

## Editorial

The results of the European elections of June, 2009, were interpreted as a „trend to the right“ or „shift to the right“ by most commentators. Many even spoke of a new kind of nationalism which might endanger the European project in the medium run. In many countries, soft or tough Eurosceptics increased their numbers of MPs or even achieved European Parliament seats for the first time, but also extended existing factions or founded new ones. Furthermore, increasing dissatisfaction with the EU expressed itself by a particularly low turnout. With about 43 per cent Europe-wide, again less citizens went to the poll stations than five years before (2004: 45.5%). Never before, the turnout in European elections had been lower. The negative record is held by a new member of the EU, Slovakia, with a turnout of only 19.6 per cent.

If we take a look at a group of neighbouring countries in the centre of Europe: Slovakia, The Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Austria and Hungary, the picture is far from being uniform, however. Among the problematic states children, according to the values of the European constitution project, there can be found both: old and new, “western” and “eastern” member states. Eurosceptics appear not only on the right wing but also on the left wing of the political spectrum, and where they are strong on the left wing sometimes they stay weak on the right wing. On the market of Eurosceptical populism, not seldomly left-wing and right-wing programmatic elements form strange syntheses. And finally, at some places soft Euroscepticism is an obstacle for the rise of tough, extremist variants.

This is true both for the Czech Republic and for Slovakia, where Eurosceptical voices can be heard in the democratic centre as well as – more radically – on the left wing. However, whereas in the Czech Republic right-wing extremist parties have been a fringe phenomenon for years, after a period of weakness the nationalist Slovakian SNS has even been successful with returning to government (in 2006) – as the junior partner in a crude alliance with the left-wing populist “Smer” party, something which is, in this regard, found nowhere else in Europe. As shown by the political scientists Lukáš Novotný (Ústí nad Labem) and Tom Thieme (Chemnitz) in their contribution, currently even the SNS in Slovakia does not mean any real danger for the existence of the constitutional state. However, their influence contributes decisively to political and social polarization, to the “brutalization of the political climate” and to the spread of a distorted picture of history. A militant-violent right-wing extremist scene flourishes on this fertile ground and – as in the neighbouring Czech Republic – is a problem for home security. However, the “massive propaganda against non-Czechs or non-Slovakians” is not only supported by marginal powers, it also reflects attitudes which are wide-spread among the population and indirectly influences the militant scenes again.

The SNS's resentment against the Hungarian minority in the country is met on the Hungarian side by a Greater Hungarian nationalism whose main supporter after the transition was most of all the Hungarian Party of Truth and Life (MIÉP). But together with its aging party leader, Csurka, it lost significance and was not able to benefit from the "credibility crisis" starting in the autumn of 2006. Other actors appeared instead. "Jobbik", based much on young men and had been without success in the parliamentary election of 2006 (in alliance with MIÉP), but gained support in the following years and achieved finally 14.8 per cent of votes in the European election of 2009. A paramilitary unit, the "Hungarian Guard", which was initiated by "Jobbik" and has meanwhile been banned, furthered resentment against Roma and spread with its marches fear and horror among this minority. According to Melani Barlai and Florian Hartleb, both sub-cultural and political party right-wing extremism cannot be interpreted as an effect of the transformation, at least not first of all. They interpret them first of all as a symptom of a post-transformation crisis, to which the big parties are said to have contributed considerably. They are not capable of "initiating a discursive consensus" and do little to bridge old differences. Furthermore, the authors state, the national-populist Fidesz Party does not sufficiently close off from "Jobbik", at the municipal level it even accepts political alliances with it. Also, they say, the party is obviously not interested in "refuting by information the resentments against Roma as well as other stereotypes".

Notwithstanding the democracy-theoretical basic problem, international comparative studies show that not only consequently closing off but also a strategy of inclusion into broader government alliances may sometimes contribute to the political marginalization of anti-establishment parties. For example, in the parliamentary elections of 2007 the two years in government of the two populist parties "Samoobrona" and "League of Polish Families" ended in a political disaster, from which they were not able to recover in the European elections of 2009. From this event the two Polish political scientists Aleksandra Moroska (Wrocław) and Krzysztof Zuba (Opole) draw a fundamental conclusion regarding the conditions for success of populist parties, which they consider to be characterized by a two-fold exclusion (vertical dimension: "us" against "those above"; horizontal dimension: "us" against "those others", i. e. "foreign" minorities, groups, organizations, institutions): Under favourable prevailing conditions (an atmosphere of fear and crisis among the population), due to their anti-attitude they find support but will soon lose it when being given the role of decision-makers instead of oppositional critics and when the political climate becomes more positive.

Austria seems to confirm this rule. There, the FPÖ's participation in two ÖVP-led federal governments (2000–2005) resulted in a considerable decline in votes and a dramatic increase of inner-party conflicts. A split was the result. However, this weakening of the populists has not proven to be lasting. Whereas Jörg Haider's new foundation, the BZÖ, was successful only in Carinthia and

lost its political leadership due to Haider's death in a road accident, the FPÖ under its leader Heinz-Christian Strache gained renewed attractiveness. Meanwhile, once again it plays its well-known role as a vehicle of protest and a means of pressure against the ever-lasting Grand Coalition. As explained by the Paris political scientist Patrick Moreau, this acceptance among parts of the population may also be due to verbal-radical statements not being taken really seriously: "Nothing of the policies of making the national-populist right-wing take part in government has ever resembled any national-socialist temptation. This 'radical' right-wing has been accepted, and nobody is much worried by the possibility of their renewed participation in a coalition with ÖVP or SPÖ."

After all, how much different is the situation in Germany, where at the national level right-wing extremist parties play almost no role at all but are still a subject of public concern. Apart from differences concerning dealing with history, this is most of all due to politically motivated violence which has declined after its dramatic rise in the years following the reunification but stays to be at a comparatively high level. Furthermore, one tough right-wing extremist party, the NPD, was able to achieve good election results most of all in the eastern federal states and to gain seats in two federal parliaments, and often by a symbiotic relationship with militant scenes. The political scientist Henrik Steglich, who in his Dresden dissertation thesis systematically analyzed the conditions for success of right-wing extremist parties,<sup>1</sup> shows in his contribution the complexity of a number of factors that help to make this phenomenon comprehensible. Obviously, the NPD successfully exploits the special prevailing conditions and opportunity structures in Eastern Germany: "Both economically and in respect of the rooting of democratic structures, the new federal states are still in a process of transformation. Social protest, anti-capitalism and statements directed against the western community of values make a considerable share of their message." The NPD, he states, does "reconstruction work" where the established political and social actors are weak: in the rural space. "Both topically and by its organisational structures it has adjusted to the conditions of a transformation society", and it benefits from it.

Thus, it is hardly possible to explain the success of right-wing extremist parties without appropriately considering the characteristics and abilities of actors. For, favourable prevailing conditions and opportunity structures alone are not enough. Rather, in the competition with other actors of the system of political parties they must be changed into political currency, particularly votes. And for achieving it, not only for one election but over a longer period, programmatic, personnel, organisational and strategic conditions must be met, which many among the non-established are not up to. The cases of Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria provide convincing examples of this. But even in

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1 See Henrik Steglich, *Rechtsaußenparteien in Deutschland: Bedingungen ihres Erfolgs und Scheiterns*, Göttingen 2010.

Slovakia and Hungary the process of the consolidation of democracy may be supposed to have progressed far enough, so that despite serious extremist challenges a crisis of the system seems to be out of the question for the foreseeable future.

*Uwe Backes*