



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

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

**Neosphäre Vienna, Neubaugasse 64 - 66, 1070 Vienna**

**Vienna, 13 – 14 April 2019**

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

“A spectre is haunting Europe”. This famous sentence by Karl Marx written at the eve of the 1848 revolution referred to Communism. Presently, another spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of right-wing populism: Right-wing parties and movements are winning elections in many EU Member States. In some countries, both East and West, extreme right-wing parties form part of coalition governments. The threat is real and is likely to last for a certain time.

### **What can Liberals do to counteract this threat?**

We are faced with a rather complex situation. On the one hand, populist movements and parties share commonalities: All of them make use of a narrative of threat constructed around the distorted observation of issues such as migration, corrupt and/or incapable politicians or the estranged, hence ailing, European Brussels bureaucracy. On the other hand, populist movements tend to adapt their strategies to national sensibilities. Whilst some are openly antisemitic, some concentrate on anti-Islamism, while others mobilize generally against minorities. Some are traditionalists, others are modernists. In other words, right-wing populism is protean in character. This explains why right-wing parties are distributed across three different groups within the European Parliament.

Liberal answers against right-wing populism need therefore to be flexible – not denying existing problems, but forcefully showing liberal alternatives.

The development and implementation of a successful strategy must be conceptualized as a sustainable process. It may not be gained through single events alone. Following the first workshop in Visegrád, it was decided to continue the work on Liberal Futures as a structuring process against right-wing populism. The Vienna workshop, the second in a row, understands itself as an element for the development of such a strategy.

## The background

On 1 – 2 December 2018 European liberals met in Visegrád to discuss “The bright future of Liberalism”. The location of the first workshop was chosen quite intentionally. The Visegrád Group was established on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1991 at a meeting that brought together 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 of the three presidents was to establish a cooperative structure to assist their strivings towards European integration following the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Almost thirty years later, the Visegrád group and process has been transformed – alas by way of democratic elections – into its opposite. European integration and liberalism are no longer the steering goals. Right-wing populist parties have taken over the political process and have begun to implement, step by step, what Viktor Orbán calls “the illiberal democracy”. Along the way they are changing both the institutional and electoral systems and threatening to undo constitutional premises. Italy appears to be following a similar path; in some ways, this also applies to Austria. In several other EU Member States, the new concept of forming a break-away agglomeration of nationalistic and egoistic states celebrating the concept of the “illiberal democracy” is likewise on the rise. The first workshop was accordingly organised as a symbol for regaining Visegrád for the defence of the concept of liberal democracy – and not only for the V4 countries.

## The organisers

The **European Programme Committee** comprises Ronald J Pohoryles, Tibor Zachar, Anja Fabiani Karolina Derżyńska & 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 to 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 Open Society against authoritarian tendencies, *Lyudmila Kozlovska*, President, Open Dialogue Foundation
- 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/>