



Event Report

Konrad Adenauer Foundation
Office for Spain and Portugal



NATIONALISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

European Roundtable 2018 of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Country Office for Spain and Portugal

From 1 to 3 June 2018, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Country Office for Spain and Portugal organized its annual European Roundtable in Barcelona on "Nationalism in the European Union". The participants were politicians, scientists, policy advisors and journalists from 11 European countries. This is a summary of the most important points of the discussion.

Nationalism is back in Europe. Not only in Hungary or Poland, but also in countries such as France, Great Britain, Italy, Greece and Germany, nationalist and populist movements have emerged and strengthened in recent years. In addition to the National Front in France and the Lega in Italy, the secessionist movement of the nationalists in Catalonia, the entry of the Alternative for Germany into the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) and the controversial legal reforms in Poland, which were even defined as a breach of the rule of law by the European Commission, recently have received particular attention.



Davor Stier, Gunther Krichbaum, Wilhelm Hofmeister and Paulo Rangel

During the European Roundtable, answers were sought on what constitutes the new nationalism in Europe, whether it represents a threat to the EU, how the EU and EU Member States should respond, what national mainstream parties can do about the nationalist and populist phenomena,

and how the 2019 elections to the European Parliament can help to strengthen European identity.

The return of nationalism

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, there was a broad consensus among politicians, scientists, and the media about the impending end of nationalism in Europe and other Western countries. This expectation of "post-

EVENT REPORT

JULY 2018

DR. WILHELM HOFMEISTER

MARTIN FRIEDEK

FRANZISKA OTT

www.kas.de/spanien

national politics" was shared by authors as diverse as Francis Fukuyama and Jürgen Habermas. However, the swan song on nationalism was premature, not least because of an erroneous understanding of social modernization processes and also of the concept of nationalism itself.

The current discussions about the return of nationalism show that there is no clear definition of what nationalism is. In no case is nationalism an almost inevitable consequence of the existence of nations. Nations evolved and existed without a doctrine of nationalism. In the past and in the present, many nations have thrived without it.

Since the end of the Cold War, many different currents of nationalism have emerged in Europe. If in the 1980s and 1990s the former Member States of the Soviet Union were mainly focused on turning away from Moscow as the center of political power – whereby they became independent "by default" – since then it is a nationalist trend that is on the rise in the middle and east of Europe. The same applies to the successor states of Yugoslavia, which were driven to war in the 1990s by nationalist movements and where strong nationalist sentiments are still alive today.



By contrast, in Western Europe two different forms of nationalism dominate. In some regions, such as the Basque Country, Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland, Corsica and Lombardy, there are regionalist forces that want to secede from the nation states to which they belong. In this sense, nationalist movements are characterized by the fact that they want to secure more privileges and financial resources for their region by claiming greater autonomy. But with the exception of very few cases, that does not mean that they are necessarily populist, too. They do not turn against the regional elite, occasionally they are even led by them and some of these movements, like the Scottish National Party, are committed to all aspects of a free and constitutional democracy.

But the second form of nationalism and populism in Western Europe does question the principles and values of liberal democracy. The parties or movements that stand for this type of nationalism construe an idealized alleged identity of the state and its people and it is their leaders who claim to determine who may or may not be part of this supposed community. The "dissenters" as well as anyone not explicitly admitted to this group is denied the right to speak, to participate and to seek legal protection. These nationalist movements are therefore anti-pluralistic. The primary means of mobilizing the often so called

"legitimate national community" is commonly to criticize the "ruling elites". What makes these movements populist apart from nationalist is their questioning of some of the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the neglect of the protection of minority rights as well as their disregard for the rights, duties and responsibilities the Member States of the European Union have committed themselves to. Leading nationalist-populist parties in Europe include the Freedom Party Austria, the Freedom Party of the Netherlands, the National Front of France or the Alternative for Germany.

Some specific traits of the new nationalism in Europe



John Breuilly and Malgorzata Bonikowska

In order to determine to what extent these trends are currently threatening the democratic nature of the European Union's political system, a historic comparison with the nationalism of the inter-war period 1918-1939 is recommended. It is striking that today's movements have not yet glorified the

use of force and also don't enjoy the backing of the military. If the nationalists were openly anti-democratic in the inter-war period, they are far more pragmatic today, and some even claim they want to defend democracy against conspiratorial foreign forces. While the driving force of nationalism in the 19th century was the nation state and its expansionism, nowadays its focus is rather on the internal social cleavages such as income, educational level and migration issues. In the 19th century, the nationalist movements were supported by the younger generations who accounted for the majority of the population. Today it is the populous elders who are skeptical of the EU and globalization. In the Brexit vote, the majority of young people voted in favor of remaining, whilst the majority of older people voted for Britain to leave the EU. Nowadays there are also women among the nationalist leaders, like Marine Le Pen, which would have been unthinkable in the 1920s.

