HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
EUROPEAN UNION

Conclusions and Recommendations
Capacity Building
How to Counter Right Wing Populism and Extremism in Europe

1. *Introduction*

In recent years, we have been witnessing the rise of right-wing populist and extremist parties across Europe, from the Front National and UKIP in the west to Golden Dawn and Jobbik in the east. As a result, a record number of these right-wing parties have entered and coalesced in the European Parliament. In this week-long capacity building programme, we focused mainly on three specific areas: the ***antidemocratic***, the ***Eurosceptic*** and the ***xenophobic*** aspects of right-wing populism and extremism.

To address the issue of right-wing populism and extremism, it is imperative to discuss firstly the concept of populism. The notion of populism is politically and morally charged, and it tends to overlap with other issues. In our view, populism is not an ideology but a political style or a discourse, as many scholars of this field - such as Ernesto Laclau - have argued. Populism is multi-dimensional and therefore can stem from different causes, take diverse forms and pertain to different parts of the political spectrum.

In our conclusions we concentrate on right-wing populism and extremism. We rely on the umbrella concept of the ***radical right***, defined as an ideological core of ultra-nationalism derived from an anti-universal, anti-democratic myth of the national community, in combination with an authoritarian understanding of politics and a pronounced populist style.[1] Throughout, we use the term 'radical right' to describe both populists and extremists, but it is important to understand the distinction between the two groups. We make a distinction between populist parties, such as Fidesz, and extremist parties, such as Jobbik. Both groups pose serious yet distinct challenges for our liberal democracies.

2. *The anti-democratic component*

Modern liberal democracy is formed of two aspects: democracy, as a form of rule and the principle of the sovereignty of the people, and the symbolic framework within which this democratic rule is exercised. On the one hand we have the liberal tradition

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[1] Minkenberg, M. (2001). The Radical Right in Public Office: Agenda-Setting and Policy Effects. West European Politics 24, no. 4 (Oct), p.3

constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect for individual liberty. On the other hand, there is the democratic tradition with its central ideals of equality, identity between the governing and governed, and popular sovereignty. European democracies are the result of the historical interplay between these two traditions. This is what Chantal Mouffe has called the 'democratic paradox'.[2]

Following Mouffe, we see the present democratic deficits as the result of mainstream political parties and national and international institutions focusing on the liberal aspect at the expense of the democratic aspect. Thus, the mantle of popular sovereignty is free to be claimed by the radical right. We, in turn, focus on the other side of the democratic paradox, as the radical right maintains only the majoritarian concept of democracy whilst ignoring the liberal. This can lead to situations in which majoritarian rule might lead to the decision to exclude a group, to restrict rights of minorities, etc.

The anti-democratic features of the radical right are manifold, and for that we have classified them in four different groups:

First, **violent exclusion**, especially of minorities — scapegoating and 'othering' practices — has become increasingly common in Europe. Violence has been directed at groups who have resided in given countries for generations, such as Roma, Jews, black or LGBTI people, or the refugees and most recent wave of migrants, especially from non-European countries. In addition, Islamophobia has resulted in growing attacks on the Muslim population.

Second, **symbolic exclusion** has become more explicit. On a discursive level, the primordial concept of the nation has been promoted at the expense of large segments of the (minority) population. Often built on false premises, this rhetoric promotes a homogenous 'pure' nation, which right-wing parties strive to prevent from 'contamination' by other groups. This discourse poses an immediate threat to the multinational, multicultural reality of our European societies.

