

# Political Culture in Eastern and Western Europe

## The Role of Political Correctness

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### Political Correctness and Political Culture

“Free speech is what is left over when a community has determined in advance what it does not want to hear” (Fish 1994: 337). Stanley Fish considered the freedom of speech tricky because of society’s power to determine its limits. In this sense political correctness is nothing new as it also serves as a framework in order to establish of what can be said and what cannot be said.

But political correctness – in contrary to the freedom of speech – does not cover all topics relevant to society. Political correctness is mostly connected to anti-discrimination of certain social groups. The issues linked to the term political correctness have been debated vividly in German-speaking media in the last years and by politicians of the respective countries. It has been interesting to observe what happened to issues connected to political correctness in the media and during political discussions. Political correctness contained the risk that the debate would drift away from a specific (or perceived) problem and its constructive solution – as the persons touching the political correct issues would automatically discredit themselves. Therefore, the issue wasn’t discussed constructively at all, let alone solved politically. This actually occurred in the context of the debate of Thilo Sarrazin’s book “Germany Is Doing Away with Itself”. The paper will describe what happened in more detail below.

Political culture research has somehow neglected political correctness as a possible aspect of contemporary political culture, especially of political elite culture. Political elite culture includes sets of beliefs and conduct codes, including “rules” how to communicate and what to say and not to say in public. Research could be possibly interested in the existence of speech codes, dimensions of political correctness and its

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<sup>1</sup> This is the slightly altered author’s translation of a paper titled “Politische Kultur in Ost- und Westeuropa. Die Rolle der politischen Korrektheit,” dating from 2013/2014, and published in the edited volume *Kultur der politischen Eliten Osteuropas* [Culture of Political Elites in Eastern Europe, 2016], edited by Nicole Gallina and Katerina Gehl. The author will include recent discussions and additional controversial topics in the paper “Political Correctness as an Impediment to Practical Reason” (Gallina 2017).

effects on certain social realms. There is however little scientific literature available.<sup>2</sup> Reasons for the lack of literature could be that political correctness goes hand in hand with politicization and moralization, and a successive reluctance of how to tackle the issue scientifically. It is indeed tricky to define political correctness specifically, and this has not facilitated empirical findings. But the term is generally known and its use is accepted in the context of certain topics relevant to society, so the phenomenon should be worth an examination.

This paper has three parts: The first theoretical part concentrates on differences regarding the acceptance of political culture between Eastern and Western Europe and discusses political correctness as a possible component of contemporary political culture. The second part presents political culture as seen by its critics, and analyzes some forms of political correctness in Eastern and Western Europe for the example of migration. The third part draws attention to the non-existence of political correctness in Eastern European political culture, and points to some challenges for a democratic political culture in Eastern and Western Europe.

I will focus on the situation in German-speaking countries, and some selected Eastern European countries (relevant in the context of the edited volume “Culture of Political Elites in Eastern Europe”, namely Romania and Bulgaria).<sup>3</sup>

## Differences Concerning Political Culture in East and West

Political scientists assume the existence of a consensual political culture in liberal western democracies (among others Best and Higley 2010). This means that the political cultures of political elites and citizens overlap, elites and citizens sharing a democratic political culture. A democratically elected parliament that functions on the principle of majoritarian decision-making additionally reflects this fact. Political scientists interested in political culture focus on liberal democracies, displaying a democratic political culture that is participative, transparent, independent, self-critical etc., with an overall positive connotation. If we compare this situation and culture with Eastern Europe, we have practically no choice and will come to a negative assessment

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<sup>2</sup> In particular, there is a lack of German-language literature. English literature on the topic cannot be called extensive either. Hughes (2010) offers a good overview of the history and implications of political correctness. The existence of political correctness has been more often discussed in the context of anti-Semitism (e.g. Hölscher 2008). However, racism and sexism (and not anti-Semitism) were drivers for the phenomenon.

<sup>3</sup> A discussion of the dimensions and effects of political correctness, as well as the viewpoints of its critics does not necessarily imply to support the particular groups, causes, or viewpoints presented.

of the Eastern European situation. Here, political culture is personalized, polarized, intolerant and not transparent (Gallina 2010: 14).

