

Workshop organiser

“Political Economy of ‘Authoritarianism’ and ‘Right Wing Populism’. May, Orban, Szydło, Le Pen, Gauland/AfD ... – the EU in a crisis of legitimation between neoliberal ‘reformers’ and different authoritarian ‘right wing forces’”

This paper should serve for the preparation of the workshop and support the discussion there. Its structure corresponds to the questions that have been asked and to the agenda of the final workshop program. We abstain from including information about parties and statistics illustrating problems and developments. But in order to provide a much-needed basis for our debate, we attach the RLF study “A love-hate relationship. Far-right parties and the European Union” and we also refer to our blog <http://stocktaking-scenarios.blog.rosalux.de/> → see tag “right wing populism”.

I. The approach, crucial terms, first conclusions

Approaching “Right Wing Populism” and “Authoritarianism” from a perspective of critical political economy requires us to provide a specific view of how to explain these issues and how to deal with them. This especially refers to the analysis of the relations between the people resp. the members of society in its economic sphere. Accordingly, the deciding questions will be: how the labour force, the instruments of labour means and the objects of labour are inter-connected; how the labour force realises its metabolism with the nature and how and under whose command it creates material and immaterial products of work; as well as by whom, how and with which consequences the appropriation of these products of labour is then being realised.

Of course, this does not mean that such issues like gender, age, citizenship, nationality, religion, cultural belonging, political positions, physical and mental constitution are less significant, in comparison to those of class and social milieu. On the contrary, all of these aspects of individual identity are reasons for societal inequalities and all of the societal inequalities act simultaneously, they strengthen or even multiply or they contradict each other. Individual features are used and instrumentalised by different right-wing forces, including racists, xenophobic and fascists. But they are also used, by conservative and even by rather open-minded neoliberals, simply as a means for increasing competition. And all of the members of the society have to deal with these specific kinds of inequality.

The different right-wing forces have specific interests and they tend to deal with individual and societal differences in different ways. In our workshop, we shall focus on such right-wing agents, with their specific “interest policies”, who claim to act in the interest of the “ordinary people without alien background”. These forces are opposing the political management, as it is dominant in the EU for ignoring or counteracting the interests of “our ordinary people”. They aim at blocking the ruling kind of globalisation, and especially the dominant practices concerning migration and the obtaining of asylum status. They ignore or openly hurt the interests of the majorities of populations in the EU, in Europe and in the world.

The concept of „right-wing populism“ should be proofed by how it helps to understand the current rise of an ideology and of a policy which is aimed at changing/strengthening the existing relations of hegemony resp. of power in the interest

- of the reactionary sectors of the middle classes,
- of nationalist-conservative forces,
- of nationalist-neoliberal forces,

- of essentially nationalistic and/or of religious fundamentalist forces.

The term “right-wing populism” is not appropriate to understand the issue of the concrete ideology and policy. Populism is a communication technique which is used with the claim to speak in the name of “the ordinary people”. The populists teach “the ordinary people” what is good for them – they are authoritarian. Their purpose is to keep or change the concrete representation of the society. Ernesto Laclau, who developed a theory on populism, has tried to “advance three theoretical propositions:

- (1) that to think about the specificity of populism requires starting the analysis from units smaller than the group (whether at the political or at the ideological level);
- (2) that populism is an ontological ... category – i.e. its meaning is ... to be found ... in a particular mode of articulation of whichever social, political or ideological contents;
- (3) that form of articulation as such, apart from its contents, produces specific structuring effects which primarily manifest themselves at the level of the modes of representation.”¹

Laclau wanted to make us recognise two aspects of the same condition for the emergence of a populist rupture: „the dichotomisation of the social space through the creation of an internal frontier, and the construction of an equivalential chain between unfulfilled demands.”² On Laclau's basis, Stuart Hall has introduced the term „authoritarian Populism“ (AP) to directly address “the question of the forms of hegemonic politics”³ playing an “‘educative’ role.”⁴

The communication technique, the ideology and policy of so-called “right wing populists” are aiming at influencing, activating and organising individuals, as well as collective agents on the basis of the slogan “them” against “us” – derived from individual features like the ethnic or cultural belonging, social origin and status, sex, a special disability, political position and role. “Right wing populists” tend to claim of having the right to “educate” the people about values, norms and principles which ought to rule the everyday life of society. Such an education includes a strong measure of top-down-instruction. It belongs to the authoritarian ideology and policy of “right wing populists” aiming at or already being armed with instruments to realise “the correct” against “the wrong”, to protect “our own ordinary people” against the enemies – the “right wing populists” are agents of an authoritarianism which diffuses into fascism.

