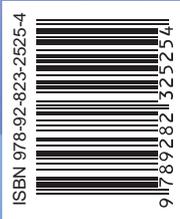


Socialists and social democrats are and should be very concerned about growing populism and an increasing lack of respect for minorities. This publication concentrates on recent developments in new Member States. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have in the last two decades gone through a democratic and socio-economic transition which is without precedent. Latent problems related to that process came to the surface after EU accession, culminating in expressions of extreme nationalism, the rise of populist parties and the reappearance of unresolved questions concerning minorities.

In this publication, edited and introduced by Hannes Swoboda and Jan Marinus Wiersma, these trends are analysed and discussed in a frank way by well known researchers and prominent MEPs from the new Member States. They give a better insight and provide lessons on how to move our agenda forward in the whole of Europe.



Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights

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Edited by
Hannes Swoboda and
Jan Marinus Wiersma



Socialist Group in the
European Parliament

 **Renner**Institut

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This publication expresses the great importance the Socialist Group in the European Parliament attaches to the fight against all forms of political extremism in the European Union and elsewhere. To sharpen our arguments, we engage in a continuous debate with experts and those directly involved. This was also the main motive for our Group's conference, co-hosted by the Austrian Renner Institute, on "Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights" which took place on 1 February, 2008 in Vienna, and is the basis of this book.

Socialists and social democrats are and should be very concerned about growing populism and an increasing lack of respect for minorities. This publication deals with recent developments in new Member States but one should not overlook the threats to the so-called older democracies. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have nevertheless in the last two decades gone through a democratic and socio-economic transition which is without precedent. Ten Central and Eastern European countries became members of the EU in 2004 and 2007 respectively. Given the fact that before accession all political energy was invested in the membership negotiations, it is no surprise that latent difficulties linked to the manifold transition processes came to the surface afterwards, culminating in expressions of extreme nationalism, the rise of populist parties and the reappearance of unresolved questions concerning minorities.

In this publication, edited and introduced by Socialist Group Vice-Presidents Hannes Swoboda and Jan Marinus Wiersma, these trends are analysed by well known researchers and prominent colleagues from the new Member States. You will find a variety of individual contributions which do not represent official Socialist Group positions but will give a better insight and provide lessons on how to move our agenda forward. It was and remains our aim to make the transition in the new Member States (and, for that matter, the countries of the Western Balkans) a success, meaning well-functioning democracies, socially responsible governments and respect for individual human and minority rights.

Populism, especially right-wing populism, has become attractive in Europe since a couple of years ago. In many Western European countries right-wing populist parties have been successful in elections. In some cases they were/are even coalition partners in predominantly conservative-led governments.

The success of right-wing populism is clearly connected with the globalisation crisis of neo-liberal shareholder capitalism and its negative impact on labour markets, wages and work force qualifications. Millions of blue and white collar workers have lost their jobs or are at least anxious about losing them. They have been confronted with the severe shock of not only losing their economic existence, but also their traditional social role and their identity. In this situation many of them do not feel represented any longer by the political programmes and policies of the moderate right and left parties. They tend to follow more radical political parties and their leaders, who are promising simple solutions to complex problems.

Growing right-wing populism has also accompanied the period of “transformation” of the former authoritarian communist systems in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. This transformation crisis was a traumatic experience for many people. The implosion of communist regimes was followed by the “market shock” of enforced introduction of neo-liberal market capitalism. The accelerated economic change resulted in a radical change of society as well. It was accompanied by tensions and anxieties felt by a large part of the population, who were thrown into an insecure social status. The result was a large number of losers, who were not able to cope with this “new insecurity”. There was a great deal of fighting among the elites about the re-distribution and privatisation of state resources. It was accompanied by an aggressive tone of political language as well as an appeal to nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric and programmes. The question of national minorities also played an important role in boosting support for right-wing populist agitation.

For all these reasons it is very important for social democrats across Europe to find new, efficient and also attractive solutions to

the current labour market and social policy problems, in order to regain lost political ground, convincing political leadership and stronger influence on EU economic and social policy.

We are very pleased that the Socialist Group in the European Parliament chose the Renner-Institute in Vienna as its partner and venue for the seminar on “Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights”.

