



## **LIBERAL ANSWERS TO NATIONALISM AND POPULISM**

### **The Liberal vision for the future of Europe**

**Neos Lab Vienna, Neubaugasse 64 - 66, 1070 Vienna**

**Vienna, 13 – 14 April 2019**

#### **The purpose of the meeting**

“A spectre is rising over Europe” this famous sentence was written at the eve of the revolution in 1848 by Karl Marx. He was referring to the Communist revolution, which failed at this time. Nowadays, another spectre is rising: the spectre of right-wing populism. In most European Member States the right-wing parties and movements won the last elections. In some countries in the East and likewise in the West right-wing parties even entered into the national governments, or maintained the power. The threat is apparent, and it will last for a certain time. How can Liberals answer to this threat and contribute to its decline?

The situation is even more complicated. On the one hand, there are many communalities that characterize the populist movements and parties: Their strategy is based on the use of, mostly imagined, threats caused by migration, corrupt and/or incapacitated politicians, the “bureaucracy in Brussels”, etc. On the other hand, they vary their strategies according to national traditions. Whilst some are openly antisemitic, some concentrate on anti-islamism, and others are more generally mobilizing against minorities in their own countries. Some are traditionalists, some others modernists. The situation in the European Parliament teaches us that the right-wing populism has many different faces and hence three different groups in the European Parliament. The liberal answers against the right-wing need hence to be quite flexible, not denying existing problems, but forcefully show the liberal alternatives.

It is evident that the development and the implementation of a successful strategy must be conceptualized as a sustainable process and cannot be gained through single events only. One of the results of the first workshop in Visegrád was the decision to continue the work on Liberal futures as antithesis to the right-wing populism. The Vienna workshop understands itself as an element for the development of such a strategy and is already the second event in a row.

#### **The background**

On 1 – 2 December 2018 European liberals met in Visegrád for the workshop “The bright future of Liberalism”. Liberals all over Europe were attending the workshop that was organised in Visegrád with a quite important symbolic intention: The Visegrád Group was created on the 15th February 1991 at a meeting of the Václav Havel, President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Lech Wałęsa, President of the Republic of Poland, and József Antall, Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary. The aim was to join the European Union after the end of the Communist regime as “new democracies”.

As we know now, the so-called Visegrád group was successfully turned into another direction, and this in the beginning by democratic elections. After winning the elections, step by step, the right-wing started to implement what Orbán calls “the illiberal democracy”, changing the institutional system and the electoral one. Italy seems to take the same path, and in many aspects by Austria as well. In many European Member States right-wing populism is on the rise, with the new concept of forming a break-away agglomeration of nationalistic and egoistic states celebrating the concept of the “illiberal democracy”. Hence, the workshop was organised as a symbol for regaining Visegrád for the defence of the concept of liberal democracy.

Europe is at the crossroad between a further deepening of a democratic Europe and a decomposition of with a weak political entity and a weak European identity.

Furthermore, the participants shared the opinion that the related topics are interesting for Liberals beyond the V4 countries. Already the initial audience comprised Liberals not only from the V4 countries, but from the neighbouring countries as well.

## **The organisers**

The **European Programme Committee** comprises Ronald J Pohoryles, Tibor Zachar, Anja Fabiani Karolina Derzyńska & Susanne Wunderer

The **local organising team** consists of Chris Hildebrandt, Susanne Wunderer, Stefan Windberger and Ronald Pohoryles.

## **The Programme**

**Saturday, 13 April**

### ***Fighting populism and extremism: The aims of the workshop***

- 2:00 pm – 2:15 pm Welcome Address by the Host
- 2:15 pm – 2:45 pm Divided societies, divisive populism and liberal answers: an introduction into the theme; *Ronald J Pohoryles*, ALDE Individual Members Austria
- 2:45 pm – 3:15 pm Confronting the right-wing populism with liberal optimism; *Stefan Windberger*, ALDE-NEOS Candidate for the European elections (tbc)
- 3:15 pm – 3:45 pm Coffee Break

### ***Fighting populism and extremism: Examples from European Member States***

- 3:45 pm – 4:15 pm Hungary under populist rule – Liberal perspectives for a return to European values; *Annet Bösz*, Hungarian MP, Liberálisok
- 4:15 pm – 4:45 pm On the various faces of populism: the Czech Case; *Villem Tanzer* (tbc)
- 4:45 pm – 5:15 pm Liberalism can win: How Slovakia successfully challenged the Slovakian populism; *Pavel Sibyla*, Progressívne Slovensko
- 5:15 pm – 6:00 pm Fighting populism in a pluralistic democracy: Liberal strategies in the Netherlands; *Robert Schliessler*
- 6:00 pm – 6:30 pm Recap & Public debate, led by *Susanne Wunderer*, Member of the Board of ALDE IM Austria
- 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm Flashmob for a liberal Europe and an ever deeper European Integration, led by *Susanne Wunderer*

**Sunday, 14 April 2019**

***How to fight populism and extremism: The liberal way***

10:00 am – 10:30 am The liberal answer to populism: The fight for an Open Society;  
*Friedhelm Frischenschlager*, Member of the Board of ALDE IM Austria

10:30 am – 11:45 am The transnational perspective: Why Eastern European Liberals and  
Western European Liberals have to closely co-operate; *Tibor Zachar*, FDP

11:45 am – 12:00 am Coffee Break

***The Civil Society fighting populism and extremism***

12:00 am - 12:30 am The threat of populism and the responses of the civil society; *Karolina  
Derżyńska*, ALDE Individual Members country coordinator

12:30 am – 1:00 pm The subtle storm of Pop-Extremism, *Anja Fabiani*, ALDE IM Slovenia

1:00 pm – 1:30 pm Fighting extremism by empowering minorities and undermining the  
extremist by using their own weapons: The Gaming Project “GAMER” Tools that  
enables groups who are target by hate to respond; *George Weiss*, La Benevolencija, NL

***Further perspectives: Towards a sustainable liberal strategy***

1:30 pm – 2:15 pm Sandwich lunch and bi-lateral talks

2:15 pm – 3:30 pm *Recap, and further perspectives: Sustainable transnational cooperation  
for Europe*

If you need any further information, do not hesitate to contact [office@austrian-liberals.eu](mailto:office@austrian-liberals.eu), or  
[r.pohoryles@austrian-liberals.eu](mailto:r.pohoryles@austrian-liberals.eu) .

Updates will be available at <https://www.facebook.com/ALDEAustria/>