Some concluding remarks in the end of this part:

1. Populism is nothing new. In the 19th century, it has emerged with the development of large capital, especially within the threatened small bourgeoisie. Originally, in North America, it has been aimed to mobilise the people in concerned areas against the eviction by railway corporations (Populist Party). In their own interest, the people have been supposed to accept and follow leaders offered to them. Populism is authoritarian from its beginning.
2. Populism has been and is also used by agents and agencies of neoliberal development. These forces have tried to cover and/or to justify the specific interests of capitalist oligarchies⁵ (and

¹ Ernesto Laclau, *Post-Marxism, populism and critique*, Edited by David Howarth, Routledge 2015, Oxon and New York, p. 153.

² p. 153

³ Stuart Hall, *Authoritarian Populism: A reply to Jessop et al*, in *New Left Review* I/151, May-June 1985, 116.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ On the basis of capital owners simultaneously co-operating and competing in the spheres of production and finance, a special kind of capital – finance capital – has emerged. These capital owners organise forms of co-operation with their managers, their partners ‘within the state’, ‘in politics’ and in civil society, in the judiciary, in the military and in the ‘security sector’, in consulting and accounting, in science and in culture, in the media and among the lobbyists. These forms of co-operation, or rather the capital oligarchies underlying them, reproduce themselves as such via the appropriation of the fruits of a third party’s labour (primary exploitation) as well as through redistribution and dispossession (secondary exploitation). Their property rights are guaranteed by the impersonal legal systems of a

their partners) in order to tackle and to deconstruct a more Keynesian/social-democratic influenced model of the capitalist mode of production, while promising stronger individual cultural rights and economic gains from “globalisation”.

3. “Right wing populism” as a misleading term reflects the policy of forces aiming at reducing and abolishing specific individual cultural rights and at limiting (and rolling back) specific aspects of “globalisation”. Above all, they refer to unfulfilled promises for gains in the neo-liberal agenda, and above all to “dangers” resulting from migration and from people forced to escape.
4. “Authoritarian populism” is a common feature of modern neo-liberal policy and of extreme conservative/fascist forces (which are often or even mostly also neo-liberal) aiming at setting special norms and rules for the individual and societal life.
“Authoritarianism” is the use of societal regulatory powers – especially of the state- (governments, courts of justice, police and military forces) – to protect resp. to implement what is declared to be “correct”.
5. The term “right-wing populism” is often used to cover the extreme conservative and/or fascist character of the forces referred to, which mobilise against the individual rights of people having a specific ethnic, cultural, religious, social, political background and/or sexual/gender orientation, and/or a specific physical and mental constitution.

The three decisive questions in this respect currently are the following:

Will the so called “right-wing populists” be able to reduce and to abolish individual liberty, individual rights, as well as collective social and democratic rights – in order to dictate new rules to society with its members – especially in relation to ethnic minorities and other forms of “otherness”, and will they be capable of implementing these new rules by making use of public and private instruments? What does their development mean for the future of transnational and of international relations, for the future of social relations within the EU and for the future of the EU? Which are the foreseeable consequences this will have for agents working for social emancipation and solidarity?

These questions are closely connected with another major question: Why has the left been unable to make use the global financial crisis (and of the crises amalgamated with it) for turning it into a situation of a political offensive? (see IV.)

II. On the genesis of the current status of the main problems identified since 2000

Two facts on recent history should be stated here clearly:

Firstly, the misleading term “right wing populism” has started its effective hegemony in the mainstream debates with Jörg Haider. On the one hand, the term has been expected to help distinguishing between the manipulating leader/s of the FPÖ and their misguided voters. On the other hand, a distinction between the openly acting aggressive right-wing fundamentalists, who were more or less admitting their fascist orientations, and the forces acting apparently in more moderate ways had to be introduced. But there also has been a strong political will to overlook the direct and indirect intersections, as they have been emerging between the “moderate” racists – who were speaking apparently moderately about the problems with “the others” who were making troubles for “our people” – and the open threats by hooligans and fascists – who were attacking asylum seekers and migrants. Such intersections, which often are strategically used by fascists, tend to generate a tolerance (or even an active support) for acts of hunting, evicting,

modern state which is in the possession of the monopoly of organized violence.

beating, and killing asylum seekers, migrants, and their supporters.

An official policy which is more or less blaming “right-wing populists” for the problems, while cutting benefits and refusing the much-needed help and even increasing social repression against asylum seekers and migrants, has the overall effect of empowering racists. Such a kind of policy also tends to promote racism, simply by doing the same (or similar) things in relation to “one’s own” socially excluded citizens, not the least while making use of the term “solidarity”. Such a policy only tends to promote nationalism, aiming at global competitiveness, while speaking about “European values” and about the national and European chances stemming from “globalisation”.