This seminar continued a long line of cooperation projects which we have organised with the Socialist Group. The outcome can surely help us, the Political Academy of the SPOE, in our task of supporting sustainable democratisation in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. We already do so through the network of European foundations cooperating with the Forum for Democracy and Solidarity of the Party of European Socialists, as well as on a bilateral basis.

The research results and political conclusions of this seminar will be helpful in our task of supporting further implementation of these democracy-building measures. So, although this seminar dealt primarily with Central and Eastern European developments, the outcome will be helpful to all of us, since up to now we could not really say that we have found profound solutions and political measures to minimise right-wing populism to a scale that is not dangerous for democracy.

Consolidating New Democracies

Hannes Swoboda and
Jan Marinus Wiersma

The enlargement of the European Union that took place in May 2004 and January 2007 was a major success. The Socialist Group in the European Parliament was a great supporter of the accession of twelve new Member States. Since the fall of communism in 1989, the Socialist Group has been active in helping these countries to strengthen their democracies.

Even if the economic and political integration in general is progressing well, certain developments in some new Member States leave us, however, with a feeling of discomfort. Our main concerns are the growing nationalism and minority tensions, the growing populism and the voters' apathy in this part of Europe. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that populism and political polarisation are not unique to the new member countries; they can also be found in the old Member States.

Since we, as Members of the European Parliament, have both played – and still play – an active role in EU enlargement, we feel a special responsibility towards the countries concerned. The disquieting developments in the new Member States prompted us to organise, in close cooperation with the Renner Institute, a seminar on democracy, populism and minority rights. The contributions and conclusions of the participants, from both the academic and the political field, are reflected in this publication. They express individual views and do not represent the official position of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.

Questions and possible answers

The recent political developments in Central and Eastern Europe leave us with a number of questions. It is clear that there are large fluctuations, after every election, in voters' preferences. However, the swings that occur in this particular region do not seem to be just healthy re-consideration of political preference. The extremes are

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gaining ground, and in particular populist parties and populist tendencies inside certain parties are becoming ever more dominant. Does this development, then, hint at a basic lack of trust in centre-left and centre-right politicians? Does it point to a loss of confidence in mainstream politics?

First of all, we have to define more clearly what populism actually means and what it entails. Populism as a term is, as Anton Pelinka states, as old as democracy. After all, one could even go back to the days of the Roman Republic, when leaders such as Gaius Marius and Julius Caesar were coined *populares*, meaning they used popular referendums to go over the head of the Senate and establish the laws they saw fit. Pelinka holds the opinion that populism, throughout the centuries, is not defined by any particular programme, but by a specific technique: mobilising the people against the elite. Since the term is so broad, Jean-Michel De Waele believes it is better to talk about anti-system parties instead.

When we take a look at contemporary populism in Western Europe, the main message of this movement is a cry for plebiscitarian democracy: “the people” should get immediate power, by means of referenda or leaders who know what “the people” really want. Populists offer solutions in slogans that simplify complex political issues into one-liners, denouncing the – in their eyes – scheming politicians with their endless debates in parliament.

Furthermore, populists tend to take the political fight out of parliament and into the streets. A mild form can be witnessed in the Netherlands, with populist leader Rita Verdonk proudly answering to questions about her non-attendance in parliamentary debates that she would rather be outside the parliament in real contact with the people than playing political games inside. A harsher form can be witnessed in Hungary, where opposition party Fidesz organised demonstrations on the streets against the Gyurcsany government, while refusing to have debates in parliament with the government. In this way former Fidesz Prime Minister Viktor Orban made clear that he cared little about parliamentary procedures.

The problem with populism is that it tends to define democracy as majority rule, while liberal (representative) democracy takes into account the principle of majority rule as well as the principle of protecting minorities and individuals. The latter prevents a tyranny of

the majority. Respect and the protection of minorities vis-à-vis the majority is one of the most important aspects of informal democracy. Informal democracy, in this context, means that politicians do not only formally obey the rules, but also act according to the spirit of those rules. This implies that politicians try to be accountable, transparent and act in the interest of their electorate and not of themselves. It also entails parties seeking government responsibility to pursue a policy agenda, not just and merely for power itself. Moreover, it envisages that political parties cooperate with each other, take responsibility if need be, as in Germany and Austria with the *Grosse Koalition*, and do not just stare with hostility at each other, as it is the case in the Czech Senate.

