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**Europe at the Threshold:
Fairness or Fortress?**

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Antiracist Concepts

Hajo Funke



UNRISD

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UNRISD, Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: (41 22) 9173020

Fax: (41 22) 9170650

E-mail: info@unrisd.org

Web: <http://www.unrisd.org>

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Europe at the Threshold: Fairness or Fortress?

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Hajo Funke

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Introduction

The Idea of a Free Modern Europe was created by Antifascists some 60 years ago—in the dark days of genocidal Nazi Germany waging its racial war of extermination and murdering the European Jews, the gypsies, Slavs and the handicapped. In the vision of survivors the new Europe was conceived as a Union that will forever end the centuries long warmongering, the expansionist nationalism¹ and particularly the barbarity of Nazi Germany by overcoming the preconditions that helped to shape it.

After 1945, Germany was given the opportunity for democratic change. 60 years later, however, Germany and Europe are facing elements of the spectre of the past. Violent racist attacks on persons of non-German and non-European descent, of gypsies and of the handicapped. Europe has seen genocidal “ethnic cleansing” of nearly 200 000 Bosnian Muslims – without reacting sufficiently.

Racism in dominating “white” Europe was part of the history of colonialism. In the present it is primarily directed against those perceived as “weak” and “alien”. Along paranoid racist lines though often in more subtle manifestations those subject to racism are categorised by their very physical and/or cultural appearances they are defamed as a being of lower intelligence, character, allegedly representing all evil of the world. The revival shall adopt the power policies of socialdarwinistic colonial Europe in the 19th century, and the radicalised forms of the paranoic race wars of Nazi Germany in the thirties and forties of the 20th century.

Under different historical and political conditions new authoritarian dynamics of racism have to be once more the concern of the European political class.

Racial discrimination shall mean “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national, or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.” (International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted and opened for signature and ratification of General Assembly Resolution 2106 of 21 December 1964) (quoted in EUMC, Annual Report 1999, and p.15).

This interpretation of Racism deliberately includes a spectrum of incidents that are not necessarily racist by intention, but have “racist” exclusionary consequences. “That means not only overt racist violence is called racism, but also the subtle expression of exclusions on grounds of race,

¹ With respect to one of the issues of the UN Conference in Durban – the debate on Zionism – aside of the recent discriminatory policy of the Israelian government - is much more complex to described as racist. (See Micha Brumlik „Über Israel rasonieren“, in Frankfurter Rundschau, 22.8.2001)

With respect to the debate on guilt deriving from the atrocities and crimes against humanity by slavery the experiences of the debates on guilt and coming to terms with the past in Germany, but also in South Africa should be evaluated.

ethnicity, religion and culture. The working use of the term also includes anti-Semitism and xenophobia” (ibid). Racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism are related to authoritarianism. According to theories of authoritarianism (see Adorno and other), racist traditions, mentalities and attitudes are often instigated and activated by **Right-wing Extremists (RWE) or Right-wing Populists (RWP)**. They forcefully address people’s authoritarian-bound anger, fear or rage against so-called “scapegoats”. They are constructed, in a long tradition of prejudices, as people who are considered “alien” to the Europeans because of different colours, of different religion (especially Islam) – and Jews.

In today’s Europe, social scientists describe the rage of authoritarian aggressions against innocent people as a result of a dynamic interaction of several main factors: 1) the long tradition of xenophobic authoritarian mentalities in considerable parts of the population, 2) special public policies against minorities and migrants and a related xenophobic public discourse on asylum-seekers and foreigners as betrayers of the welfare state; 3) the propaganda and networking of right-wing extremists; 4) socio-economic and political transformations related insecurities or even despair as a background to mislead people’s fears and rage in racist terms. This authoritarian dynamic can result in growing rage and the request of extended and radicalised versions of scapegoats - a destructive spiral, that have the potential to undermine and even destroy democratic structures and societies as happened in the regions of “ethnic cleansing”.