Secondly, the complex official policy in Western Europe has never fought such racist (and more or less open fascist) movement orientations and corresponding organizations in any relevant and consequential way. Such tendencies have never disappeared, and they have permanently been able to make use of an officially promoted nationalism. Nationalism has also made use by agents of official policy in the so called “socialist” countries, where at the same time antifascism and internationalism have been praised and celebrated. But the official strategy of “keeping the folks quiet” has even tolerated some kinds of racism and led to practices of discrimination against ethnic and cultural minorities. In many cases, even positive discrimination was not aimed at any honest support. The oppressed but also partly instrumentalised religious structures of the churches never had challenged nationalist and also fundamentalist movements and forces in any consistent or effective way. But the beginning of the “life in freedom” and the use of credits for reforms have been the starting point of a process of an enormous destruction of public infrastructure – especially of social infrastructures like those in education, in child care and in culture – as well as of production structures and of jobs. Since the beginning of the 90s not only frustrations from unfulfilled hopes and lost illusions have been rising in the CEE countries. Furthermore, the conditions for becoming EU members (2004, 2007, 2008) had a clearly discriminatory character. In the very moment of hope and happiness which it has constituted to finally join the EU, clear majorities of the CEE populations have not seen (or not realized) that the enormous EU enlargement had established a new under-class of EU members (related to rights, funding, and mandates), as well as of EU citizens. But the destruction of the public sector has pushed people back into outdated family and religious structures. Nationalist and fundamentalist structures have resurrected and developed in this very process.

Both important and complex historical facts have been part of deep global changes which may be summarized by the following points:

- Aiming at “gains from globalisation” the EU has had to improve the political, social and economic conditions for the TNCs and for other global players and to realise a broadly accepted societal compromise ensuring its own political unity, internal security, and social coherence. On the other hand, it has had to respond to its “alliance responsibilities”, i.e. to realise control over the neighbourhood and at the same time to acquire or maintain a capability for global military action.
- In parallel, confident and economically relevant powers have been and are still arising in the very neighbourhoods of the EU. Such powers are now gaining leeway by building their own alliances among themselves and/or with powers like China. These powers partly build on seemingly powerless subaltern movements (especially of wage earners and farmers), which in the end seem to lead to the emergence of new variants of capitalism.
- On the other hand, especially in the countries of the centre, new ideological and cultural upheavals are emerging and expanding, specifically calling for political alternatives to the established powers. As relevant left wing political alternatives seem to be, until now, systematically

blocked, these calls are met ideologically by what is being called “right-wing populism”, i.e. by forms of fascism and by religious fundamentalism. At the same time, political systems, state administrations and societies at large themselves seem to be generating a growing propensity for violence and repression.

- These developments, in turn, serve to reinforce the trend towards a ‘new security paradigm’ with an underlying tendency to make openly repressive and even military instruments for more ‘security’ politically legitimate and acceptable. Even more generally speaking, social concerns are increasingly met by authoritarian and exclusionary responses, as recent social security reforms in several EU member states clearly have shown.

- Ideological and cultural upheavals are more and more taking place under the hegemony of different kinds of fundamentalism. State governments and civil society structures themselves have begun to generate a growing propensity to violence and repression. This tends towards leading to a new ‘security paradigm’, openly accepting and advocating repressive (and even military) means as a politically legitimate means for more ‘security’.

- Social concerns are increasingly met by authoritarian and divisive responses, as social reforms in several EU member states recently have shown. These institutions, together with the IMF, determine the very principles of neighbourhood policy and they do in fact ‘recommend reforms’ to neighbouring countries. A certain historical compromise on the welfare state still appears to be centred on the middle class, and this leads to crucial social questions being ignored or treated merely as questions of arbitrary “charity”. Immigrants are systematically excluded from this compromise. But migration and escape from conflict have become a key reality defining the social issues of today.

- The relationship between the EU and its neighbours has been determined by changes of statehood and democracy within the EU, as well as in its neighbouring countries. This affects the development of an “EU statehood”, as well as the on-going processes of state building (as e.g. in the USSR successor states) in a decisive way, leading towards a more or less destructive ‘restructuring’ of states from without or from within (with Iraq and Turkey as opposite examples), or straightforward state destruction (as in Somalia or Syria), and the impact of separation movements (Kosovo, Crimea), making statehood itself a major stake in an international struggle for power, with destructive (often deadly) consequences for the populations concerned. The war on hegemony in the Near East fought in Syria now not only blocks all possible solutions to other major problems of this area, it also tends to deteriorate the overall situation of crisis in the Southeastern neighbourhood of the EU.

