

ALTER SUMMIT

Theses on the Struggle against Right-Wing Extremism in Europe

In Europe, right-wing extremism is no longer a marginal phenomenon. This is shown by the neo-fascist movements in Hungary and Greece, Jobbik and Golden Dawn, both of them exercising violence in the public space against political opponents and minorities while simultaneously making use of the legal political space provided to them as a consequence of their representation in parliament.

This phenomenon has many faces. Except the neo-fascists who unashamedly profess to violence, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and the fascist tradition, there are right-wing extremist parties who have modernised their discourse in such a way that they are able to mobilise also many voters who are embittered about their social situation and politics in general, who cannot perceive an alternative but do not sympathise with Fascism and National Socialism in the first place.

Yet, the core of their ideology characterising the thinking and feeling of both the leaders and the cadres of those parties again and again breaks through the thin layer of the discourse moderated for political reasons as could recently be observed with Dutchman Geert Wilders or Austrian Andreas Mølzer.

In the face of the crisis in Europe it would be a serious mistake to overlook or underestimate the danger emanating from right-wing extremism in its different forms. 70 years after the liberation of Europe from National Socialism, the Holocaust as well the war are to us both reminder and obligation to energetically oppose Fascism.

I. Different causes to be understood as present-day realities

The right extremism we are confronted with today is a current phenomenon with new characteristics which need to be judged from the perspective of present-day realities. Where ever it emerges is an expression of the deep and unresolved economic, social and political crisis. The traditions to which it refers and the form it takes differ from country to country. As far as the social situation is concerned, its origins in some Central and Eastern European countries lie in the crises which have emerged in the course of transition from state socialism to capitalism. In Hungary, the rise of far-right reflects a general dissatisfaction of the populations for which at the moment there is not left-wing political answer. The far right's role is to control this discontent within limits and to maintain the extreme inequality of the society through the use of various forms of violence. In other cases austerity policies imposed by the Troika, mass unemployment, dismantling of the social welfare state are triggering a progressive precarisation even of seemingly consolidated societies which results in a brutalisation of the working world and in a growing fear of the future.

In all cases right-wing extremism is an expression of the systemic and structural crisis and growing social frustration, anger about the non- acknowledgement of work and qualification and the fear of poverty

II. The crisis has also seized the political system

In most countries the same parties have for decades now been replacing each other in positions of power or forming the governments and as a power cartel share both authority and influence.

They have mainstreamed politics along the lines of neoliberal capitalism controlled by the financial markets. Now they are by large parts of the populations held responsible for the social consequences of this development and rightly so. Many people turn away from them and from politics in general. In a situation in which it becomes obvious that the neoliberal social and economic project has failed the right wing of the power elites tries to fabricate a new ideological legitimacy of the state through ethno-nationalism, which embraces anti-Semitism, Romaphobia and the exclusion of foreigners. Right-wing extremist parties make use of this crisis and pretend to be in opposition to the dominant political system and portray themselves as defenders of welfare state arrangements from which according to their nationalist and racist views they want to exclude foreigners and migrants. Meanwhile many of these ideas have affected the discourse in the centre of the societies. But their aim is not to set real democracy of participation and shared responsibility against the depletion and falsification of democracy, but replace democracy altogether by an authoritarian regime, in which the “people’s will” is interpreted and executed immediately by a charismatic leader. Neoliberal individualisation creates a favorable environment for their agenda as does the personalisation of politics promoted by main-stream media. The modernised right-wing extremist parties are therefore not an expression of democratic protest but represent a danger to democracy: they use the bad to promote the worst.

III. The thrust against European integration

The crisis of the political systems particularly affects European integration and national relations in Europe; on the one hand, because right-wing parties want to redirect the tensions of the socio-economic crisis into nationalism, that is, into the rejection of other peoples and immigrants; on the other, because the European Union is ever more losing the trust of the populations as a consequence of the institutionalisation of neoliberalism and austerity policies.

In this atmosphere the right-wing extremist parties have adopted the rejection of European integration as their common strategy. This strategy is the core element of their attempt at forming a fraction of their own in the upcoming elections to the European parliament. The alternative to European integration is the nationalist rivalry between the European powers. Therefore the project of a European fraction of nationalists is a contradiction in itself, it is pure demagoguery hiding its real intentions which is sting up nations against each other.

IV. The power of TINA (There Is No Alternatives)

The frustration about the dominant policy is increased by the absence or the lacking visibility of democratic and social alternatives. This observation applies in differing degrees to the individual states as well as at EU-level. Trade unions, social movements and political actors often have alternatives, but they share the responsibility for the lack of visibility of these alternatives. But without a political alternative and change of political power relations in the states and at EU-level neither an exit from the crisis will open up nor can the rise of right-wing extremism be countered by anything strategically decisive.