In order to understand the dynamics of today's nationalism, a "demand and supply" analysis can be useful. Surveys show that most people on the "demand side", i.e. voters and citizens, ask basically for comprehensible answers and solutions to their complex socio-economic problems. But, conversely on the "supply side", the leaders of the new nationalism always promise salvation only in connection with issues of identity. It is worth remembering that it was the impoverishment of the middle class in Germany in the 1920s that finally led to the collapse of liberal democracy in Europe.

Various factors play a role in the perceptions of those who turn to nationalist and populist movements. These include general factors such as globalization, digitization, immigration, economic inequality and unemployment, as well as the impression of a supposed elite-failure.



Alain Dieckhoff, Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger and Dave Sinardet

It appears that, from a practical perspective, the frustration among European voters is partly due to the way the European Union works: its technocratic character, the unclear decision-making structure within the political multi-level system and a resulting perceived lack of political say which seems to make it impossible for the individual citizens to address their political demands effectively in the political decision-making process towards the relevant elected officials.

Although many of today's nationalist movements are very populist, populism and nationalism are not synonymous. While populists primarily fight a supposedly corrupt elite and are often anti-pluralistic, among others, the current nationalism is characterized by an active marginalization and discrimination of all those who the nationalist opinion leaders have declared illegitimate stakeholders, therefore excluding them from the core group.

That is and certainly was not necessarily typical of nationalism, at least in its beginnings in the 19th century when it was actually linked to the social modernization of Europe. In some cases, nationalism even had a positive and liberating effect, for example in Poland and Ireland in the 19th century.

Another important aspect is the difference between nationalism and patriotism. Viewed from the standpoint of civilization and culture, Patriotism expresses a virtue, that is, it shows affection for the community beyond the concern for oneself. Hence, patriotism is inclusive and integrative while nationalism today is exclusive and discriminatory.

There are two strategies that all nationalist movements apply. They all appeal to people's emotions. But in a world as complex and interconnected as ours it is impossible to establish barriers between emotional and political messages. On the other hand, these movements are obviously succeeding in selling the citizens apparently simple - albeit false - solutions to complicated problems.

EVENT REPORT

JULY 2018

DR. WILHELM HOFMEISTER

MARTIN FRIEDEK

FRANZISKA OTT

www.kas.de/spanien

Due to the possibilities of the social networks there has been an unprecedented boom of nationalist and populist publications, content, movements and parties. There are online platforms and audiences for any conceivable opinion without any scrutiny by experts or professional bodies. This can lead to serious consequences, as for instance the new phenomenon of the so called "long distance nationalism," where people with nationalist attitudes support nationalism in countries other than their own.

These trends have a variety of causes. In a certain sense there is no doubt that the Cold War phase was a period of exceptional stability which the mainstream parties are now seeking to extend. But in order to do so, they need to offer politically credible solutions instead of merely satisfying demands of "the market".

Nationalism in the EU Member States - a challenge for the cohesion of the EU?

There are significant differences between various forms of nationalism in Western, Central and Eastern Europe, which are related to the tension between rule of law and nationalism. In parts of Central and Eastern Europe, there are two different systems of political corruption trying to influence state decision-making in order to pursue particular interests (state capture). In Lithuania, Poland and Hungary, these interests are related to political parties (party state capture). In Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Latvia, corporate interests are at the center of political corruption (corporate state capture). In order to advance its interests, party-based political corruption in particular uses a nationalist-populist rhetoric, since their opinion leaders are not concerned with an unfair modification of the legislation (policy changes), but with a long-term change in the political system itself (polity change).



Jokin Bildarratz Sorron, Anna Szymanska-Klich, Vygaudas Ušackas, Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski

It is sobering to analyze the European Commission's capacity to stop such violations of the rule of law. Not only does the Commission have virtually no powers to guarantee the rule of law in the Member States through effective sanctions on its own, but it also, and above all, lacks the means

to investigate how corporate state capture operates and therefore is not in position to counteract these breaches of the law. However, it is questionable wheth-

er sanctions are the right approach to ensure the rule of law in EU member states, or whether such supranational pressure is not pouring oil into the fires of nationalists and populists.