That populism could have dangerous implications or consequences is something all authors agree on. But there are some differing views on the degree of danger. Whereas André Gerrits believes one could explain populism in Central and Eastern Europe as a healthy signal that the depoliticised phase – caused by the inevitable accession conditions – is over, Adrian Severin perceives the phenomenon as an outright threat to democracy.

We believe it is paramount to establish why people vote for populist parties. What are the reasons that make people turn away from mainstream politics? Although populism is a widespread phenomenon in Europe, we focus on Central and Eastern Europe specifically because the young democracies in this part of Europe went through multiple transitions (of a political, economic and societal nature). Foremost, serious political parties should try to understand the reasons why populist parties have become so popular in order to offer realistic solutions that deal with voters' problems and concerns. In addition, some conclusions may also be drawn for the benefit of fighting populism in the old Member States.

One could group these developments into three categories of reasons why people are becoming increasingly sceptical of politics and turning to populist parties, or not voting at all. The first category concerns *governing factors*, meaning the effect of policies (such as reforms) and issues of political and moral conduct of those in power (corruption, for instance). The second category relates to *party structures*, since political parties are the key actors in European democracies. Finally, the third category encompasses *media*

and communication issues – not only the way a government communicates its policies but also the way in which the media function as a watchdog.

Governing factors

As Gabor Hunya and Michael Dauderstädt eloquently point out in their respective contributions, the first post-communist governments embarked upon an ambitious neo-liberal reform programme, with warm encouragement from the United States (and the EU) and international organisations such as the IMF. Shock reforms were introduced, albeit in different degrees, causing major economic restructuring with many state-subsidised companies either going bankrupt or, in some cases, being privatised under dubious conditions. For the dynamic parts of society (the young, the well-educated or the well-connected) this was something good, yet for a large part of society it meant insecurity, unemployment and poverty. After initial enthusiasm for the downfall of communism, these losers of transition (or modernisation) increasingly grew disenchanted with politics. Pelinka notes that there is a gap between (higher educated) modernisation winners and (less educated) modernisation losers. Europeans with a higher education see themselves profiting from Europeanization, globalisation, and modernisation in general, while there is an electoral shift on the part of the less-educated workers towards populist right-wing parties. In this context he even speaks about right-wing populism as a proletarian phenomenon, a challenge to the claim of the traditional left parties to represent those who lag behind.

Furthermore, both centre-right and centre-left governments failed to develop a policy agenda beyond the accession criteria of the EU. As Jean-Michel De Waele also stresses in his contribution, governments did not launch long-term ideas on the future of society, education, housing or healthcare, in contrast to their western European counterparts. Most policy ideas beyond the Copenhagen criteria were based upon power-driven logic: how does my party stay in power and how do I keep my opponent out?

Gabor Hunya points out in his contribution that during the transition period a private economy appeared which was linked more to the state than to the market. Indeed, here the corruption scandals

occurred. In almost every single government in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989 there have been scandals that have undermined the trust of the population in politics. Political connections originating from the communist past were used during large privatisation operations. Former public officials acquired large capital sums which they would later use to get political influence. One of the most infamous examples is *Rywin-gate* in Poland, when public officials allegedly tried to buy the influence of the independent daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* by means of an immense bribe.

Another element of moral behaviour in office is the way in which the communist past is dealt with. Most people would agree with the idea that personnel changes were needed in order to do away with old regime networks and to indict those who were personally responsible for repression. André Gerrits and Ivan Krastev argue, however, in their respective contributions, that the issue of lustration is being abused by those in power to eliminate their political enemies, with the Kaczynski twins in Poland as the most notorious example. The crusade against former communists, therefore, seems not to be born of only moral reasons – to erase the old *nomenklatura* connections and to bring prominent communist “bad guys” to justice – but also out of a quest for power. This difficult issue of society coming to terms with its past might have been overlooked by the rest of Europe.