“It has gotten worse”—Racism in today’s Central Europe

“Right-wing extremism in Germany did not change. It has gotten worse in the course of the last years. What has changed, is that there is an increase of public awareness.” (Wolfgang Thierse, Bundestagspräsident, Second highest representative of Germany, in Mai 2001, after he had toured through East German States). After nearly a year of serious public debates and political actions we still have to face a high level of right-wing extremism, racist violent acts, and public support. In 2000 official reports counted over 15 000 right-wing extremists. This short observation indicates in the case of Germany (in variation also generally in the European Union) that we still face serious public and political challenges to fight racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, although, finally, serious steps were enacted to support this struggle.

For analysing the adequacy of political activities, it is necessary, to first analyse *racist attitudes, their political supporters, and the problems of racist violence itself* (chapter 2), secondly, *to reconstruct the main causes of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism— in Germany and in selected European countries with different traditions, political cultures and political situations* (chapter 3). *Without at least an adequate comparative perspective, it does not make sense, to analyse and to evaluate the various attempts and further chances for a coherent antiracist public and civil policies, on the level of the individual states and on the European level.*

For this main task of reconstructing the main causes of racism and specific counter policies three questions/dimensions seems to be important:

- 1) The dimension of political culture, historical mentalities and social attitudes: in concrete terms, whether or not the political climate in public and politics is changing towards more tolerance or not; whether there is a culture of mutual recognition and/or of multiculturalism or rather a (sustained) culture of (rigid) assimilation, subordination and racist exclusion of foreigners;
- 2) the goals and implementation of public policy: whether or not a sufficient anti-discrimination policy is enacted or not; or if public policy even enhances racial discrimination;

- 3) the goals and implementation of economic and social policies: whether or not the impact of fears, among other aspects related to globalisation, modernisation, and social deprivation is addressed by economic and social policies on the European level and in the member states.

Dimensions of Racism and Xenophobia in Europe: Public Opinion, Racist Attitudes and Violence in social and political Context

In Europe today we are facing several features/ forms of racism: 1) (pro)racist attitudes; 2) public and political representations of an use of these attitudes by right-wing extremists and/or right-wing populist parties' policies; 3) discriminating and racist incidents, including institutional and structural forms of exclusion and racism. Although the picture is mixed, in a lot of European member states these dimensions are on a high level, and the problem has even grown in the course of the last years.

Racist Attitudes in Europe

Distance, rage and false racist projections towards minorities are described in a special analysis of a Euro barometer 2000 survey on behalf of "the European Monitoring Centre of Racism and Xenophobia" (EUMC) (see: Attitudes 2001).

- a) Half of the members of European Union believes, that the presence of people of minority groups increases unemployment in the given country (only 35 % tend to disagree; in Germany 61%, in East Germany even 65% agree; minorities are immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and citizens of foreign origin);
- b) 52% believe, that these minorities abuse the system of social welfare (54 % in West, 60% in East Germany);
- c) analogous 52 per cent believe that in schools where there are too many children of these minority groups, the quality of education suffers (West-Germany 60 %, East-Germany 48 %);
- d) 58% believe, that immigrants are more often involved in criminality than the average inhabitant (Germany 62%);
- e) the amount of people that feel the presence of people from these minority groups as a cause of insecurity rose from 37 % in 1997 to 42 % in 2000 (see p.53). This attitude is especially widely shared in the following countries: Greece (77 %), Denmark (60 %), Belgium (56 %), France (51 %), Germany (46 %) – whereas it is especially low in following countries: in Sweden (24 %), Finland (32 %), the UK (32 %) and Spain (34 %).
- f) This slowly growing trend of (xenophobic) fears, of being feeling betrayed, or degraded and deprived – can be enforced and supported by public discourses and policies of xenophobia and racism. For this group of concern, it is decisive how the political arenas deal with latent or semi latent fears, insecurities and false projections.