Third, in gaining popularity, radical right-wing parties, groups and movements have **contaminated mainstream politics.** The radical right, even when not in power, can significantly influence political discourse and in some cases the policymaking process. In France, for instance, the Front National has enjoyed great electoral success. French political scientists, such as Vincent Tiberj[3], argue that the centre-right UMP/Republicans under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy adopted stances from the FN. In general, the incorporation of radical right-wing parties into formal political platforms serves as legitimation of such ideologies, as well as providing numerous opportunities for leaders to voice their standpoint in public and join the negotiating table. Concurrently, the political establishments in some countries have adopted a so-called *cordon sanitaire* around these parties, which also has the

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[2] Mouffe, C. (2000). The democratic paradox. London: Verso, p. 1-3

[3] Cole, A, Meunier, S. and V.Tiberj (2013). Developments in French politics 5; Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan

potential to serve as another source of support as the group presents itself as standing against the remote bureaucracy of mainstream politics.

In countries such as France and Belgium, radical right-wing parties have both been excluded under a *cordon sanitaire* arrangement and had their stances adopted by mainstream parties. The exclusion of these parties can strengthen their anti-establishment image, while simultaneously signalling to supporters that their concerns are ignored. We firmly believe that democratic parties should confront the radical right and its ideas directly. This is where the efficiency of democracy can be judged. Importantly, we maintain that to debate radical right-wing ideas is not the same as legitimising them. Furthermore, whilst there is no 'silver bullet' to address all cases, openly anti-democratic forces using violence and involved in criminal activities – such as the Greek Golden Dawn – should be repressed. Several European countries such as France, Germany or Greece have a legislative arsenal enabling state authorities to ban those parties and charge their members with criminal offences.

Fourth, as an extension of this, ***legal and institutional exclusion*** can occur when mainstream parties in power decide to co-opt radical right-wing ideas. This leads them to codify exclusionary practices. The most obvious example is Hungary's treatment of Roma. This includes educational reform voted through by Fidesz that clearly discriminates against Romani youth,[4] the decision of the highest court to legitimise Roma segregation in case of religious schools,[5] as well as the wide-ranging 'public works programme' extensively criticised as a measure targeting Roma.[6]

Thus far, the success of radical right-wing parties has largely depended on their influence on mainstream parties.[7] The clearest example is in immigration policy. Since 1990, the public debate around this issue has been consistently dictated in the terms of the radical right. Concurrently, we have seen the emergence of an 'Extreme Centre'[8]; centre-right and centre-left parties implementing right-wing measures when they are in government, such as border fences and concentration sites for immigrants (as in the case of Greece, where such measures were implemented by a coalition government of a centre-right and a centre-left party).

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[4] http://tasz.hu/en/romaprogram/hungarian-government-creates-legal-framework-segregating-roma-children-schools

[5] http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/hungarys-highest-court-legitimizes-segregation-in-the-case-of-religious-schooling/22387

[6] See, for example, http://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/elindult_a_kozmunka-mintaprogram_-_harcos_beke- 76771# and http://www.sosinet.hu/2012/02/28/rajuk-var-a-kozmunka-szegeny-es-cigany-gyerekek- oktatasa/ [in Hungarian].

[7] Betz, H.-G. (2002). Conditions favoring the success and failure of radical right-wing populist parties in contemporary democracies. In Meny, Y. and Surel, Y. (eds.), Democracies and the populist challenge. New York: Palgrave p. 207

[8] Chatzistefanou, A. (2012). The extremism of Greece's centre ground. The Guardian http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/may/12/extremism-greece-centre-golden-dawn, Zenakos, A. (2014). The ideology of modernization and the Extreme center. Unfollow https://unfollow.com.gr/web-only/11141-eksygh [In Greek]

3. *__The Eurosceptic component__*

Euroscepticism is a term widely used in academic and public debate, yet it is not always clear what its defining features are. At its most basic, Euroscepticism is the rejection of European integration. However, parties and citizens differ in terms of the scale of rejection: we can place them somewhere in between exit and full integration. This distinction is important, but does not represent the whole story as parties and people have very different reasons for their rejection of European integration, e.g. on democratic deficits and de-politicised structures of the EU institutions or the false aspiration to 'rescue the sovereignty of the nation-state'.