In Western Europe, there exists a different form of nationalism that is only partially populist or anti-elitist. The separatist nationalists of the state sub-regions in Catalonia, the Basque Country and elsewhere are in many ways even pro-European, hoping to integrate their region into the EU as sovereign states after their sought after independence. Particularly in the case of Spain, these centrifugal forces are due to the fact that after the experience of the Franco dictatorship, nationalism for the whole of the Spanish nation is largely discredited. The examples of the Basque Country and Catalonia show that these regions invoke direct democracy in order to advance their independence aspirations - while violating the equal-ranking principle of constitutional democracy.

The nationalist, delimiting ideology of the regional elites in these two Spanish regions dates back to the time of the Industrial Revolution. Even though the current Constitution already gives the regions extensive autonomy, the financial and economic crisis has further contributed to the nationalist elite of these territories attempting to create a regional "national" identity through cultural movements, a partisan media and an emotionally heated debate. Even though the regional elites from the Basque Country and Catalonia continue to push for a break with Spain, it is worth noting that while nationalists hold a majority of seats in both regional parliaments, after four decades they still do not have a majority of the regional population behind them. In both cases, the European Union has effectively made it clear that it rejects a secession and also that secession would not automatically lead to EU membership.

Especially in Spain it becomes clear that a regional and a national identity are not mutually exclusive. Only very few Basques feel exclusively Basque without feeling Spanish at the same time (only 19%). The nationalist rhetoric is further invalidated by the fact that many EU citizens already have a local, a regional, a national and a European identity at the same time, without feeling any incompatibility.

There is no doubt that the Hungarian, Polish and Italian nationalist populists have already turned into key players in their countries. As a result of the tension of the (by now) extremely divergent interests of the different EU Member States, three major lines of conflict have emerged for the European Union as a community. Firstly, there is a conflict of sovereignty (which institutions at EU or national level have decision making power and in what matters?) Secondly, there is a solidarity conflict (who is entitled to EU funds and on what grounds?). And, thirdly, there is an identity conflict (who are we Europeans?).

EVENT REPORT

JULY 2018

DR. WILHELM HOFMEISTER

MARTIN FRIEDEK

FRANZISKA OTT

www.kas.de/spanien

The European Commission of the 1990s and 2000s tried to deal with the nationalist secessionist movements of regional forces in the "old" Europe by involving the regions directly in the decision-making processes of the EU, bypassing the Member States, because they hoped that this direct exchange between the European and subnational authorities would bring the institutions closer to the citizens and improve cohesion between the territories. However, this approach may have helped strengthen the centrifugal forces in the regions and thus made them, in some cases, turn against their national authorities. In view of this regional policy having back-fired, the EU lately has not pursued this strategy any longer in this way. Considering that, on the other hand, urbanization is an ever increasing trend, the time may have come for the EU to shift its focus away from the regions towards the urban areas and metropolitan regions and to help them network with one another within the framework of the nation states.

With regard to "classical" nationalism, the question that poses itself is why this movement, which is commonly associated with phenomena such as Brexit, LePen, Wilders in the Netherlands, and Strache in Austria, has fallen on such fertile soil in Central and Eastern Europe. These states, after



Wilhelm Hofmeister, Paulo Rangel, Bogdan Klich, Sofia Zacharaki and Ines Domingos

the collapse of the Soviet Union, had just reached their long-awaited sovereignty, freedom and democracy, and therefore were expected to reject nationalism and its resulting lack of freedom, but generally this is not happening. Many citizens in Central and Eastern Europe are under the impression that within the EU's shared sovereignty system, more and more powers are being shifted to the European level. This is why they hope that nationalism is a movement that is trying to put a stop to this "perceived loss of sovereignty". This is preceded by the frustration of voters whose subjective perception is that their vote makes no real difference in the system of shared sovereignty, and that the prevailing power structures called "Brussels", "the market", "the Internet" or "the corporate world" leave little scope for political realization.

