

Preface

Hardly any other subject has had such a comparable meteoric career in political debates and academic discussion in European countries, the American continent, and beyond as the concept of populism. This boom is strongly connected to a deep uncertainty in and shock to the democratic systems, which, after the euphoric invocation of the “end of history” in the 1990s, has been linked to a crisis syndrome of various forms and shapes, spanning from the financial and refugee crisis to the crisis of the European Union as well as the all-encompassing globalization crisis. Within such heated debates, there is a need for cool-headed analysis and diagnosis. It is important to clearly differentiate between the polemic use and the scientific use of the concept, to study the politicians, movements, and practices subsumed under this concept in an interdisciplinary dialogue especially between political science and the humanities, and to create international comparisons. In this way, isolated phenomena can be placed into a comprehensive framework in order to identify typologies and similarities as well as in particular differences in the context and dynamics of development.

An interdisciplinary approach, historical depth, and international comparison—these central postulates of current research on populism formed the starting point for and a major focus of the international conference held at the Austrian Institute in Rome (ÖHI) in the autumn of 2015. Special thanks go to Michael Gehler for initiating this project as well as to Günther Pallaver for planning and organizing the conference together with Michael Gehler, the Istituto Storico Austriaco a Roma, the Istituto Storico Germanico di Roma, and the Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento of the Fondazione Bruno Kessler, which also accepted publish the proceedings.

Looking at Austria, Italy, and Germany has proven to be a fruitful and stimulating comparison due to their geographical proximity as well as their differences. These are due to the virulence and prominence of the populism phenomenon in the new millennium, which offers abundant material for analysis and raises a series of questions, and to their

different national and regional forms and developments of populism. The focus of the conference, the results of which are presented in this publication, once again confirmed the cooperation between the Istituto Storico Austriaco and the Istituto Storico Germanico, two institutions connected by a long and often interwoven history.

As the conference has furthermore shown, the city of Rome is especially suited as a starting point for interdisciplinary research since it is home to international institutes of the humanities with widely developed networks. We sincerely hope that this extraordinary potential for transnational research in the humanities will continue to be exploited in the future.

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