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**The Politics
of Migration
and the
Future of the
European Left**



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The Risk of Losing Touch

In 1997, the UN refugee agency recorded some 33.9 million refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum-seekers and other persons of concern forced to flee conflict or persecution. In 2016, less than two decades later, these figures have nearly doubled to 65.9 million.¹

Societies in the Global North have become increasingly polarised in their responses to migration as the number of migrants has risen, due in part to heightened global interconnectivity. Is migration a blessing or a threat? Should border management facilitate or limit the movement of people? In many cases, the ideological divisions that these questions raise have destabilised and challenged established political parties, fundamentally altering the political landscape. At the root of this polarisation lies a »cosmopolitan/communitarian cleavage«, which not only cuts right through the existing party system but also - in many cases - through individual political parties. Essentially, this cleavage can be described as a growing gap between liberal-minded global citizens and traditionalists. While the liberals tend to embrace globalisation and favour an open stance on migration, the traditionalists, who tend to have more limited economic and social capital, approach globalisation with scepticism and are generally more critical of migration.²

Unsurprisingly, elections have set the stage most dramatically for these opposing camps. An examination of recent voting in presidential and parliamentary elections in Europe demonstrates that migration- and integration-related issues have undeniably influenced, if not decided, election results across the continent. As this compilation of national case studies documents, migration was the one defining issue that influenced election outcomes in an astounding 10 of the 12 countries analysed.

It is not hard to see why: public opinion surveys of European Union Member States confirm that, on the European level, a majority of citizens view migration issues as the greatest political challenge on the continent.

Comparatively, surveys on the national level similarly rank migration near the top, consistently placing this issue second.³

Established political parties ignore migration at their peril. However, addressing the issue comes with its own set of challenges. Part of the difficulty of discussing the topic of migration is the deeply divisive and personal conversations that arise. Migration and integration issues ultimately raise the question of identity, powerfully denoting who is and who is not »one of us«. As such, salient questions in this regard do not lend themselves to simplistic answers in an area characterised, ultimately, by difficult fundamental ethical issues.⁴

A balanced discussion of these issues is particularly challenging for progressive political parties. Contrary to political competitors on the Right, Europe's Centre-left needs to harmonise historical traditions of internationalism and an ethical commitment to global solidarity with the task of defending the successful functioning of the welfare state.⁵

It is hardly the only challenge that progressive parties are currently facing. In fact, Centre-left parties across the continent are experiencing an unprecedented crisis. A few years ago European summits resembled family gatherings of the *Socialist International*, while today hardly any state in the European Union is governed by the Centre-left. In 2017, the French *Parti Socialiste*, the Dutch *Partij van de Arbeid* and the German *Sozialdemokratische Partei (SPD)* suffered crushing electoral defeats. Even in Sweden, long the heartland of European social democracy, support for the populist right-wing *Sverigedemokraterna* has topped 20 per cent, and in much of central and eastern Europe, centre-left parties have long been stagnating in the single digits. The only silver lining seems to be the United Kingdom, where the *Labour Party* under Jeremy Corbyn has been enjoying a significant surge in public support – however, in very specific circumstances.

There are many reasons for the current decline, including the dissolution of the traditional working class and the decline of political parties as mass organisations. But on the Centre-left, all reasons share a common cause, as grim as it is simple: European workers are turning their backs on workers' parties. In large parts of the continent, blue-collar voters are either abstaining from the ballot box or supporting populists. In Austria's parliamentary election in October 2017, 59 per cent of workers voted for the right-wing populist *Freiheitliche Partei*, and in Germany's elections of the same year the *Sozialdemokratische Partei* lost more than 500,000 votes from their former supporters to the right-wing populist *Alternative für Deutschland*, which based its election campaign squarely on opposi-

tion to Angela Merkel's *Willkommenskultur* of 2015. A similar story is unfolding in France, where in recent elections only 20 per cent of workers voted for the *Parti Socialiste* - a painful decline from 70 per cent in the 1970s - and 43 per cent for the anti-immigrant *Front National*.

A major ideological reason is that centre-left parties seem to have largely abandoned traditional workers' interests, with a shift to the political centre. Beginning in the 1990s, social democratic leaders such as British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, reinvented their parties by advocating pro-market economic reforms, privatisation and deregulation. This course proved as beneficial in the short term as it was disastrous in the long. Confronted with centre-left parties, which had reinvented themselves as the »Neue Mitte« or the »Third Way«, blue-collar voters were effectively left behind.