Broadly speaking, the rejection of the current state of the EU institutions can be constructive or destructive, critical or sceptical. To be clear, Euroscepticism does not necessarily have to be the domain of the radical right. In our view, the binary distinction between 'left' and 'right' is not very helpful in understanding Euroscepticism. Therefore, we propose to use a twofold distinction that measures parties on their relatively nationalism and internationalism, and on their economic interventionism or liberalism.

Considering the above, it is essential to determine the root causes of the manifold 'Euroscepticisms'. It is thus necessary to differentiate between national and international causes, economic factors and institutional shortcomings of the different governmental layers. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance to tackle the issue of national identity and how the fear of loss of national identity feeds into right-wing Euroscepticism. To be clear, most of the causes of Euroscepticism are rooted in the national contexts, we explain more thoroughly above in our discussion of the anti-democratic component.

4. *__The xenophobic component__*

In periods of severe social and economic challenges, scapegoating is a common phenomenon. Recurring victims throughout history have been racial, ethnic and religious minorities such as Romani people, migrants and Jews, along with other vulnerable social groups such as women and LGBTI people.

Nowadays, radical right-wing movements all over Europe exploit the troubles of our time – alarming unemployment rates and the current refugee situation – so as to increase their mass appeal and attract voters. In order to accomplish this, they address people's emotions and spread fear of what is foreign, different or strange (*xenophobia*). Targeting support amongst 'ordinary' people and presenting minority groups as the root cause of most of the current difficulties, they provide simplistic explanations and radical solutions to the public's daily concerns when at the same moment mainstream political parties seem incapable of putting forward solutions. This, again, reinforces sentiments of anxiety towards the 'foreign' and hopelessness of the citizens concerning their socio-economic situation.

Xenophobia refers to the belief that it is 'natural' for people to live among others of 'their own kind', and it goes with a level of hostility toward people of 'another kind'. This hostility manifests when 'strangers' come too close to the group (at a geographical or social level), so as to be a threat to the beliefs, practices, identity or material interests of the group. Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Gypsyism,

homophobia and misogyny are all main forms of xenophobia. All the aforementioned facets of xenophobia are externalised as physical or verbal violence or as discrimination against the victims which can be direct or indirect, institutional or social discrimination.

As globalisation and the European integration lead to numerous radical social and economic changes, such as the economic interdependence among different states and the formation of heterogeneous communities worldwide, people often approach these shifts with bewilderment and fear or denial. It is here that the radical right can take advantage of people's puzzlement and present themselves as proponents of traditional values and institutions with which people are familiar, namely defending 'homeland, religion, family'. It is on the basis of these values that they prey on people's insecurity.

5. *Counter-strategies*

Although here we have examined three key aspects of the radical right separately, it should be clear that they are deeply interdependent. Because of this, our counter-strategies must be unified and complementary

Such strategies must recognise the democratic deficit and its different manifestations: eastern and western EU Member States, due to their historical legacies, economic development, social and cultural characteristics, struggle with different forms of it. More precisely, while eastern Europe still lacks a truly embedded democratic culture (which in the west has taken decades to evolve) and genuine democratic leadership to guide this, in western Europe the task might involve the de-eliticisation of democratic politics. The empowerment of excluded groups on all levels ─ regional and national ─ is also important.

Additionally, it is apparent that the radical right has come to own certain prominent political issues, such as identity, nationhood and security. A counter-discourse on those issues has not emerged yet, and must be urgently formulated. The promotion of a plural, progressive European identity and a sense of nationhood that is predicated on diversity, as well as the embedding of national identities in a wider regional or European identity, can wait no longer. The basis of these identities should be solidarity and not exclusion[9].