2) A relevant minority of *about 20%* expresses fear, distance or even aggression, when they *opt for expelling* legally established non-European immigrants: in the view of this minority the immigrants should all be sent back to their country of origin. This number rose from 18 to 20% (see EUMC Attitudes, p.57). This expression of an aggressive distance is especially high in Belgium (27), Greece

(27), Luxembourg (27), Germany (24, and 20, who don't know) and in the UK (22 and 20, who don't know). It is especially low in Denmark (7%), Spain (10%) and Sweden (12).

3) A small but relevant minority of 15% (4%, who don't know) of Europeans feel personally *disturbed by the presence of minorities* (s.p.41). "Lurking behind these feelings is a common attitude towards outsiders. People, who feel disturbed by religious minorities tend to display the same feelings towards "racial" or national minorities." (ibid.) In Greece this attitude is especially wide spread: 38%. In Spain (4 %), Finland (8 %), Portugal and Luxembourg (9% each) only a very small proportion of respondents expresses that fear. Germany fits nearly to the average of the European Union (16 %), similarly as Austria (15 %).

4) This small but relevant minority may be of special general importance, if this minority is combined with another relevant proportion of the Europeans: those who are showing *ambivalent attitudes towards minorities*. One European out of 4 has been categorised as ambivalent – meaning persons that have both positive and negative attitudes towards minorities at the same time (see p.11). "This group should be considered to be the group that reacts most to political leadership". (s.p.11) "They gravely desire the assimilation of minority groups" and don't support antiracist policies.(s.p.24)

5) Together with the fundamentally intolerant the numbers add up to nearly 40% within the European Union. *This large minority which shares intolerant and ambivalent (potentially negative) attitudes towards minority groups feel disturbed by people from different minority groups or see minorities as having no positive effects on the society*. They support or accept repatriation of immigrants. Both groups are forming a (potential) majority in Belgium (53 %), Greece (70 %) – and 47% in Germany, 45% in France, 42% in the UK, 42% in Austria. Again the lowest proportions we have in Sweden, Finland, Spain and Italy.

6) Only 21% are actively tolerant. These are mostly people who have higher education and/or personal relationships to persons of different race, religion or nationality and persons who are without fear of being unemployed.

7) To summarise: in Contemporary Europe we have to face a high level of intolerance towards minorities that is slowly on the rise. Of particular concern is, that a small but substantial proportion of around 20% even demands repatriation of legally established immigrants. Under these conditions it very much depends on the political arena, the public discourse and the public policies, if the right-wing populist groups and parties to revitalise and politically escalate these dispositions or not. This is even more important because in some European countries the ambivalent and intolerant proportions of the population already gained a majority. Hence to some degree it is up to Europe's political leadership to determine Europe's destiny at the threshold of the new millennium: if politic avoid the xenophobic token or if they use it to gain electoral support, especially if social and economic fears and deprivation under conditions of globalization and new technology will worsen.

Policies of intolerance by Right-Wing Populists (RWP) and Right-Wing Extremists (RWE) in Europe²

² Right-Wing Extremists have a clear antidemocratic and racist, often antisemitic ideology and strategy and as parties a concept of authoritarian leadership within the party and towards society. Examples are the German „Republicans“, the DVU and the even neonazi NPD; in France „Front National“ and in the UK the neonazi „British National Party“. Right-Wing Populists use perceived or real popular xenophobic or racist sentiments by merely reproducing or even producing them, with the help of allied media; so they are destined to build dangerous bridges to racism and their political representations and networks – like the Austrian FPÖ, where we observe both elements, of RWE-activists and dominating RWP's.(See Moreau; Funke 2001)

Within the last decades Europe faces the rise of right-wing populist movements and parties and overtly right-wing extremist parties, which both rely on racism, xenophobia and authoritarianism. The concrete feature and shape is different from country to country and depends on the different political cultures, which still matter; on the stability of democratic institutions; and on the amount of social unrest. The rise of influential right-wing populist movements and parties can be the result of social economic crises and of the erosion of the legitimacy of the political system. The RWE-movements present these crises in dramatised or even apocalyptic forms, project the causes of crises to “scapegoats” and present themselves as the ultimate (authoritarian) solution. Consequently they propagate radical anti-democratic solutions and are part of a general radicalisation process, thereby functioning as “prophets of deceit” (Leo Löwenthal). Furthermore, a new right-wing populism (RWP) is active in a considerable group of European States, in Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and, to a smaller degree, in Denmark.