In many cases, European centre-left parties attempted to compensate for their shifts on socio-economic issues by adopting particularly progressive socio-cultural platforms. While such positions were often popular among the remaining centre-left party membership and in large parts of society as a whole, they further alienated large parts of the traditional blue-collar electorate from their former political home. The resulting cultural backlash can be seen in the current rise of right-wing populist movements across Europe, which has proven particularly painful for the Centre-left.

Against the backdrop of this development, this collection of essays attempts to shed some light on how European political parties, especially from the Centre-left, are responding to the politics of migration. It is composed of two parts. The first part consists of 12 country chapters, where detailed case studies describe how the political system and centre-left parties have responded to the challenge of migration. The second part addresses the issue from a strategic perspective and asks how progressive political forces *should* respond to the challenge of migration.

Kristian Weise begins with a contribution from Denmark. Weise describes the tension between the welfare state and immigration, and explains why four of the past five Danish parliamentary elections were sealed by the debate surrounding migration and integration.

In France, too, migration has become a major election issue, as was clearly evident in 2017, particularly for the Left. The presidential campaign of Marine Le Pen focused extensively on migration and security and unexpectedly propelled the *Front National* into the second round, where Le Pen received more than 10 million votes before her defeat by Emmanuel Macron. Vincent Tiberj's contribution examines France's complex relationship to immigration through an analysis of historical developments

and shows how the attitudes of French citizens and parties have changed over time.

Michael Braun describes the situation in Italy, which essentially lacks a unified policy on migration and integration. Italian election results, unlike other countries in Europe, have thus far not been demonstrably affected by migration - a surprising result, particularly given the country's exposure to migrants crossing the Mediterranean.

In stark contrast, the exact opposite holds true in the Netherlands. Peter Scholten examines how the country's migration policy, quite liberal through the 1990s, has now come under scrutiny. In the 2017 elections, migration was the main point of contention - with disastrous consequences for the Dutch Social Democrats, who failed to formulate convincing proposals to their electoral base.

Also in Hungary, left-wing parties have fared poorly at the polls. Tamás Boros analyses why the Hungarian Left has not been able to outline a convincing policy in the public discussion on refugees, immigration and integration.

Oliver Gruber focuses on Austria, where attitudes to migration, asylum and integration have become a political litmus test for the Social Democrats. Gruber traces their ambivalent treatment of the subject and explores current shifts along the cultural and economic left/right axes.

While migration issues in Austria have received considerable media attention, the subject's explosive sensitivity in Poland is often overlooked. Dorota Szelewa and Michał Polakowski describe how previously insignificant issues of migration and integration were reintroduced to the political debate during the crisis in 2015, quickly taking centre stage in Polish election campaigns. Szelewa and Polakowski view this as a sign of the Left's political and structural weakness.

Radovan Geist and Zuzana Gabrižová examine the main factors affecting the emotionally charged debate over migration in Slovakia in 2015. They focus on the prime minister's Direction-Social Democracy party (SMER-SD) which, much to the chagrin of its sister parties on the continent, has so far rejected the plan to redistribute asylum-seekers throughout the European Union.

While many might assume that the debate in Slovakia would be worlds away from Sweden, Swedish society's support for migration has shifted dramatically in recent months. Anders Lindberg describes how public opinion abruptly started to favour greater restrictions as »typical of Swedish political culture«. He also explains what this change and the range of shifting opinions mean for the country's political parties.

Gianni D'Amato describes the seduction of populism in the »direct democratic arena of Switzerland«. He argues that the Swiss Left must present convincing solutions for the economic and social problems caused by the historical »challenge of migration«, without falling into the trap of populism.

Gonzalo Fanjul analyses shifting positions on migration in Spain over the past 30 years and calls on the Spanish Left to radically change the discourse: fundamental rights should be independent of one's birthplace.

Phoebe Griffith ends the analysis of European countries with a debate on migration policy in the United Kingdom, where mass immigration may be one of the most enduring legacies of the last Labour government. The discussion of migration significantly influenced the Brexit vote - partly because the party underestimated the degree to which mass immigration has impacted public opinion.

