

Sovereignty in the Era of Globalisation

V4Europe – Renewal in the European Union from Central European Perspectives

- workshop organised by the Hungarian Europe Society -

Budapest, 27 October 2017, Friday

Venue: Ibis Styles Budapest Center, H-1074 Budapest, Rákóczi út 58.

Program:

9.00 – 9.30 Registration

9.30 – 9.45 Welcome and Introduction

István Hegedűs (chairman, Hungarian Europe Society)

9.45 – 11.00 Session 1: A Fresh Start for the European Union or Back to Normal after the Year of Upheaval?

The year 2017 has brought a promising re-start for the historic European project with a new political *elan*. Rhetoric has changed in the international media from “populism is unbeatable” to “populism is dead”, as Cas Mudde observed. Still, the reasons behind the multiple crises the old continent is facing have not disappeared either in the Western or in the Eastern part of the European Union. Illiberalism, Euroscepticism and anti-establishment sentiments are still present as relevant ideological tendencies. In fact, the consolidation of the liberal democratic order as well as the necessary changes and reforms of the European institutional structures need to be based on in-depth analyses of the question “What went wrong?” in the spheres of national and European politics in the last decade or so.

The on-going debates about the future of Europe have been recently revitalised inside the European public sphere. At the moment, political concepts in favour of a differentiated integration and a multi-speed European Union open to all member states seem to enjoy a relatively broad support. Certainly, a more unified EU with joint financial and defence capacities would become a stronger and more influential global actor. Moreover, a general renewal of the European Union, including its policies and institutions, would mean a significant leap forward and a clear alternative to the populist counter-offer demanding cultural resistance and national-regional opposition to the ideal of a closer union.



Populists claim they represent the people against the corrupt elites, whether national or international. Until now, as Benjamin Moffitt argues, temporary transnational coalitions amongst populist leaders and parties have been built just as a strategy secondary to their aggressive national objectives. Should democratic and liberal political forces use this window of opportunity and fight back at the European supranational and party family levels to defend European values, pluralism and the rule of law? Are there possibilities to formulate transnational cross-party coalitions to counter the Euro-sceptic and nationalist-populist forces? Since the EU is not only an area of economic cooperation, but a union of democracies, the European Union is supposed to play a special role using all elements of its legal and political tool-box – incentives and sanctions, engagement and deterrence – to cope with anti-EU protest alliance just like the friendship binding Poland's and Hungary's governments together.

Rosa Balfour (Senior Fellow, German Marshall Fund, Brussels): Current Debates on the Future of Europe and the Perspectives of the Visegrad Region

Erin K. Jenne (Professor, International Relations Department, Central European University, Budapest): Problems of Populist Politics in the International Arena

Moderator: **Zsuzsanna Szélényi** (Member of the Hungarian Parliament, Member of the Hungarian Europe Society)

Debate

11.00 – 11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 – 12.45 Session 2: Where are the Visegrad Countries Heading? Resistance, Critical Thinking and Alternatives

In Central Europe, in spite of the obvious differentiation amongst the four Visegrad states, governments predominantly represent the “sovereignist” view as a key narrative about the European Union. This is especially so in Hungary and Poland, where the ruling parties try to maximize their negotiation potential in a highly assertive way, whilst organising anti-European political campaigns unscrupulously. The potential risks and dangers of an anti-liberal *Sonderweg* leading towards isolation and even towards exit from the European Union in the long run have to be taken seriously. As Donald Tusk, President of the European Council claimed in a strong statement after the attacks of the Polish ruling party Law and Justice against the independence of the judiciary: “They transport us – in the political sense – in time and space: backwards and eastwards”.

The future of the European integration is vital for the countries in Central Europe. It is an open question, whether there are social-historical obstacles to be overcome in favour of a successful path for deeper political and economic integration, or, fresh conflicts are purely the results of short-term governmental measures and narratives? Whilst the notion of sovereignty has fundamentally changed over the time due to globalisation, challenging populism in the area of political thoughts, values and principles, hence, the re-invention of European perspectives against nationalist doctrines seems to be a convincing framework for formulating democratic ideas and alternatives all over in Europe. In reality, the old-fashioned concept of national sovereignty promoted by the Polish and the Hungarian governments as well as their confrontational attitudes towards the European



institutions – using the migration crisis as a bad excuse - have accelerated national and regional insecurity and brought along short-term utilitarian policy decisions which have undermined mutual trust even amongst the Visegrad partners. The situation might even worsen: what kind of dilemmas nationalist-sovereignist governments would face if the concept of a multi-speed Europe really takes shape in the future?

Since no European countries are able to deal on their own with the complexity of challenges – like the Russian threat, the consequences of cyber war, climate change or terrorism - rising in our global era, liberal and democratic political groups and individuals in the Central European region are supposed to remain committed to a united Europe assuming that exercising further elements of sovereignty together would offer better chances to safeguard Europe and its member states. In such a framework, public debates could focus on the real dilemmas how democratic political representatives of the Visegrad4 Group might react to the emergence of economic and political dividing lines inside the European Union. As the Czech and Slovak member governments cautiously move away from the nationalistic-exclusive concept of the Visegrad co-operation and change their focus in the middle of 2017, there are increasing opportunities to discuss how the region can contribute to the further development towards a united Europe.