- The privatisation of the public sphere is more and more affecting the administration and security services provided by governments, and this, again, leads to changes in the relationships and the exchanges between states. These on-going processes of privatisation and liberalisation also purport to seek a redefinition of democracy, which further diminishes the admitted leeway of democratic politics, while effectively excluding any real participation and incorporation.

The purpose of the on-going modern neo-liberal “reforms has been (and still is) to increase the global competitiveness of the main players in form of corporations and locations. Again, nationalism has been used to realise these reforms and nationalism has been used by racist and fundamentalist forces, thereby seemingly protecting the interests of the national “losers” concerned, while officially (in the EU and in the member states) the “European unification” and “Europe’s openness” have continuously been celebrated. But this general process and the specific failure of NATO and EU concerning the issue of Yugoslavia, the killings, evictions and escape of former Yugoslavian citizens have fueled an increase of nationalism within the EU.

The Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties which have exacerbated deregulation, liberalisation,

privatization, competition, and monetary integration, on the one hand, and militarization, observation, and “protection” from refugees and migrants, on the other, have resulted in an increase of gaps and contradictions within the respective societies. The Lisbon strategy (as adopted in spring 2000 by the European council and aiming at realizing a future of the EU as ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’ by 2010) explains a new exacerbation process of economic, social and regional inequalities, and, more especially, a strong tendency towards the precarisation of labour, as well as of living conditions and the corresponding pressure towards all kinds of mobility. While the demands for individual employability and self-responsibility for social security were raising, the social and economic preconditions for being able to respond to these demands have developed very disparately. In addition, the very differentiated individual constitution of ordinary people and especially of their ability to deal with such demands have to be looked at: The public infrastructures have been ‘shrunk’, with the effect of increasing the problems of millions of individuals, who at the same time have also been facing an enormous cultural demand to be or to turn open for

- new living styles resp. ways of life,
- very different gender relations,
- new communication means and technologies,
- being culturally open minded and learning foreign languages,
- actively building contacts with people from very different cultures,
- enjoying new possibilities to realise themselves and to have fun,
- offering help and solidarity to others.

These new requirements have also been connected with an emerging and then on-going crisis of conservatism. The implementation of neo-liberal reforms has been closely connected to the destruction of social and democratic standards, as well to an exacerbation of all the existing social, economic, cultural and political contradictions and problems in and of the EU. Accordingly, it has also increased fears among many people to lose their income, wealth and social status. It thereby has induced a new stage of crisis of social democracy, of representation, and of the welfare state.

While the left-wing forces have been and still are unable to launch an initiative based upon emancipation and solidarity, the agents of so-called “right-wing populism” (and also of new forms of authoritarianism and male chauvinism) have risen in number and diversity – and they have increased their political momentum. Their impact is still on the rise – and this is closely linked to an increase of violence within the respective societies. There is a tendency towards a certain linkage between the emergence of this so-called “right-wing populism” and the recourse to a rather moderate conservatism which will in the end reinforce these tendencies towards authoritarianism. The danger of authoritarian “right-wing populist” political forces has reached a degree, where the possibility of their “coming to power” in central member states of the EU can no more be discounted, as a clear symptom of an on-going crisis of social democracy. But the majority of people are not able to give any emancipatory or solidarity-based response to the social and cultural demands, contrasting the very unequal preconditions to respond them and to criticize their societal, ecological and global meaning. The left has been unable and is still unable to help them to deal with these problems from an alternative and solidarity based perspective. On the one hand, this promotes helplessness and depressions, as well as frustrations and aggressions, the tolerance related to the search for possibilities to proceed against the socially weaker and/or seemingly “privileged” socially weak and markedly foreign or simply strange. It also promotes tolerance related to the direct violence against people. But this is also not in the long-term interest of many of those forces in society which are bringing about these kinds of demands

addressed to “the people”.

The different extreme conservative, nationalist, racist, fundamentalist and fascist forces which aim at an improvement of their position in globalized competition and within a globalising society are more middle class oriented. This growing tendency towards ever increasing demands is also expressed by the seemingly moderate “right-wing populists”. All of them, with their different kinds of ideology and theory, with their different priorities of front-pulling, with their different instruments, techniques, practices and readiness to realise violence are concentrating upon challenging or exacerbating the existing differences between people related

- to their social, ethnic, regional, or cultural origins and to their place of birth, and
- to their social status, as well as
- to their religion, their beliefs, and their political positions,
- to their identified enemy
- to their sex and gender positions,
- to their mental and physical constitution,
- to their way of life.