As the current economic crisis undoubtedly reinforces the right-wing radical parties, it is apparent that one main root cause of the rise of these parties is austerity policies and neoliberal economics in general. ***The EU is being degraded into an enforcer of austerity measures across the continent. It is essential to restore the idea of the EU as a regional network of states that stand together in solidarity in order to promote mutual wellbeing, good living standards, tolerant societies, and democratic values that are shared by all.***

Furthermore it is vital to explain the local benefits of EU membership to ordinary people with a clear and understandable message. Local initiatives are key to bringing the EU closer to the people, and so awareness of the benefits it brings must be raised amongst civil society. Whilst generating a positive vision of the

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[9] Lleshi, B. (2015). Beyond the Nation. The Brussels Times
http://brusselstimes.com/opinion/4323/beyond-the-nation

EU is important, a clear response to right-wing Euroscepticism is important too. We require more effective ways of deconstructing Eurosceptic myths. This cannot be done solely on a rational level, but should also address emotions. Accordingly, there needs to be a greater symbiosis between local, national and supranational political levels in order to co-ordinate a pro-EU message. These layers need to be better connected not just in a political sense however — there need to be **more efficient and accessible training and exchange programmes in order to decrease the distance between EU institutions and citizens**. These are required at all levels and in different fields e.g. sports and 'train-the-trainer' programmes.

Finally, *the entire structure of the European Union must be subject to transformation*. It is absolutely vital to introduce democratic reforms to all levels of European institutions, restoring and creating transparency and accountability. In this respect, **diversity must be increased and a greater inclusiveness within EU institutions is required, with mechanisms to enable a much more accurate representation of the European population in EU institutions**. We have to create a European democratic arena, where all voices will be heard. This will help lift suspicion towards the operation of European institutions.

It would be a mistake to believe that the radical right-wing elements in our societies will disappear immediately if we provide solutions to today's social and economic challenges. Both globalisation and European integration have destabilised the politics of the nation-state, and the reverberations of these changes will be felt for a long time to come. However, both of these changes have also led to huge benefits in the daily lives of ordinary people. **Progressives should be strident in defending greater global and European integration against the often empty criticisms of right-wing populists and extremists.**

We want to conclude by referring to some specific measures against the radical right that could be put into practice immediately. It has been observed that, even if the appropriate legislation against xenophobic behaviour often does exist, it cannot be implemented properly due to lack of suitable training and mind set of the civil servants or police officers that apply it. **We recommend that different stakeholders collaborate with each other in a knowledge exchange in order to provide public officials with EU-wide training.**

Another proposal relates to the empowerment and representation of minorities in political parties. This can be achieved by **establishing quotas for those who are elected as candidates, by increasing leadership in minority groups, and via private-public partnerships to help promote equality in business as well as the public sector.**

In addition, it is crucial to overcome hate speech in the public sphere, such as inside the European Parliament and on the internet. **Hate speech has to be monitored in the European Parliament by an independent body and the existing sanctions regarding hate speech need to be reviewed.** Concerning hate speech on the internet, we strongly suggest that **social media should be used in this effort to confront the advocacy of hatred and that a dialogue should be promoted between internet providers and social media companies**, examining among others the possibility of creating **a new platform for non-governmental organizations and the civil society.**

The challenge posed by the radical right is a great one, but we believe that it is surmountable, and that we can build a Europe that fulfils the historic ideals of democracy, human rights, diversity, respect and peace.

The capacity building week, entitled *How to Counter Right Wing Populism and Extremism in Europe*, took place from 12 to 16 October 2015 in Brussels and Antwerp. The participants were:

Miriam Ajayi (25), Germany

Juliette Alibert (22), France

Théo Aphecetche (21), France,

James Bartholomeusz (23), United Kingdom

Zsófia Deák (28), Hungary

Jekatyerina (Katya) Dunajeva (30), Hungary,

Antonis Galanopoulos (26), Greece

Mona Hagi (18), Sweden

Hoang Tran Hieu Hanh (24), Germany

Erik Kochbati (18), Sweden

Maria Koutelidaki (23), Greece

Bénédicte Laumond (27), France

Daniel Lüchow (27), Germany

Kate Samuels (24), United Kingdom

Paul Stocker (26), United Kingdom

Nikolett Suha (30), Hungary