - b. Islamophobia and xenophobia
 - c. Social dislocation and the lack of integrating minorities
 - d. Cultural anxiety
 - e. Has the extreme right changed its image or its ideas?
- 15.45 – 16.15 Coffee Break



16.15 – 17.45 **Session 4: How does liberal democracy respond? How should it?**

- a. Political exclusion or inclusion
- b. Adopting right wing ideas or addressing the underlying problems
- c. Confronting the extreme right

Saturday 10 December 2011

09.15 – 10.45 **Session 5: Liberal democracy, a model for the 21st century?**

- a. What traditions and ideas are available to liberal democracy
- b. What institutions and policies are necessary for reviving liberal democracy?

10.45 – 11.15 Coffee Break

11.15 – 12.45 **Session 6: Policy recommendations and conclusions**

- a. Recommendations for party reform
- b. Recommendations for institutional reform
- c. Recommendations for policy ideas

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