This does not mean automatically that the antimodern right-wing forces are also anti-neoliberal in the sense of opposing deregulation, liberalisation, commercialisation and privatisation, but they want to protect and increase their own position by regulation. The political problems in general and especially that of right-wing populism have so sharply increased in the 2000s, because of the combination of the efforts for imposing the implementation of the globalisation strategy of the EU, especially of the Lisbon strategy (regardless to its not realised objectives), of the global financial and economic crises, as it has started in 2008 and as it has provoked the Euro and EU crisis, of raising global problems especially forced by the ecological issue, of the tragic development in the EU neighbourhood, of the way and mode in which the rulers in the EU have dealt with these issues. The on-going piece-meal management of these crises has changed the EU itself profoundly and sustainably:

These changes can be summarized by the following points:

- * the EU and the Eurozone have been further moved in the direction of the neo-liberal paradigm of economic policy, which continuously destroys real economic potential,
- * EU law has been changed in the same direction,
- * EU institutions have been changed, the financial architecture and the institutions of the Eurozone have been “improved” in an, at the very least, rather contradictory way,
- * a new ‘Union method’ which is systematically undercutting democratic controls has been more and more put to use,
- * a new type of Association Agreements and free trade agreements have been signed,
- * inequality and poverty have increased, a humanitarian crisis is developing, new zones of exploitation are being tapped,
- * solidarity and social fellow-feeling as elements of social and territorial cohesion are diminishing or vanishing,

- * democracy has been destroyed in many respects and is still under pressure of further destructive processes,
- * in the very neighbourhood of the EU violence and dislocation are taking an explosive turn, thereby also affecting the EU itself,
- * repression, surveillance, and militarization are increasing within the EU, the co-operation with NATO has reached a new quality.
- * Germany has come out clearly to dominate within the EU, while
 - the EU is constantly declared to be in a state of emergency or exception, and leading governments are acting on this basis, neglecting or transgressing its existing legal bases,
 - the very existence of the European Union is more and more questioned by reactionary and nationalist forces. The significance of Brexit goes far beyond being a simple example for that broadening tendency of wishing for the traditional nation state to come back.

The preparation on our workshop has been additionally complicated by the fact that during the last years in the literature, including that of the left-wing, the use of terms has been changed significantly. In many resp. the most cases the meanings of “right-wing extremism”, “radical right-wing”, “far right”, “extreme right”, “nationalist”, “authoritarian-populist right-wing”, “right-wing populism” are not clearly defined. Until 2010, the scientific mainstream has distinguished between “right-wing populism”, on the one hand, and the increasingly spreading forms of political activism and initiatives coming from the right-wing at large, on the other hand, while using the criterion “acceptance of EU membership”, acceptance of the EU and of the existing borders. This criterion is not viable. The more the non-specified term “right-wing populism” is being used, the more the reflection of its development is hampered and obstructed. The explanation of the reasons for the risingly unspecific use of the term are also connected to an ongoing transfiguration in the political and scientific mainstream which exerts a strong influence on the status, as well as on the political orientations of the respective researchers.

III. On the current state of these problems

We do hope, and, in fact, we do expect, that the most focused contributions from our workshop participants will help to analyse, to understand and to discuss this issue much more deeply.

In the language of the political and scientific mainstream, the main issues for “right-wing populist” front-pulling can be identified as

- Immigration and islamophobia,
- criticism of globalization,
- Euroscepticism,
- social populism.

The same mainstream identifies “security” and “protection against migration and terrorism” as the basis for a new societal consensus to be constructed within the European Union.

The four points referred to above can also explain why many of us (and why many left-wing parties) are blamed for being populist: We criticise – in a very (resp. Marxian understanding) of the societal form of the ongoing process of globalisation – this very process, and the role of the European Union within it. And we tackle the issues of the distribution of property, wealth and income and of the regulation of the economy. While working towards helping people to become enlightened about the very causes of societal and of global problems, and to organise the agents struggling for a perspective of emancipation and solidarity, we strongly refuse and fight the very idea of leaders and avantgardes to take responsibility for these struggles. “Left-wing populism” as such cannot exist. Our work on alternatives for dealing with societal and global problems is based on the idea of changing the capitalist mode of production and the forms of socialisation linked to it – working, therefore, on tackling the main agents of neo-liberal globalisation themselves – i.e. the globalised capitalist oligarchies based on globalised finance capital and their formal and informal organisations. This idea cannot orientate on an exit from the EMU, the EU or from international cooperation, simply because this would mean a further unleashing and unfettering of these very oligarchies and their capitalist power.

