



## **RALF DAHRENDORF ROUNDTABLES:**

### **A Liberal Response to the Populist Challenge**

#### **“Quo Vadis Populism? An Assessment”**

*Istanbul, 14 June 2019*

Is there anyone these days who does not talk explicitly or implicitly about populism? From Donald Trump in the US via Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela and Matteo Salvini in Italy to Victor Orban in Hungary: populists of their kind – the list is long – do not only shape the current public debate to a large degree, they are also responsible for an increase in populist policies that not seldom have authoritarian leanings. In these troublesome days, it is more important than ever to find liberal answers to populist and authoritarian threats to democracy and the rule of law. For this purpose, a number of European liberal leaders came together in **Istanbul on 14 June 2019** to discuss the approach of populists to contemporary problems, their communication strategies as well as potential liberal answers to fight back. Under the framework of **Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtables**, organized by the **European Liberal Forum** with the support of the **Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Turkey Office**, the **Freedom Research Association** and the **International Democratic Initiative**, politicians, academics and civil society activists discussed what populism is, why it is rising now and how it impacts states and societies under the topic: **“A Liberal Response to the Populist Challenge: Quo Vadis Populism? An Assessment”**.

Under the moderation of the Turkish Hürriyet journalist Barçın Yinanç, panelists from the US, Turkey and Italy sensitized the audience to the manifestations and roots of populism. Populism was identified as strategy, rather than an ideology, that lives on creating the image of an enemy to which it opposes the “true” people. In times of an ever more rapidly changing world in the face of globalization, it is an easy game for populists to play of the fears of the people who feel left behind and play them off against the winners of globalization – the “elites”. Therefore, it was highlighted that democratic liberals should not leave the “losers” of globalization to the hands of populists but take their fears seriously and find new, alternative solutions.

In the second session under the moderation of the Turkish journalist Nevşin Mengün from Deutsche Welle Turkey, panelists from Hungary, Poland, Croatia and Turkey reported about the impact of populism in their home countries and particularly raised awareness about the importance of tackling populism from the beginning. The medical principle of treating diseases in early stages should be applied to populism, as well. Since populism tends to spread in rural areas and usually does so very “loudly”, liberals should do the same and focus on the local levels while promoting democratic values.

In the end, the panelists of the Dahrendorf Roundtable discussion called on everyone to become active. They stressed that the answer to populism is not liberalism alone; neither is it socialism, communism or conservatism. The answer to populism starts with individual responsibility and coalition building. By taking responsibility and cooperating with politicians, NGOs, academics and independent media, liberals can counter populism with strong arguments.