

Jürgen Trittin

Unregulated Globalization

The Rise of Populism and Nationalism in Europe

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
dear Ms. Scoffield,
dear Ambassador Sparwasser,
dear Mr. McNee,

Thank you for inviting me to the *Global Centre
for Pluralism*.

Populism is a threat to pluralism.

Populists and nationalists are gaining ground not only - but all over Europe: in Italy, in Poland, in the Netherlands, in France, in Austria, in Finland,

in Denmark, in Norway, in the UK, and in Germany.

Why is populism so successful? And why now?

1 Sherwood Forest

There is no simple answer. But there are a few trends worth looking at.

Right-wing populists always claim to speak for the *little man*. But they don't. In Europe, **right-wing populists are strongest in countries that are well off** like Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands or Germany.

By contrast, people in Spain and Greece are still suffering from the effects of the crisis. But instead of turning to right-wing nationalist, **they voted left and pro-European.**

The European Union is not a *zero-sum-game*. The economies of all member states have benefited from the Southern and Eastern enlargement as well as from a deepening of the union. But in those states that benefited the **most**, populism has risen:

populism is **not** the answer of the poor. Populist parties are **not** elected by those who live in precarious conditions, but **by those defending small privileges**. Right-wing populism is **male** and **white**.

Demands from the political left to distribute society's wealth more evenly are often associated with *Robin Hood behavior*. In that analogy **populism is the Sheriff of Nottingham disguised as Robin Hood**.

1.1 Upper class hooligans

Paul Taggart, Professor at the University of Sussex says: "Populism is politics for ordinary people by extraordinary leaders".

- ↳ *Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian populist: **super rich** and **super corrupt**.*
- ↳ *Or Geert Wilders, the Dutch populist: **super rich** and **super islamophobic**.*
- ↳ *Or Boris Johnson, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs: **super upper-class** pretending to be ordinary and **super fake news-promoter** of Brexit.*

These men are not ordinary guys but belong to the extraordinary elite they campaign against.

2 The father of Populism - Neoliberalism

When did this present rise in populism start? Evidence points to the **financial crisis of 2008**.

After 30 years of neoliberalism and of weakening democratic institutions, states suddenly had to act. To prevent the collapse of entire economies they saved banks by transforming **bank debts into state debts**.

States like Ireland, Spain or Greece weren't able to raise billions of Euros to save the banks by

themselves and were thus forced under the umbrella of austerity reigned by the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission.

And thus the success story of populism and nationalism began anew.

In many European countries, populist parties became strong by first and foremost fighting European solidarity. This was also the outset for the *Alternative für Deutschland* - the AfD. They started as an explicitly Anti-European Party. In **2013**, they got **4,8 %** with their anti-EU-agenda.

Viktor Orbán won the federal elections in Hungary by promising to the Hungarian people to save all real estate debts in foreign currencies . He did this with the backing of billions of Euro-bonds provided by the European Union which

he, at the same time, criticized heavily. The real winners of this approach have not been the Hungarian people but **banks in Austria and Germany.**

I am confident, without the financial crisis lots of people in the middle classes would still believe that there is a better future for them and their children. The experience of the crisis made them **defend** their small wealth against those who have less.

They fight the poor.

If you look at the voters of the AfD, their majority is **not** coming from the poorer east of Germany. The majority comes from **the Western states of Germany, from the wealthiest** states

with the **lowest** unemployment rate - **Baden-Wuerttemberg** and **Bavaria**.

Furthermore, the voters of AfD are neither dumb nor silly. The number of academics in the AfD-Group of the German Bundestag is as high as in the *Green Parliamentary Group*.

Some forecasts saw them being reigned in by parliament. But the opposite is the case. Nine month in *Bundestag* have **radicalized** them.

The AfD today is no longer just a populist party. It's a racist und nationalistic party, I would even call them the radical right.

2.1 Unequality

European populists usurped the social question because the center-left failed to raise it. Instead,

in an attempt to tame capitalism the center-left fatally introduced neoliberal programs. In the UK it was coined *New Labour* - in Germany *Agenda 2010*. Labels that haunt them until today.

Until this day, after 30 years of largely unregulated globalization, elites from the center-left have failed to find answers for the most urging questions.

Take for instance the **social imbalance** of German society.

Estimations show that **the richest people in Germany (0.1%)** own around **1.6 trillion Euros**, whereas **half of the population** owns **nothing** and **one fifth** of society is **indebted**. But besides

strong economic performance and big tax revenues, the pressing need for investments in common goods like welfare, health, and infrastructure have been shamefully neglected.

That is the legacy of 30 years of neoliberalism.

2.2 Nationalism

At this point, let me include a thought about **nationalism**. When I speak about the consequences of unregulated globalization, I don't mean going back to national policy.

Contrary to the claims of right-wing populists, nationalism does not solve any problem but it creates new ones.

Just look at the present trade conflict between America and China. Or the looming rupture of

EU: nationalists across Europe make false promises of salvation behind closed borders, the UK is leaving the peace project, and the remaining 27 states are at risk to fracture into two camps, the rich and the poor.

European Solidarity is in decline.

3 General will of “the people”

Populist promise participation. **But Populism is based on exclusion.**

Populists separate society into **two homogeneous and antagonistic groups**: *the people versus the other*.

Therefore, everyone who diverges from the populists is branded a **traitor of *the people***. The

common denominator of the right-wing populist parties is: hatred of ***the Other***.

Right-wing populists claim: their policies are good for everyone. But if you study their manifestos, you will find a paradox: they are **doubly exclusive**.

↳ First, they **exclude** anyone who **isn't** part of *the people*.

↳ And secondly, contrary to their own propaganda, their policies **do not profit people of low income**, who are poorly educated or in other ways disadvantaged.

Their policies are fundamentally elitist. It's their overarching ideology that assures them their electoral victory.

At the end of the day, people vote for the exclusion of *the other*.

4 Four theses for discussion

Of course, many people in Germany are highly alarmed by the success of the AfD; gloomy pictures of **Nazi-Germany** arise. But there are also a lot of people who courageously rally against the racist views of the **AfD**.

While there is no quick fix, here are **four theses** for policies **against populism and nationalism**.

- 1) **Equality is key**. We need **inclusive policies** that **support diversity and pluralism**. We need inclusive policies that support those who are in need - financially and socially. And we need inclusive policies that empower rather than create new dependencies.

- 2) **Ecology and climate protection is justice.** By now, we have maneuvered our planet into a climate crisis and the poor suffer the most. Not just since the industrial revolution has *the West* gained profits on the back of the *the Rest*. It is time to pay up: if we continue like this, extreme weather events will knock on our doors as well - and that will only be the beginning.
- 3) **Free trade needs to be fair.** By now, we all see the immense disadvantages of unrestrained capitalism. The rich become richer, the poor become poorer, and the environment is being destroyed. Every new bubble creates the next financial crash. We cannot go on like this. The economy needs regulation for the benefit of everyone.

4) **Multilateralism is the solution.** Hardly any problem can be solved by one nation alone, because **problems ignore borders.** The experience not only from the two World Wars led to **multilateralism.** Therefore, if we want to stop the rollback, **global governance must be the basis of international politics.**

5 Don't feed the troll

And, one important thing at the end. Hate, racism and exclusion do **not deserve our understanding.**

Populists are **not right.** They name problems **but no solutions.** And some problems they make up altogether.

They become stronger, if democratic parties try to be tougher on refugees than populists.

In social media as in real life, we need to respect one basic rule: **don't feed the troll.**

Thank you!