According to the arguments in this paper, as we have unfolded them here, we can name the following issues of societal contradictions, conflicts, battles:

- the issues of economic and social policy, in facing „the challenges of globalisation”,
- the issue of global problems especially of climate/ecology,
- the issue of dealing with (im)migration and asylum,
- the issues referring to the dominant forms of gender relations,
- the issues of dealing with global, societal and political problems,
- the issue of dealing with individual inequalities relating
 - * to their social, ethnic, regional, cultural origins and their places of birth,
 - * to their social status,
 - * to their religion, beliefs, political positions,
 - * to their sex or gender,
 - * to their mental and physical constitution, and
 - * to their life style.
- the issue of the role of the EU and especially of its institutions related to the problems mentioned above.

A more or less extreme right-wing populism which has been transformed and now is currently building positions within leading EU member countries has begun to define the political agenda within some key member countries of the EU.

Looking at the very figures reliably available, we face a shocking share of voters supporting authoritarian ideas:

Romania – 82%, Poland – 78%, France 63%, Netherlands 55%, Finland – 50%, Denmark – 49%, United Kingdom – 48%, Italy – 47%, Sweden – 35%, Spain – 33%, Germany – 18%⁶.

“Right-wing populists” as self-styled “protectors of the ordinary people” against “globalisation” have been strengthening their influence since the mid-1990s. Their “criticism” has not any real theoretical basis, but is oriented on inspiring and making use of fears of a globalised world existing within the population, while exacerbating nationalist feelings. They regard globalisation as

⁶ @Statistia_com, source: YouGov

something anonymously emerging from above and, against this background, they argue in favor of authoritarian economic, political and cultural protectionism. Their “criticism” is closely linked to anti-modernism. On the other hand, at least some of the right-wing and authoritarian populists do in fact welcome the arrival of highly qualified workers in the EU and advocate a broadly deregulated labour market.

Since the mid-1980s, different kinds of “EU criticism” have been growing. Gains and progress in relation between increasingly mobile people and their culture are negated, but an unclear “national interest” is praised. Of course, these “Eurosceptics” find many arguments against “Brussels’ centralism” and the “Eurocrats’ regulatory frenzy” while superficially referring to interests of “ordinary people”, above all of the weakest strata and sectors, which they effectively ignore. The bailout programs and especially the memorandums against Greece are being used to justify the adequacy of right-wing nationalist “Euroscepticism”.

The repertoire of “right-wing and authoritarian populists” with regard to a more narrowly viewed economic policy is not compatible with any claim of a protection of “ordinary people”. It is also rather strongly ambivalent with regard to their demands for an authoritarian state, as it includes: the prevention of state economic intervention, the introduction of tax cutbacks, especially in favour of the rich and richer, a reduction in the size and the capabilities of the state apparatus, the privatisation of public companies and of state and communal functions, as well as demands for significantly cutting subsidies for any dimension of culture. But these forces also put forward additional demands for state subsidies in various economic and social areas, for state protection of the health service and for benefits for those who need them “really”, for families, for “security” and especially for the police. Accordingly, their programs and their propaganda efforts combine the economic aims of neo-liberal deregulation with the mobilization of feelings of anti-globalisation, on the one hand, and of income redistribution in favour of higher income groups, with social demagogy, and with elements of a selective welfare state protection, on the other hand.

Deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation are supposed to strengthen the position of their respective national economies in global competition. At the same time, the national state should be protected against other states by regulation. Global competition by low-salary countries is being made use of finding a justification for protectionism. Therefore, the “right-wing populists” put into practice a contradictory strategy, in order to address an extremely differentiated voter spectrum with strongly divergent interests. Any analysis of the impact of “populist radical right-wing parties” (PRRP) on socio-economic policies shows the following: Centre-right governments with PRRP participation tend to pursue more redistributive economic policies compared with governments without PRRP participation (p 5). They support deregulatory economic policies which then result in deregulatory economic policies comparable to these of centre-right governments without PRRP participation. (p. 6)⁷.

In this connection, putting the social welfare networks under the suspicion of being made use of by “social parasites” is of high political importance for “right-wing populists”. And asylum seekers, as categories of people “not belonging here” are then regarded as such “social parasites”.