Party factors

Post-communist societies tend to have a lack of social cohesion. This might surprise because many of the reform movements actually originated in civil society – *Solidarnosc*, for example, was an independent trade union. Nevertheless, there are very few strong civil organisations in post-communist countries. NGOs seem weak with membership numbers falling, accompanied by a lack of general support. This might be explained by the fact that in communist times people were literally forced to play a role in the public domain with mandatory party memberships. After the fall of communism, both the compulsion to conform and the impetus for opposition disappeared. Out of disillusionment with politics and faced with a sudden wave of liberal individualism, collective thinking was discredited and people started to care more about their individual material well-

being than about society as a whole. The direct result: the domination of the public domain by political parties.

In our opinion, it is of great importance to ascertain what kind of role political parties play when it comes to formal and informal democracy. Formal democracy refers to the institutional and legal arena of politics in which the constitutional rules are laid down. Informal democracy defines the behaviour of the actors in the political process – parties, politicians and voters – according to certain ideas of how they should act. For instance, politicians and their parties are expected to be accountable and transparent, while the electorate is expected to vote on the basis of a political programme and its concrete implementation. If politicians do not operate according to these informal rules, something is amiss.

As André Gerrits and Ivan Krastev discuss in more detail, policy choices of political parties were dominated by external factors: the overwhelming consensus in favour of western European liberal democracy and American-style open markets and the wish to join the EU and NATO. Left-leaning governments were also committed to EU and NATO membership and were consequently forced to pursue more or less the same reform agenda as the centre-right. This must have been confusing and disappointing for people who voted the centre-right out of office and voted for the left because they felt the reforms were undermining their security. Moreover, during the 1990s, social democratic and liberal parties in Western Europe were also turning away from traditional ideological stances towards the Third Way, right at the time when their Central and Eastern European counterparts were shaping themselves along the lines of their sister parties.

Taken together, one could conclude that there was no real political discussion about the course of the country (because of the pressure from Brussels), differences in ideology, or about economic alternatives. As Gerrits states in this book, the real political tensions were masked by the EU negotiation process, just waiting to come out later, after accession, when there was no need anymore to present a united front to Brussels. That would explain the increasing parliamentary polarisation in the Czech Republic and the “street” polarisation between Fidesz and the social democrats in Hungary. In addition, Krastev argues, because there is consensus on the eco-

nomic and democratic system – in contrast to Europe in the 1920s and 1930s – political parties are not fighting each other on economic issues but on issues such as lustration and nationalism.

Other European leaders were rather stunned when Jaroslaw Kaczynski, during the negotiations on the Lisbon Treaty, exploited the Second World War as a negotiation tactic to demand more Polish seats in the European Parliament. Such political use of the past is against the very idea of European integration, based on peaceful cooperation without bringing up the past for political means. As Libor Roucek also states in his contribution: history should be dealt with by historians, politics should be dealt with by politicians. This abuse of the past – based on rather nationalist ideas – and other rhetoric about being truly “Polish” were echoed in similar nationalist phrases by Fidesz in Hungary and – albeit somewhat milder – by President Klaus in the Czech Republic. It seems to be an outcome, in a way, of the *Verspätete Nation* syndrome. Regaining independence and immediately handing over some of the sovereignty to the EU proved too much for certain nationalist parties, which, as Krastev mentions, were also boosted by the absence of social class conflicts.

This revived nationalism clearly has consequences for minorities, bringing about tensions within and between countries (most notably between Slovakia and Hungary). Balazs Vizi argues in his contribution that, although the EU paid special attention to minority rights up until accession, after the candidates joined the ranks of the Members, the implementation of laws became problematic. Nearly all authors in this publication hint at the phenomenon that the EU is very influential on reform issues in the accession process, but relatively powerless after accession. Once countries have joined the EU, minority rights are regarded as internal affairs of Member States, referring to the principle of subsidiarity. Although we do not believe that the EU should duplicate the work of those institutions that deal with minority rights – such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE – we are convinced that the Member States could be more active in adapting existing EU instruments to improve the protection of minorities. As Vizi argues, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights could play a more pro-active role in monitoring Member States’ practices. Generally speaking, Member

States should be more aware of their duties regarding the protection of minority rights. Problematic minority issues within the EU Member States should become a legitimate field of co-operation as they have in other international organisations. This is also the reason why we personally, together with Socialist MEPs from Slovakia and Hungary, are engaged in promoting a better understanding between Slovaks and Hungarians in Slovakia. We do not want to interfere in internal politics but we wish to promote an important European value.