It is against this backdrop, in particular, that further expanding and deepening the EU's competences should be considered first of all in those areas where both the EU's supporters and a majority of the frustrated citizens still see added value in belonging to the EU, as for example in the areas of defense, security and the fight against terrorism. But maybe, in times where the important political, economic and social decisions are taken at a global, digital and virtual level,

far away from the electoral districts, the democratic fabric of the EU is in need of an additional post-territorial layer of democracy in order to fully restore the citizens' electoral and co-decision-making rights. However, the principles of transparency, plurality, the effective separation of powers as well as the protection of human rights must be guaranteed at all times.

Political mainstream parties and nationalist movements

The dealings of the EU institutions and of the European mainstream parties with nationalist-populist movements, both in the center-right and in the center-left spectrum, have changed fundamentally in the last two decades. While Austria was still sanctioned for the government participation of the FPÖ in the year 2000, today nationalist regional parties such as the PDeCAT and the PNV even sit in the liberal ALDE parliamentary group founded in 2004 in the European Parliament.

The rise of nationalist and populist movements has come as a shock to the major mainstream parties, most of which have spent the last two decades announcing the end of era of the nation states in Europe that were supposed to morph into some sort of post-sovereign entity. But now this illusion is confronted with reality. Neither the US, nor Russia or China nor the other geopolitical regions had shared the idea of a post-national world. And it is precisely the fear of the EU-citizens of being at the mercy of the abstract higher forces of the supra-national institutions and globalization, that makes them turn to the nationalist and political movements. Even the appeal of Marxism's promises was already based on its assertion that there was no need to submit to the laws of the economic cycle and that the individual was the master of his own fate. Compared to those kinds of reasoning strategies and affirmations, the rhetoric of most of the mainstream parties about their course of action being the only viable alternative is much less attractive.

The mainstream parties (both center-left and center-right) in the EU are under competitive pressure from both the extreme left and the extreme right. The social democrats are losing voters to the extreme left because they are accused of standing idly by and not doing anything about economic globalization, job relocation and the increasing divide between the rich and the poor. But the moderate left-wing parties are furthermore losing voters to extreme right-wing, nationalist-populist movements, because many of their traditional voters do not agree with the alleged and often so-called ideology of unrestricted immigration of the left-wing parties. Even some Christian Democratic and liberal-conservative center-right parties have been criticized for not having been able to withstand the pressure of radical parties at the fringes of the political system and for having revised their policy programs as a result of it. However, this assumption is disputable. It is true that many Christian Democratic and liberal-conservative mainstream parties are in fact trying to realign themselves again in a more defined way within the constitutional political spectrum.

But, a clear definition of what the parties stand for and the values they defend is necessary in order for them to compete. Hence, this fact is therefore fundamentally positive. Quite the opposite, it would be fatal if the rhetoric pressure of the radical parties led to a further trend of abandoning the traditional competition between the democratic center-left and center-right, and to dissolve in rather undefined movements in the center, thereby opening up more and more political space at the radical fringes. Because in the long run, even after an initially successful mobilization phase of those platforms, the citizens would find it increasingly difficult to have any certainty about which party would really stand for their values. The lack of parties with a distinctive identity in the center would then entail the risk of pushing voters with clear ideological expectations to the increasingly radicalized growing margins of the political system. Consequently, the moderate mainstream parties on the left and the right of the center, instead of escaping into an ever-narrowing center, have to position themselves more clearly across the whole democratic political wing they are belonging to and, as far as possible, attract and recover as many groups of voters as possible.

This strategy can contribute to weaken the increasingly radical rhetoric of the extreme nationalist and populist fringe parties and their maximalist polemic demands.

So even though the trend of some of the platforms in the political center to leave behind the left-right rationale has had some positive feedback in the press, this trend is not putting an end to further radicalization of the political margins in the long run. For that reason, and despite the very understandable polemics it unleashes, it is not advisable for the national and EU-parties to isolate the nationalist-populist movements but rather, apart from sharpening their own profile, to analyze in the most unemotional and level headed way if these organizations could be -at least partially- hedged into and contained in moderate alliances, as it has already been possible in the case of Italy, for example. The political groups within the European Parliament, when faced with the problem of member parties with extreme views, also try to moderate and keep up the political dialogue with them.

There are two possible conclusions mainstream parties can draw from the experience of the nationalist-populist challenge: First of all, regarding the identity layer, mainstream parties could recognize that for human beings, their identity and their sense of belonging is a spiritual and emotional need. Hence, mainstream parties should be able to transmit that a democratic nation state patriotism and the identification with European common cultural values can be -far from being mutually exclusive- part of the same shared identity.