Approximately two thirds of the EU citizens are convinced that the upper limit for taking in immigrants has already been reached. They share a deep feeling of insecurity and uneasiness – and they have become convinced that the official policy has been closing its eyes to the cultural conflict between traditional, often rural Islam and the libertarian and permissive urbanised societies of the EU. Here, the emancipation of women and of homosexuals has turned into symbols for modernity. But on the other hand, strong “populist right wing and authoritarian” forces regard the very

⁷ Alexandre Afonso, Leonce Röth, Dennis Spies (The impact of Populist Radical Right Parties on socio-economic policies, in: European Political Science Review, page 1 of 26 © European Consortium for Political Research doi:10.1017/S1755773917000133

emancipation of women and of homosexuals as crimes against “our values” and aggressively authoritarian forces orientate on the patriarchal family model. Almost all “right-wing populist” organisations declare to see the “European culture” under threat, they warn against “islamisation” and against dangers to national identity.

IV. Some conclusions for left-wing policy

The central challenge for the left-wing forces is and will be to search for possibilities to act politically in an effective way. This starts with initiative which will be feasible on the local level, within the municipality, constituting the left as an attractive and living force, capable of helping the weakest, of working on specific projects concerning the everyday life of “ordinary people”, of effectively dealing with any kind of threat emerging from anti-emancipatory forces – by organising communication and co-operation of people and groups on specific problems and aims, while at the same time building and strengthening solidarity. This should be connected with a radical left critique of the form and the mode of on-going globalisation, of the really existing European Union and their agencies, especially addressing those based within their “own” country. Being in a political situation of strategic defensive and having been unable so far really to address the causes of the different crises and problems, we should have a closer look at the still and newly on-going political activities of emancipatory agencies and agents ‘in the field’. It is and will be a crucial question, how to strengthen and how to connect these activities and, especially, how to bring them in a way together that the EU institutions would be forced to act against capitalist oligarchies and against the reactionary anti-emancipatory forces – in the interest of those who strive for a decent life for everybody.

We have found three interrelated (or at least inter-relatable) fields of action with regard to which such a perspective may be developed:

- the struggle for active local and regional development,
- the struggle to maintain and democratize the public sphere, in particular, public finance,
- the struggle for democratic, social and ecological standards – in particular, for a minimum of social security, in order to defend people against poverty, to protect basic rights, and to oppose the on-going processes of ecological destruction

It means, to put the issue of commons into the centre of policy.

The on-going (as well as the emerging and coming) defensive struggles are (resp. will be) about defending democratic, social and ecological standards in order to prevent further projects of the capitalist oligarchies, especially their economic and “security”-oriented mega-projects, further deregulation and privatization of the commons, of nature and of the public sphere – and, in this connection, free trade and investment protection agreements such as TISA. One of the crucial arguments in favour of them is the promise of “growth”, while they are, in reality, actively contributing to reinforce the development of destructive kinds of production and of consumption patterns, as well as the underlying and driving processes of commercialisation. It will be of central importance to become capable of demonstrating that there are viable alternative perspectives and that the forces needed to effectively fight for them can be effectively mobilized. This will have to do with local and regional problem-solving in the housing economy, with the supply of food, energy and social services and with the transport sector, as well as with certain sectors of the construction and agriculture industries. Such perspectives of significant change may then begin to seep into the everyday life of citizens who could actually start to challenge the reigning social consensus – as employees, residents, users, consumers, customers, or even as socially, ecologically,

politically committed people, with their respective specific forms of organization and association. This task is made even more urgent by the on-going rise of those “right-wing populist” forces, which has begun at least to develop the power for blocking any real political alternatives by propagating reactionary pseudo-alternatives.

This strategy-building of the left-wing forces – from individuals refusing competition and ecological destruction to their common social, cultural and political initiatives and to organisations (including, trade unions and political parties, and state institutions) – would require building local and regional alliances as well as constructing supra-regional, European, and transnational networks between these alliances. As a logical next step, they will have to focus again on the preservation, democratisation and expansion of the public sphere, as well on the introduction and implementation of democratic, social and ecological standards and, finally, on the struggles to open possibilities for an alternative local and regional development. But for making the still existing possibilities to act in these directions effectively feasible, i.e. in order to combine and to multiply the actions of the different emancipatory forces struggling for alternatives, the issue of comprehensive solidarity based modes of living has to be put into the centre of the work for developing programmatic left wing ideas and conceptions, as well as the corresponding long-term strategies of political action. The explanation for this is easy: the mode of living is complex and concerns all aspects and dimensions of societal reality. But only the massive individual human desire to live together with everybody in a decent life and in an intact nature, as well as the individual and collective will to overcome the reasons for preventing that, will be capable of effectively challenging the prevailing societal conditions and the dominant social relations.