They present issues and themes that are perceived as neglected by (formerly) “established” parties: socioeconomic risks, social despair, economic ghettoisation, globalisation, the weaknesses of European, especially financial integration; the perceived corresponding cultural threats of losing identity and feelings of belonging; the perceived threats by “strangers”, *people, which allegedly “subvert” the established or imagined “order”* – and finally they present simple aggressive “solutions” by subordination under their leadership and by presenting scapegoats in the realm of more or less excessive nationalisms (Moreau 2000). RWP exploit real fears, experiences of erosions of structures and milieus and powerlessness, of social anomie by playing with sentiments and using or aiming the control of media. They are elected by RWE-ists, (perceived) losers of socio-economic modernisation, by workers and peasants, by elderly and younger (male) parts of the electorate, especially with lower skills and education. (ibid.)

Violent racism

Beyond these phenomena of new RWE/RWP, European states have to face violent, often racist eruptions like recently in Spain, Northern England (and especially through a racist youth movement in East-Germany, parts of West-Germany and in Sweden). The “Annual Report” of EUMC indicates a high level of violent attacks, although a fully accurate and comprehensive picture is still not available. No country is immune with respect to racism. But there are startling differences between the nation-states. According to new sources of EUMC racist violence between 1995 and 1999 has risen or is on a special high level in a considerable group of member states of EU. With respect to lethal violence act and violent assaults we have to face most serious situations in:

(the data are related mainly to official statistics, which are in a very different status of empirical preciseness; so the following data are presented with caution, they present a minimum)

Lethal violence violent racist assaults

1) Germany	15 (25)	4885
2) the UK	16	9976
3) Sweden	1	1237

These are the countries, according to available statistics with a high level of racist violence; in the case of Germany other estimations are higher (according to “Tagesspiegel” between ’95 and ’99 there were 25 murdered persons); also for Sweden; in all these countries threats and incitements, and the number of active Skinheads has risen. In the case of the UK the statistics include all racially motivated violent racist assaults.

The second group of concern are those countries, which only within the last years have clear indications of a considerable rise of violent racism and of threats, incitements and/or the number of active Skinheads. Two of them are “new” immigrant’s countries; all have strong RWP-groupings either within conservative parties or as own ones.

4) Austria	1	714
5) Italy	(unclear)	599
6) Spain	2	777

On the other side there are some countries with clear indications of defending a low level of racist violence – like Portugal and the Netherlands—and a country which was able by political efforts to reduce considerably amount and intensity of racist violence in the course of the last years: France.

Differences and similarities in member states of the European Union.

Racist attitudes and acts of violence are in amount and intensity very different in the member states of the European Union. This is due to different political culture traditions between a liberal culture of diversity and ethno nationalism; to the given political constellation, be it the rise of the right-wing populist movement; to the amount and intensity of real or perceived insecurities and social-economic fears; and on the other side to the co-ordination and intensity of democratic liberal movements, parties and the political system as a whole. We try to refer a) to racist incidents and attitudes and experiences of discrimination, b) to RWP- and RWE-politics, c) to traditions of ethno nationalism and intolerance and d) to policies of anti-discrimination and active tolerance and integration.

States in Central Europe—Traditions of Ethnic-nationalism and Dealing with Post-War-Migration

Germany

In Germany the number of criminal offences with racist / xenophobic motives in 2000 totalled over 15 000. More than 1 000 acts of violence with racist / xenophobic motives were reported. Most violent acts with racist / xenophobic motives were aimed at people of foreign descent – two examples out of 1999: on 29 September a man from Mozambique died as a result of severe injuries received in an attack on 15 August by a 31 year old man with xenophobic convictions who hit him during a quarrel in a Bavarian cavern.

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