It is also important to keep in mind that both liberal democratic elites and the rest of society consider themselves active parts in the political system, and capable of influencing (restraining) power. In Eastern Europe, the situation is somehow different: Formally, most of those countries are liberal democracies, but society and elites are aware of the fact that they are subjected to powers which restrain their political activities and creativity considerable. This however does not mean that political elite culture and the culture of society do not go together. It simply means that this culture has little in common with a democratic political culture.

Eastern European cultures find themselves still under pressure and little at ease with the cultural changes that a functioning democratic system requires – the EU accession of a considerable number of Eastern European countries has been an additional challenge. The concept of a democratic political system is rarely autochthonous. No wonder traditional codes, beliefs or attitudes clash regularly with the requirements for a democratic political system and with EU-fundamentals to which those countries have not actively contributed to or lived with a longer period of time.<sup>4</sup> A smaller part of Eastern European elites pressures decisively for a cultural change which would mean to abandon old behavior patterns and conduct codes. The EU, financial institutions, international courts or NGO's such as Transparency International have also developed activities in this direction. They might have a contrary effect, the “natives” feeling pressured, even considering the western political culture a threat for traditional patterns of social cohesion (while it is unclear whether the new patterns work). Those fears find their expression in the support for populist politicians such as the Bulgarian Bojko Borisov or the Slovak Robert Fico.<sup>5</sup>

If behavior patterns and codes of conduct of elites do not longer match with those of other “subordinate” social groups, the potential for conflict grows. Transferred to political culture this means that problem arise if the respective cultures of the political

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<sup>4</sup> Some countries in Central-Eastern Europe have had short-term autochthonous developments like Czechoslovakia between the two World Wars or the Polish Underground State during the Second World War. Namely the importance of the latter for a democratic awareness in Poland and for the firmness of its democratic political system has not to be underestimated, but so far been neglected in western research.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Fico surprisingly lost the presidential elections in April 2014. Generally, his politics had a support of 30% (e.g. SME 2014) or Spravy (2013). However, Fico's Smer received some 25% in the European elections a few weeks later. Bulgaria's Borisov was first not re-elected as Bulgarian prime minister, but he and his party continued to be popular in Bulgaria (with some 30% in the European elections) what subsequently lead to another term in office for Borisov as prime minister (since November 2014).

elite and the rest of society drift away from each other or if a certain previous balance is disrupted. In the case of Eastern Europe, it was the abandonment of communist/socialist governments and the introduction of democratic political systems. Suddenly, political institutions were supposed to – and sometimes even did – function according to different rules. The whole society formally had to change. A closer look reveals that it is difficult for large segments of society to adapt, and it is evident that after two decades with democratic political systems, a cultural understanding between “democratic” elites and large segments of society has not been reached.

One important former rule, that almost everything was impossible on an informal basis, still has considerable power. In this regard, an important problem Eastern European societies face is that the democratic culture that should go hand in hand with democratic institutions actually does not favor façade institutions, and it does not lay the burden of power and social relations in the hands of bargainers who operate in informal, socially coded settings that were most practically based on informal transfers of goods or money for certain favors. All segments of society have to cope with this problem. Political elites are even more affected as they are publicly exposed – in former times, elites could rely on state media and propaganda in order to conceal their weaknesses to the public, which also enabled to keep the illusion of an unity between elites and the rest of society. Democratic systems offer far more possibilities for exposure and public protests.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, questions of political correctness seem little relevant. The above introduction has suggested that political correctness is just a part of democratic political culture that consists of a complex set of codes and rules. The argument here is that Eastern European countries have not adopted the whole complex of democratic culture: Speaking with Mishler and Pollack (2003) it is a *thin culture*. A *thin* democratic culture implies that old culture codes and rules are still working and still might be part of another *thick culture*. This culture adapts, and also abandons or reintroduces some of the old codes if necessary. It adapts, but it still has significant power which forces the democratic system and its underlying democratic culture to exist along old codes. The result of the “cultural struggle” is largely that democratic institutions are not stable, democratic rules questionable.

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<sup>6</sup> Demonstrations in order to bring about elite change have been quite successful in Ukraine, and little democratic regimes fell in 2004 and 2014. In Bulgaria, months of protests against the government had little impact in 2013/2014 – at some point the protesters were simply ignored and the movement lost its impact. Moldova saw large protests in winter 2015/2016 against the “pro-European” political elite accused of large-scale corruption (which would be the most significant expression of powerful “old” cultural codes) requesting political change.