This issue also concerns the sizeable Roma communities in the new Member States. Although the adverse situation of the Roma was addressed during the accession process, discrimination and exclusion continue to persist. Many populist and nationalist politicians are hostile towards the Roma, using them as scapegoats and reproducing discriminatory practices. The Socialist Group has consistently drawn attention to the situation of the Roma, most recently during the conference “Towards a European Roma Strategy, from Commitments to Results”, organised on 6 March, 2008 in Brussels. It has always been our view that the Roma cannot be regarded in the same manner as other national minorities, because they lack a clear territorial base or connection to any nation state. Our premise, therefore, is that promoting inclusion of the Roma is a shared responsibility for the European Union and its Member States; a position which was, for the first time in history, also recognised by European government leaders in December 2007. In March 2008 we presented a nine point programme for a more effective and comprehensive European strategy to improve the situation of the Roma. This should include funds specifically earmarked for them, but also instruments such as a Framework Strategy for the inclusion of the Roma. The European Commission has been reluctant to come forward with plans, also because it touches on subsidiarity issues. It is our firm conviction, nevertheless, that the European Commission can and should do more to promote inclusion of the Roma.

Communication and media factors

The role of the media was not discussed during the seminar in Vienna. Nevertheless, when talking about the functioning of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, the media cannot be left out of

the analysis. Often, the media is described as the provider of oxygen in a democracy. It keeps political forces in check by reporting about the decision-making process and the rationale behind it. If there is foul play at hand in business, civil society or in politics, it is the duty of the media to bring the story to the public. In other words, the media acts as a watchdog for those in power. It seems that, after first having paid lip service to the principle of free and independent media, the stance of some newly elected governments changed when the first negative publications appeared. The initial reaction of governments in trouble, regardless of their political colour, was to control the media. Because politicians believed that the press was partisan or “hired” by the other side, they felt they had the moral right to control the media in order to give the electorate “the real facts”. This happened with varying degrees of success.

The media does not always appear to be independent either. Formal safeguards of internal independence such as effective codes of conduct and editorial statutes are almost absent. Journalists often seem to be deprived of basic job security and protection vis-à-vis their employers, which might cause editorial self-censure.

Since the business climate prevents the media from becoming financially independent, it often depends on funding from third parties. Yet, this means depending either on the government via state subsidies, or on business oligarchs who have political ambitions or who wish to “steer” public opinion (after Berlusconi called the “Italianisation of the media”). Consequently, media independence is often jeopardised. Another related reason for the gradual demise of independent media (which can also be witnessed in Western Europe and the United States) is privatisation and commercialisation – meaning subordinating media performance to market requirements. Because it sells, sensationalism and tabloids are on the rise, blending facts and fictional material. Public figures are being attacked without a real factual basis, nonetheless reputations are being ruined. The problematic image of politics is hence even further damaged.

Steps that could be taken in order to improve media independence include laws that protect journalists from the government, and legislation to ensure financial transparency; it should at least be clear to the public who owns which media. Nevertheless, politicians

and journalists alike should be aware of their respective responsibilities: it is inherent to the public position of politicians that they are scrutinised by the media, while journalists should do this in an independent and objective manner. Again, this is part of informal democracy.

Start of a debate

Of course we do not pretend to offer a full explanation nor analysis of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe in this introductory article. We are merely putting forward those elements we think are vital in a debate on the state of democracy in Europe in general and in Central and Eastern Europe specifically. We do believe, however, that starting a debate on these issues in the PES and social democratic parties all over Europe is the first step towards improvement. In that context, we would like to stress once again that the views and opinions brought forward by the authors are not necessarily ours.

Elements such as the creation of a clear policy agenda based upon ideology, the consolidation of informal democracy and media reforms are in our eyes paramount to bringing about positive change. A policy priority in our eyes is education. As Anton Pelinka shows, there is indeed a correlation between the lack of higher education and populism. Better educated and informed Europeans could prove more able to resist populist simplifications, to look behind the “we”- and “them”- rhetoric of populism. But simple messages also attract better educated voters who fear the complexity of the modern world or do not like the complex explanations of professional politicians. It will not be easy to tackle their worries but by maintaining a responsible and open attitude by the more established parties, either in government or opposition, it must be possible to expose the ultimate irrelevance of populism when it comes to finding real solutions to pressing problems.