Against this background the volume's second part examines the lessons centre-left parties can and should draw from existing realities in Europe.

Unsurprisingly, assessments and recommendations differ markedly. Dietmar Molthagen explains his analysis of how and why the *Social Democratic Party* of Germany must present itself as the party of integration, while René Cuperus expressly warns that adopting open-door policy positions on migration would cause traditional centre-left parties to lose substantial electoral support. Wolfgang Merkel makes the case for a differentiated approach, pointing to the left's »cosmopolitan trap«, which could prove to be a heavy burden for centre-left parties.

Aydan Özoğuz is much more optimistic and believes that during these »politically charged times« the »high number of refugees reminds society that solidarity, participation and justice are the order of the day«. Echoing this stance, Annelie Buntenbach and Volker Roßocha examine the role of trade unions and demand »that immigrants be accorded the same rights and opportunities as the non-immigrant population«.

These sentiments are echoed by Lisa Pelling, who emphasises the positive effects of migration and argues that the Centre-left should campaign for more open borders. Pelling's position is countered by David Goodhart, who warns that in view of increasingly polarised societies, the Left should adopt a centrist position that limits migration, on one hand, while supporting integration initiatives, on the other. Are these positions part of an intra-left *Kulturkampf*? Luboš Blaha certainly thinks so. He reproaches progressive forces for alienating their traditional support base with *John Lennon*esque pipedreams of a global borderless society.

Ahmad Mansour also takes a critical look at the reality of integration in Germany, accusing the political Left of betraying its values in an attempt to combat xenophobia and to embrace migration paternalistically. In contrast, Sheila Mysorekar calls on progressive forces to accept migrants as voters and citizens - and Paul Scheffer sums up with a question on whether reaching a consensus of progressive Europeans on issues of migration policy is possible, let alone realistic.

The voices gathered in this volume produce two fundamental findings: one clear and one ambivalent. The articles unequivocally underline the importance of migration for voters across Europe and the entire European party system. More ambivalent, however, is the multifaceted response by the European Centre-left to the challenge of migration. Indeed, despite the importance of the issue - perhaps because of it - a unified centre-left position on migration is nowhere in sight. Responses range from open opposition in Slovakia to scepticism in Denmark and strong support for global solidarity voiced by the left parties of Hungary, Poland and Spain. While this is perhaps surprising, it need not be a burden. In many ways, the heterogeneity is simply a testament to a multi-dimensional political challenge that does not lend itself to simplistic responses.

At the same time, however, the voices gathered in this volume also underline the explosive and at times impassioned debates on this topic - especially for the Centre-left. Recent election results clearly show that centre-left parties risk losing touch with their traditional voters as a result of their stance on migration. At the same time, the Centre-left has a crucial role to play. Faced with radical positions on the Far-right and the Far-left, it is the Centre-left that should be well positioned to influence, encourage, guide and open up a differentiated and balanced political debate. In migration as in any other policy field, constructive policies can only begin with a frank discussion. This updated and expanded English-language edition of the original German reader has been compiled in close cooperation with the *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's* European offices. We would like to thank all contributors for their support and hope that this book will contribute to a stimulating and constructive debate.

Annotations:

- 1 UNHCR: Global Trends 2016. <http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/>.
- 2 Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris: Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism. Harvard Kennedy School August 2016; Wolfgang Merkel: Bruchlinien Kosmopolitismus, Kommunitarismus und die Demokratie. WZB Announcements, No. 154, December 2016.

Denmark: Doubting the Multi-Ethnic Welfare Society

1. Introduction

»We will do everything we can to limit the number of non-Western refugees and immigrants that come to this country«, wrote one of the leading figures in the Danish Social Democratic Party in a national newspaper in December 2015, continuing: »For that reason we have gone far and much further than we had dreamed of. It is because we don't want to sacrifice the welfare society in the name of humanism.«

The statement came six months into what was called Europe's »refugee crisis«, a period when refugees had been walking along the highways of Denmark and the political agenda had been focused primarily on reinstating border controls, as well as other initiatives to deter people from coming to Denmark. It was considered controversial and perhaps as going a bit further than the official line of the party. But it was the endpoint of the journey that the Social Democrats - and the Left more generally - had been on for more than two decades. A journey where, step by step, it had become more acceptable to highlight the challenges of integrating non-Western foreigners into Danish society, and in the course of which the party itself had hardened its stance on migration.

