

CURRENT AFFAIRS

DYING DEMOCRACIES – EUROPE IN DECLINE

2 x 45' (GER, ENG)

More and more democracies around the world are in crisis. Populists, mostly from the right, are on their way to power. How are they succeeding? What does this mean for the future?

The state of Europe is bad, to say the least. Almost everywhere, right-wing populists are coming ever closer to power or have already taken it over. The "illiberal democracy", as the Hungarian head of government Viktor Orbán calls his political system, threatens to become the future model for many countries. The fatal thing about this is that we do not realize, or only seem to realize, that a state is becoming autocratic, reactionary or even a dictatorship when it is almost too late. This is because the destruction of democracy is taking place by "democratic means", so to speak. In this two-part documentary, we will look at Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and France, four countries that have already embarked on the path to illiberal democracy. What were or are the strategies used in these countries to destroy democracy - even if not outwardly? What topics are used, what words are chosen, what facades are put up? And do these steps possibly also serve as a blueprint for other countries?



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1. Rise of the Populists

Right-wing populists are on the rise around the world and are jeopardising liberal democracies. The issues they use to campaign are always similar: against migrants, against elites, in favour of the nation. Using the Netherlands and France as examples, the film shows how successful right-wing populists are in gaining power. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders was able to form a governing coalition, while in France, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National party won the European elections and also made gains in the national parliamentary elections. Le Pen wants to win the presidential elections in 2027. The succession of crises is making people increasingly insecure and looking for simple answers: Islamist terror since 9/11, the economic crisis in 2008, the influx of refugees in 2015, the Covid crisis, the war in Ukraine and now the crisis in the Middle East are making people increasingly nervous as they see their prosperity and peaceful lives under threat. Right-wing populists are exploiting this situation by creating enemy stereotypes against which they want to defend and protect their respective nations.

2. Erosion from Within

Where right-wing populists are already in power, it is clear how they are eroding democracies from within. They take over democratic institutions and render them meaningless. Using Hungary and Italy as examples, the film shows how right-wing populists operate when in power. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán set the script from 2010 onwards: He changed the constitution, disempowered the judiciary and ruined the free press. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is now trying to do the same. This raises questions for all democratic parties in Europe: Are they able to stand together against the populist threat? Can they make the people of Europe a political offer that takes their concerns and fears into account and thus win back those who have not yet drifted ideologically to the far right in favour of democracy?