Those who see politics as building bridges, promoting tolerance and the balanced development of our societies, have great difficulty accepting the one dimensional message and the methods of populists, left-wing or right-wing. They constitute a danger to representative democracy and must therefore be opposed. But one cannot ignore the motives of those who vote for what very often are illusions. Many people do not recognise that the established parties

are acting in their interests. They want change. There they have a point. Social democrats should never identify themselves with the status quo. Our agenda will have to reflect the aspirations of those we ask to support us but on the basis of clear principles.

We are especially concerned about the lack of adequate minority policies in the EU. Many promises were made before accession but there are no instruments to enforce them after. This should change, starting with the recognition of the Roma as a European minority.

The EU should in the future pay more attention to the social implications of the economic and political transitions that are required during the accession process. In other words, it should be considered whether the EU has to develop a separate social agenda, dealing with the social consequences of the economic and political reforms laid down in the Copenhagen Criteria, before and after accession, and aiming to improve the situation of the losers from transition. As social democrats we plead strongly for such an approach.

In order to make democracy work better, it is necessary that parties redefine their political mission under the conditions of EU membership and indicate what their real priorities are. Based on this, political parties should draft the political programme that they want to pursue. In order to promote a better understanding of what democracy really means, parties will have to improve transparency, internal democracy, and voter consultation. And parties should be ready to give up their monopolistic position by strengthening the role of civic society. The system has to create its own opposition. As the circumstances in the new Member States are unique, simply copying examples from the old EU is not enough. Partly there will have to be a kind of reinvention of pluralism in countries that up until not long ago were ruled in a dictatorial way.

The discussion should not only be focused on Central and Eastern Europe, but on the desired conduct of politicians of a specific political family all over Europe. Corruption and other forms of misconduct still occur everywhere where human beings work and live together, not exclusively in Central and Eastern Europe. It is a debate which takes place on the basis of equality, not a case of the "wiser and older" Western European comrades reprimanding their

counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe. This dynamism should, in our view, result in a general Code of Conduct for our transnational political family. Of course, one should not have the illusion that drafting a code would root out all cases of misconduct, but at least there would be a measuring instrument that could help to stimulate discussion and keep the topic high on the agenda.

Outline of this publication

The contributions are divided into four different parts. Firstly the ways and consequences of economic transition are discussed. Gabor Hunya describes the different roads of transition, varying from “shock therapy” in the Baltic States to a more gradual approach in Slovenia. Michael Dauderstädt focuses on the consequences of economic transition.

In the following section the phenomenon of populism is the central theme. How can it be defined and what meaning should we give to it? Anton Pelinka, Jean-Michel De Waele, André Gerrits and Ivan Krastev all give, from varying academic perspectives, their interpretation.

Then the issue of nationalism and ethnic minorities is discussed. Balazs Vizi gives his view on ethnic minority rights in the framework of accession to the EU. Helmut Kuhne describes the efforts of Danish-German reconciliation in dealing with minorities on both sides of the border, while Libor Roucek gives an overview of German-Czech efforts.

Finally representatives of some national delegations in the Socialist Group offer their views. Csaba Tabajdi (Hungarian delegation) outlines why populism could endanger the very essence of democracy. Monika Benova (Slovak delegation) describes the current political situation in her country. Adrian Severin (Romanian delegation) discusses a theoretical and philosophical framework in which Europe should reinvent itself by adhering to the need of the people for “myths” while fighting populism. Jozef Pinior (Polish delegation) describes the current political situation in Poland by looking into the origins of the reform movement. Finally, Atanas Paporizov (Bulgarian delegation) explains the major challenges his country is facing after EU accession.

This publication, with views both from the academic world and from social democratic politicians, will hopefully contribute to the creation of a new and positive dynamism in the debate. We would like to thank our friends at the Renner Institute, all the authors in this book and the participants in the Vienna Seminar for their insightful contributions.

This publication would not have been possible without the excellent support of our staff: Herwig Kaiser, Guido Reehuis, Kati Piri, Maggie Coulthard and Rosario Moles.

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