V. Competitiveness’ ideology versus European solidarity

The trust in neoliberal policies has been shaken by the economic crisis. But neoliberal hegemony, that is, the dominance of neoliberal ideas in mass culture, in the media and in everyday life has remained untouched in many countries. Competitiveness in thinking, lack of solidarity, sexism, homophobia and racism do not only form a fertile ground for right-wing extremist parties but also for the spreading of right-wing extremist attitudes in the middle of society, pressuring both the programmes and practical actions of the mainstream parties towards the Right. The borders between neo-fascist parties on the one and modernised parties of right-wing extremism on the other have always been permeable and relative. But what we can observe today is a convergence between modern right-wing extremist and conservative-nationalist parties as well as hybrid forms between both. The system became closed to the left and open to the right. It is a real threat in many countries that the Right and the Far Right will join forces. Also in this process of

rapprochement and restructuring the scepticism vis-à-vis the European integration plays a role as convergence of strategies.

VI. Movements and unions in Europe fighting for equality and respect

The struggle against right-wing extremism is one on behalf of the culture of co-existence in all contexts. Both the workplaces and factories and in them the struggle for equal rights and working contracts for all employed play a crucial role. The coordination of their struggle against right-wing extremism of three French trade unions (CGT, FSU and Solidaire), the campaign against racism in the working world launched by the Austrian Federal Trade Union Federation, as well as ETUC's Action plan on migration are important examples.

The struggle against sexism, homophobia and against all kinds of religious fundamentalism which wants to rob women of their rights unites all democratic and social forces. The solidarity with the Spanish women defending their right to self-determination is part and parcel of the struggle against the extreme Right.

The right-wing hate campaigns are to be confronted by a culture of solidarity, with the solidarity networks and cooperatives in Greece which aim at leaving nobody behind in these hard times of crisis and the European network against privatisation and commercialisation of health and social protection setting important examples.

We are fighting for a humane asylum and refugee policy respecting human rights and for the social and financial responsibility being borne by all states of the European Union jointly and in solidarity. We demand equal rights for everybody person living in Europe.

Both municipalities and schools are bearing a high degree of responsibility for the inclusion of migrants and national minorities such as Roma and Sinti. The civil society is called upon to oppose right-wing extremism in all its guises. We support citizens' initiatives in several cities, in Germany among others, where people are resisting court orders relinquishing public spaces to neo-Nazi parties for assemblies and marches.

We have to stand up against the Far Right by legal means as well. In this regards the Paris Peace Treaty signed after the end of WWII is to be applied.

We demand a European directive obliging the member states of the EU to adopt laws which make an offence neo-Nazi activities and actions directed against minorities and aiming at robbing people of their democratic and human rights. These laws would oblige the authorities to intervene and to both make legal and encourage the resistance of citizens.

VII. Another Europe is (urgently) needed

We are against the neoliberal capitalist policy of the EU. However unlike the Far Right we are not against the EU but fighting for another direction of the European integration process. We fight for another Europe: for a Europe of peoples, guaranteed social security and ecological sustainability.

A central element in the strategy against right-wing extremism is the joint struggle of social movements and trade unions against the austerity policies and memoranda as outlined in many statements and in the Manifesto of the Alter Summit. There can be no durable democracy without defending and further developing the social welfare state, the public services and the Commons as well as the strengthening of trade unionist rights, overcoming mass unemployment and the guarantee of the right to education and employment for the young generation in all European regions and states.

The alternative to European integration consists in national oppositions and rivalries between the European powers. Yet, this is not a programme of peace, of social, democratic and political progress but one of nationalism. That is the programme of the right-wing extremists.

Their programme aims at emerging from the crisis as political winners. The calculation is based on the assumption that the EU in its current neoliberal constitution, which has institutionalised the rule of the financial markets, is losing the consent of ever more parts of the population. We are not

opposing European integration as such which must instead of dividing embrace the whole European continent. But we need to demand a fundamental change of direction in European integration and a re-foundation of the EU.

Our Conclusion : Towards a European alliance based on analysis and choice for solidarity

The struggle against right-wing extremism and neo-Nazism requires a complex strategy tackling the roots of the social, political and cultural evils. It must not only be led by experts and experts' organisations in the anti-fascist struggle, although they have an important task to fulfil, but it requires all social movements, trade unions, faiths, cultural and political activists. It must include ever broader layers of the society in order to isolate socially, politically and morally neo-fascist and right extremist parties and movements. It must be organized on the broadest possible basis including all approachable forces of social, political and cultural life. The creation of broad alliances must be the priority in determining our strategies and selecting the forms of actions. However the struggle against right-wing extremism and neo-Fascism takes place in a time in which the crisis and the ruling policies destroy and threaten the well being of millions of European citizens. It cannot remain neutral with regard to this reality but must connect itself with the struggle for a democratic Europe of equal opportunities for all, for overcoming austerity policies, for jobs, social rights and equality, ecological sustainability and for real democracy and solidarity.

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