While understanding “authoritarianism” and “right-wing populism” as repercussions of the political weaknesses of the left which leave them space within our societies, we need to ask ourselves and others the following four questions and discuss them in depth:

- Why did the neo-liberal ‘revolution’ in its triumph succeed in structurally weakening the left, in particular during the 1980s?
- Why did the left, in the aftermath of the recent global financial crisis, which subsequently grew into a crisis of the euro and the EU, generally remain in a strategical situation of the defensive?
- Why is it the case that the so-called “right-wing populist forces” are profiting so strongly from the unsolved crises of European societies?
- Which are the causes behind the lack of solidarity mobilised by the left within the EU with the Greek left-wing government elected in January 2015?

These are closely interrelated questions, because the same institutions and people have caused and have profited from the corresponding processes and/or problems: ideologists, think tanks, politicians and the representatives of European finance capital. The left-wing forces have proved incapable of effective resistance, because of being unable to empower themselves and the others for being able to see and to deal with the societal reality without any direct or indirect influence of a communist or social-democrat or whatever other kind of leader. Dedicated organising and solidarity is still required. The left-wing forces could have attempted to create the needed momentum by developing an attractive project and by offering organisational structures that appealed to people with a material and/or ideas-based interest in such a resistance: either, because these changes would or could have structurally improved their position in society, and/or because these changes would or could have enhanced justice in society.

So finally, we also need to talk about our history and our experiences. But these discussions could not take place in detachment from dealing with the current social reality, but has to be discussed in closest connection with current, on-going struggles against the ruling powers, for developing joint strategies in order to support the victims of the dominant policies, as much as to build renewed political forces of radical democratic opposition. Ultimately, this could provide the basis for further action, as well as for joint political strategies, while at the same time countering the main agents of neo-liberal policies and stopping the advance of “right-wing populism”. These forces tend to block the way for the urgently needed mobilization for resistance as well as for positive, emancipatory struggles – simply by offering scape-goats for existing problems alongside with pseudo-solutions – which – in the end – always amount to reinforcing domination, repression, and violence.

Because the current individual and societal everyday life is in fact connected on all local, regional and national levels with the EU level (in its specific relationship to the global one), an adequate in-depth analysis of the new dimensions of European politics will be a much-needed starting step into that very direction. And making use of existing networks and experiences of the left-wing forces will then be required to go beyond this starting step, creating at least the beginnings of an innovative process of deliberation: on how to confront the emerging constellation of crises and its more or less creative management (on the European, on the EU, as well as on the member state levels) in its multi-level reality. Such a democratic counter-strategy will have to begin by carrying the debate on European politics to the sphere of public deliberation within the member states, while aiming at common, solidarity-based reactions “from below” to these politics “from above”. Such initiatives can start this process well before it will be possible to have its claims articulated by more than one member-state government. And we may well make use of already existing transnational networks of mobilization and alliances in order elaborate and to propagate alternative approaches to the prevailing kind of problem management, in clear opposition to all kinds of right-wing proposals – in struggling to make these alternative approaches prevail within the public of our respective member states, while beginning to change the strategic orientations of political parties, and, via their intermediation, also of a (hopefully) growing number of member-states’ governments.

This would still be far from building an effective strategy of transformation in Europe – but it would be a decisive starting point for really developing such a strategy – in the face of the crises of the EU, and in face of the global crises of which they are a specific element.

V. Further questions for research.

We see five questions to be addressed more especially by further research, i.e. questions which are closely interrelated:

The central question is a very complex one and has been accompanying us for years: why is the left so weak? (1)

This weakness is especially to be stated in relation to other agencies – and, therefore, a central challenge is and will be to permanently analyse what the other social and political agencies (with their constitutive perspectives and interests) are doing and what they are achieving – especially with regard to economic policy and to the development of the economy. This brings us to the second question:

Who is doing what, and why, and with which consequences for the political conditions of these different – neoliberal, “right-wing populist” and fundamentalist – agencies? Which are their specific theoretical bases, their economic policies, and the respective economic effects? (2)

From here, we shall have to come back to ourselves again – with our own individual and political attitude and behavior being itself more or less marked by authoritarian populism – and we shall have to ask the question: What does all this mean for the political conditions of left wing agency? How can we improve the own political economy and the economic policy of the left-wing forces? (3)

Working on strategies means also working on critical scenarios for the political, and, finally, for the societal development. (This demands an on-going analysis of social structures, classes and social milieus. Accordingly, a close cooperation e.g. with sociologists and political scientists will be necessary.) We shall have to enquire, which are the scenarios specific to the development of “right-wing populist” and of fundamentalist agencies? (4)

While knowing about the deficits of their own capacity and being fully aware of the central importance of the issue of “security” in dealing with different neoliberal and “right-wing populist” and with agencies of the extreme right-wing, we shall have to enquire about the importance of economic theory, of economic policy and of the economy of “security”, inclusive of their relevancy for the questions (3) and (4).