And secondly, concerning the content layer, it would be appropriate in the interest of further EU-integration and in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the EU to focus primarily on the deepening of those policy areas where, taking into account the principle of subsidiarity, the European level can add real value. One

of these policies that is overdue is a realistic common foreign and defense policy that goes beyond mere trade agreements and which would finally enable the EU to envisage a long-term, effective geopolitical strategy and cooperation.

Given the positive poll ratings of political platforms in the center in several European countries (notably in France and Spain), the technocratic character of many of the remaining mainstream parties, and the unwillingness of socialist and social-liberal center-left-wing parties to deal with the nationalist populist movements and their values, this leaves altogether a considerable doubt that a reorganization of the classical left-right spectrum, including a return to their respective values, will actually take place. Nevertheless, the Christian Democratic and liberal-conservative center-right parties bring all necessary requirements to reposition themselves successfully in the European political spectrum, insofar as they are willing and motivated to reconnect with the fundamental values of the founding era of the European Union.

Nationalism: a threat to European democracies?

Nationalism and populism have to be interpreted as a consequence of people looking for responses to their concerns, but it is obvious that this misguided search leads to an increase in intolerance and widens the gap between societies - and therefore can end up posing a real threat to our democracies and our free political systems.

A look at the history of ideas of European Christian democracy after the Second World War shows that the dream of a "post-national nirvana" has been embraced by the social democracy and the progressive left, but has never been intended by Christian Democracy. Against the backdrop of discontent and growing nationalism, this difference should be emphasized. A clear Christian Democratic agenda, able to convey what lies at the historical roots of the EU, the federal allocation and limitation of competences and a clear future vision of the EU, can curb Euro skepticism and thus restrain at least a part of the growing nationalism.

The participants of the European Roundtable 2018 were:

Jokin Bildarratz Sorron

Spokesman of the Parliamentary Group of the Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV) in the Senate of Spain

Dr. Malgorzata Bonikowska

President, Centre for International Relations, Warsaw, Poland

Prof. John Breuilly

Emeritus Professor of Nationalism and Ethnicity, London School of Economics, London, United Kingdom

Prof. Josep María Castellà Andreu

University of Barcelona, Department of Political Science, Constitutional Law and Philosophy of Law, Spain

Jakov Devcic

Desk Office Western Europe, Konrad Adenauer Foundation Berlin, Germany

Prof. Dr. Alain Dieckhoff

Senior research fellow CNRS, Director CERI, Sciences Po, Paris, France

Inês Domingos, MP

Member of Parliament, PSD, Lisbon, Portugal

Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger

Director of the Foreign Policy Section, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Newspaper, Frankfurt, Germany

Núria González Campaña

PhD Candidate in EU Law, Barcelona/ Oxford University

Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister

Director, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Spain and Portugal

Prof. Dr. Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski

Professor and Chair of Politics, University of Wrocław, Poland

Bogdan Klich

Minority Leader of the Polish Senate, Former Defense Minister of Poland, Warsaw, Poland

Gunther Krichbaum, MP

Member of Parliament, CDU, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs, Berlin, Germany

Dr. Michael Lange

Director, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Zagreb, Croatia

Dr. Miguel Morgado, MP

Member of Parliament, PSD, Member of the Committee on European Affairs, Lisbon, Portugal

Pedro Mota Soares

Member of Parliament, and former Minister of Labor and Social Security, CDS-PP, Lisbon, Portugal

Niklaus Nuspliger

Neue Zürcher Zeitung Newspaper, Brussels/Zürich, Belgium/Switzerland

Paulo Rangel, MEP

Member of the European Parliament, PSD Portugal

Federico Reho

Strategic Coordinator and Research Officer, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Brussels, Belgium

Michael Rimmel

Head of Office, Office of the Chairman of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Konrad Adenauer Foundation Berlin, Germany

Pablo Rodríguez

El Mundo Newspaper Brussels/Madrid, Belgium/Spain

Prof. Dr. Dave Sinardet

Professor of Political Science at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), Belgium

Davor Stier, MP

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Zagreb, Croatia

Anna Szymanska-Klich

President of the Board, Foundation Institute for Strategic Studies, Krakow

Ambassador Dr. Vygaudas Ušackas

Director, Institute of Europe, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

Sofia Zacharaki

Deputy Spokesperson, Nea Demokratia (New Democracy ND), Athens, Greece