

EU Ideas Lab by DAAD Circle of Friends and partners: "Right-wing populism in Europe".

For some years now, most countries in Europe have been experiencing a growing influence of right-wing populist parties. They sit in many parliaments, represent right-wing authoritarian positions (Poland, Hungary) and are performing a successful "normalisation". Marine Le Pen, for example, is considered to have realistic chances of winning the French presidential elections in 2022. "Only Ireland is the country in Europe without right-wing populist success" (Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Heitmeyer).

Role of civil society

In the EU Ideas Lab of the DAAD Circle of Friends "Democratic Civil Society under Pressure", an intensive and multi-faceted scrutinization of the political pressure emanating from right-wing populist forces in Europe, which took place from 17-19 June 2021 (via Zoom). Prof. Dr. Dierk Borstel from the Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Dr. Floris Biskamp from the Hans Böckler Foundation-funded doctoral programme Right-Wing Populist Social Policy and Exclusionary Solidarity at the University of Tübingen took the academic lead.

In workshops and panel discussions, with the participation of DAAD alumni (mainly from Germany and Hungary), very solution-oriented work was done on what and how civil society opposes or might oppose this pressure. The search for clues took place in the areas of school, university, church and trade unions as well as in culture and media.

The moderator Britt Lorenzen provided coherent summaries between the varied formats (overview presentation, panel discussion, work in small groups with the help of miro boards, pooling of results and discussion). The team from Dortmund University of Applied Sciences, led by Dr. Anneka Esch-van Kan and Lara Müller, pulled out all the stops to ensure a smooth technical process and showed a personal insight into Dortmund's Nordstadt in the video.

Attitude patterns and alliances

Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Heitmeyer, senior professor at the University of Bielefeld, presented an escalation model of the "legitimation bridges" for "group-related misanthropy", which expresses itself in the population as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, etc., for example. He mentioned more recent developments that account for the success of right-wing authoritarian forces, such as the brutalisation of language, a higher mobilisation capacity or also a normalisation of (authoritarian) attitude patterns. In times of the Corona crisis, there was an alliance and reinforcement through conspiracy ideologies (anti-vaccinationists, „Querdenker“).

The importance of opportunity structures

Dr. Pia Gerber, Managing Director of the Freudenberg Foundation, used the example of Hoyerswerda to point out the importance of reliable local youth work (especially in rural areas) and the devastating effect of the loss of opportunity structures for encounter and exchange. From their point of view, art (in its political content) has an important transformational role to play.

Targeted framing

Sanem Kleff, executive director of Aktion Courage, pointed out the necessity of content-related media competence in schools. Pressure from the right manifests itself as an attack on basic school structures (finances, people, legal issues). The severity and permanence of the confrontation has increased in her long-term observation, the attribution of patterns of interpretation (framing) in the sense of a targeted rotation of the victim role in racist attacks is becoming more omnipresent. In addition, there is an increase in parliamentary initiatives, network activities and targeted defamation of donors.

Decontextualisation and patterns of agitation

Daniel Kraft, DAAD alumnus and press spokesperson for the Federal Agency for Civic Education reported from his field of activity, which is increasingly exposed to (verbal) threats of violence. According to his presentation, the targeted insulting of institutions follows a recognisable pattern: quotes are decontextualised (torn out of their context of meaning), transferred from the medium (into another medium, another mode of dissemination) and in a short time a "shitstorm" erupts from nowhere. He sees a solution for "separated publics" in "outreach (educational) formats", possibly orchestrated by an European umbrella organisation for political education.

European science network

After the workshop phases with a lot of personal commitment (and concern) from individual participants, the most important food for thought and suggestions were compiled. A mentimeter survey was used to identify the ideas that seemed particularly worthy of expansion and connection. Here are the most important impulses:

- An European science network should ensure that researchers/students in all European countries can study their chosen subjects and freely conduct research in them - if necessary with the possibility of changing to another country.
- EU funding programme for structurally weak regions - art and cultural areas
- Outreach political education: Discourse on the acceptance of the equality of people
- European School Opening Programme: Schools from European countries cooperate on programmes and measures against violence (in any form).
- Basic law as a basis for guiding principles of schools

Commitment and task for Europe

In summary, a high importance of Europe can be ascertained: Those ideas were favoured that focus on Europe-wide solutions and international cooperation. In this way, the EU Ideas Lab builds a bridge to the first Europe-wide alumni meeting, which is to take place after the Bundestag elections in spring 2022 with the involvement of politicians from the European Parliament. DAAD alumni will bring the most important impulses from the various European labs to this major meeting. Further events on the topic of the threat to democracy are planned on the Alumniportal Deutschland in the coming months.

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