By the second half of 2017 the substance of the statements cited above have become the general line among Social Democrats: the welfare state the party founded, developed and cherished is incompatible with substantial immigration.

The questions of migration and the integration of foreigners have been among the main political issues in Denmark over recent decades. They are said to have determined four out of the last five national elections - all those in the current millennium except for the one in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis - and have dominated the public debate in most

years. With the growing focus on migration and related issues, both political discourse and politics have changed. Indeed, as is the case in several other European countries, the political landscape and dynamics look very different today from what they did a generation ago.

The Left in particular has been haunted by these issues, sometimes stumbling its way through and often fighting internally over positions and initiatives. Its parties lost the four national elections that circled around immigration, foreigners and integration, and time and again saw coalitions of traditional right-wing and new right-wing populist parties gain power.

Though there are still different approaches to the question of migration on the Left - both between parties and within its largest member, the Social Democratic Party - recent years, coinciding with the refugee crisis, have seen a stabilisation of the issue. It is no longer primarily a question of values and principles, but increasingly one framed in the language of pragmatism and welfare economics: how many foreigners can a country the size of Denmark receive and integrate? And what will the consequences be for the welfare society if more and more people with different skill sets, employment prospects and cultural backgrounds make up the population?

While it is impossible to understand and explain this move without taking into account the rise of the populist right in the form of the Danish People's Party, it is notable that the focus on the imbalance between the potential number of refugees and other migrants coming to Denmark and the possibility of absorbing them in a meaningful way, appears to have left many Social Democrats in a more comfortable position. It is now common sense to note that »numbers matter« and acceptable to stress the difficulty of integrating many newcomers, as well as the cost to society when integration does not succeed.

But what is the background of the Left's new position, how is it expressed and what questions should it make us ask?

2. A Tribal Society Gets New Members

Though Denmark has always been a seafaring and trading nation, and at times has experienced various influxes of people from neighbouring countries, its population has been relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture. The society has been considered »tribal« in the belief that everyone more or less has the same forefathers. It wasn't until 60 years ago that stable immigration started to become a feature of the country (although more than 200,000 Germans sought refuge in Denmark during the last part of the Second World War they gradually returned home afterwards).

In the decades after the Second World War, Denmark experienced strong economic growth and high levels of employment, as did most of Western Europe. Manufacturing production rose and from the late 1950s on there was a need for more workers. It wasn't until the end of the 1960s, however, that so-called guest workers were invited to come and work by Danish employers. These economic migrants came primarily from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia.

They were called guest workers for a reason: they were expected to return to their country of origin when they had earned enough money to sustain a family at home or when their work was no longer needed in Denmark. But as economic fortunes changed - with the oil crisis in the early 1970s - unemployment was rising not only in Denmark, but also in the countries the workers had originally come from. So, many of them had no interest in going back. The employers, too, did not want them to go, having trained them to do specific jobs and tasks that Danish workers possibly could not or would not do. Most guest workers therefore stayed in the country and became permanent residents.

With rising unemployment, the social partners and the government led by the Social Democrats decided to suspend economic migration towards the end of 1973. In spite of this, immigrants kept coming to Denmark. But the composition of the people who reached the border of Denmark changed. Workers who had come to Denmark during the economic boom were now bringing their families to join them, as international human rights and national legislation enabled families to reside together. The rising number of family reunifications meant that the number of people coming from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia increased, but that the groups no longer mostly consisted of working age men.

In 1983, Denmark, now with a Conservative-led government, passed a new Aliens Act (Udlændingeloven) which was considered by many to be the most liberal legislation in this area in the world. It strengthened the legal status of asylum-seekers and, among other things, gave foreigners a legal right to family reunification.

Due to the political situation in Iran, the war between Iran and Iraq, the civil wars in Lebanon and Sri Lanka, together with several other conflicts around the world, the number of asylum-seekers started rising in 1984 and continued to be high in most of the 1980s. In the early 1990s the largest influx of refugees was from the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo and Slovenia), with 9,000 people arriving in 1992 alone. A large number of the refugees from this part of the world received permanent resident status because of the unsafe situation in their home country, and