Magdalena Góra (Assistant Professor, Institute of European Studies, Faculty of Political and International Studies, Jagiellonian University, Krakow): Politicisation of the European integration and the question of sovereignty in the Visegrad countries. A Polish example

Jakub Klepal (Executive Director, Forum 2000, Prague): V4Europe: A Paradigm Shift?

Moderator: **Zsuzsanna Végh** (Vice-chair of the Hungarian Europe Society; Research Fellow, European University Viadrina, Frankfurt an der Oder)

Debate

12.45 – 14.00 Lunch (for invited guests only)

14.00 – 15.15 Session 3: National and European Dilemmas: How Can Traditional and New Actors Unmask Illiberal Frameworks and Re-invent the Pluralist Rules of Democratic Politics?

Democratic political parties and political analysts struggle with the conceptualisation of threatening phenomena like the lack of trust in public institutions or voter realignment towards radical and anti-systemic political forces. Do we have new ways and means to increase electoral sympathy for democratic political solutions and their representatives? Would the re-invention of the old rhetoric about the “end of ideology” and the personalisation of politics that adopts fresh mobilisation techniques mixed with technocratic policy proposals help in blocking the emergence of populists in all respective member states of the European Union? Or, do we need both ideological competition and strategic co-operation between the centre left and centre right of the political spectrum to defeat illiberal politicians? In general, how could promoters of liberal and democratic political ideas react more efficiently to seemingly easy solutions like the assertive proclamation of self-interest and a new



economic and cultural protectionism proposed by populists? Is there still a chance for rational and intellectually sophisticated public debates?

In the meantime, social media is assumed to reward simplistic populist communication spreading fake news and conspiracy theories which disorientate the public in the 21st century's complex environment. Media pluralism often suffers from interlinked business and political interests. In the case of the Hungarian populist political regime, enormous governmental campaigns use xenophobic patterns fabricating and maintaining fear of domestic and foreign enemies in the citizenry. What can be done to promote self-confident anti-populist messages containing alternative ideas to re-gain the trust of people in a more and more mediated world? Quite recently, positive election results in some older EU member states have shown that the mission is not impossible if courageous democratic politicians present smartly formulated political visions.

Mirjana Tomić (Free-lance Journalist; Project Manager, Forum Journalismus und Medien Wien (fjum), Vienna): Media and Journalism Facing New Challenges in the Era of Emerging Populism

Judy Dempsey (Non-resident Senior Fellow, Carnegie Europe, Berlin): Populist Political Communication and How to React (or Not to React) to It

Moderator: **András Radnóti** (Member of the Hungarian Europe Society; PhD Researcher, Central European University, Budapest)

Debate

15.15 – 15.45 Coffee Break

15.45 – 17.00 Session 4: Civil Society under Pressure – Co-operation or Co-existence between the Representatives of Democratic Parties and the Civil Society?

Populist and authoritarian regimes tend to marginalise opposition forces, independent media and critical civil voices. Human rights activists and pro-European NGO-s are especially in the focus of illiberal governments. In Hungary, a brutal propaganda campaign was introduced against civil groups receiving funding from abroad. In reaction, strong resistance has been developed to the pressure both at domestic and European levels. Critical-minded Hungarian NGOs have recently become politically more conscious and active. Solidarity between party politicians and representatives of the civil society, however, suffers from former personal conflicts, different role perceptions and mutual mistrust which can be often detected in the organisation and composition of demonstrations against the illiberal regime.

Minority rights are systematically neglected by populists who claim to be deeply united with their own ethnically homogenous people. Gender inequality as an issue has been thrown out from the public discourse; political correctness has become swear words in the Hungarian and Polish governmental rhetoric. Opposition parties seem to be weak to confront and block the spreading of illiberal, ultra-conservative/ultra-nationalist ideas. A



strong civil society is crucial to demonstrate that there is an open-minded, tolerant alternative to exclusive and impatient political practices in the Central European region.

In the meantime, cynical political forces in power often establish their own NGO-s, so-called GONGO-s, to uphold the pretence of significant social support for their measures and to “counter-balance” the criticism of well-known internationally organised human rights groups and real grass-root movements. The tricky battle for the soul of the civil society brings disorientation and frustration in the eyes of the citizenry. What sort of politically efficient strategy can be formed by the representatives of a free and sovereign civil society to preserve its necessary functions in public life and to strengthen its voice in a polarised political world?

Márta Pardavi (Co-chair, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Budapest): Hungarian NGO-s Under Attack Coping With Politics and Policy Issues

Filip Pazderski (Projects Manager - Democracy and Civil Society Programme, Analyst, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw): Civil Society on the Crossroads of Political Game – Perspectives from Poland and Beyond

Moderator: **István Hegedűs** (Chairman, Hungarian Europe Society)

Debate

17.00 Concluding Remarks

Zsuzsanna Szelényi (Member of the Hungarian Parliament, Member of the Hungarian Europe Society)

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