I will come back later to the assumption that political correctness is of little relevance in Eastern Europe. This paper largely holds that political correctness is a phenomenon the western world and liberal democratic systems (and liberal democratic cultures) have to cope with. Concerning Western Europe political correctness can also be considered an imported good and a development from outside as its origins are found in the United States. If we compare Eastern European political cultures with Western European political cultures it becomes clear that the pressure on their cultures is different: Eastern European political cultures are confronted with a fundamental change in transforming authoritarian-communist/socialist cultures into democratic political ones. Western European liberal democratic political cultures have to cope with political correctness as an aspect of their democratic political culture, which might be considered a further development of democratic culture itself.

### Political Correctness in Language and Culture

But where can we detect political correctness and what is it exactly? Hughes (2010: 3–4) outlined political correctness manifested itself mainly in speech codes in order to avoid prejudicial language and in order to disguise taboo topics. This concerns education, issues connected to race, culture, gender and disability, later the environment and animal rights were also affected. He identified basically six realms: political, literary, educational, gender, cultural, and behavioral realms.

For the former President of the United States George W. Bush PC [political correctness] had serious consequences: *“The notion of political correctness has ignited controversy across the land. And although the movement arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred, it replaces old prejudice with new ones. It declares certain topics off-limits, certain expression off-limits, even certain gestures off-limits. What began as a crusade for civility has soured into a cause of conflict and even censorship.”* (Bush 1991) Thus, political correctness was liberal in its aims, but with a tendency to be illiberal in its long term outcome.

The notion political correctness had its origins in debates on campuses in the United States (notably Michigan and Stanford) that began in the later 1980s. It first had centered on the contents of the curriculum, most notably the request to replace the study of western culture with a course on multiculturalism. In the course of the debate, it more and more focused on words.<sup>7</sup> This resulted in new speech codes for certain

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<sup>7</sup> On the origins see for example Paul Berman (1992), mentioning that politically correct had been a phrase for somebody who toed the Leninist party line. Another overview is found in Hughes (2010: 60f.).

topics connected to the above mentioned topics. The Oxford English Dictionary (2014) for example defined political correctness as: “*the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against*”. The campus-debate spilled over to the media, and the result was the politicization of the term and a split of political elites in adversaries and supporters. Richard Bernstein brought it to the point in one of the key contributions on the issue: “*But more than an earnest expression of belief, ‘politically correct’ has become a sarcastic jibe used by those, conservatives and classical liberals alike, to describe what they see as a growing intolerance, a closing of debate, a pressure to conform to a radical program or risk being accused of a commonly reiterated trio of thought crimes: sexism, racism and homophobia*” (New York Times 1990).<sup>8</sup>

Hughes (2010: 17) found that political correctness as such was a problematic semantic construct as politics should cover a variety of activities and no society or political system could claim to be correct (and correctness by contrast signified conformity). Fairclough (2003: 18) added both sides had agreed changing language induced cultural changes. Therefore, the debate to a small part was also a controversy on language. Indeed, the linguistic aspect of political correctness is of importance, underlined for example by Ravitch (2003) identifying 400 banned words.

This would mean the use of certain codes, including not employ certain terms, within the framework of a liberal democratic political culture characterized by individual freedom and equality. Political correctness has a paradox feature: On the one hand, its supporters are calling for an extension of rights, on the other hand for some kind of language (self-)control. On the one hand it calls for equality, and on the other hand it treats some more equal than others.<sup>9</sup>

Political correctness includes idealistic assumptions on how society should look like. Those are criticized for example by Lind (2000) arguing political correctness is inherently totalitarian. Doris Lessing mentioned that correct speech filled the ideological vacuum after the fall of communism. She made the famous statement: „*Political correctness is the natural continuum of the party line. What we are seeing once again is a self-appointed group of vigilantes imposing their views on others. It is a heritage of communism, but they don’t seem to see this.*” (Hughes citing Lessing 2010: 4, and 50).<sup>10</sup> Communism indeed brought examples of extreme linguistic

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<sup>8</sup> Friedman and Narveson (1995) criticized this perspective. For a general view see Calhoun (2001). Hildebrandt (2005) also discussed the situation in America.

<sup>9</sup> See claims of those having no preferential treatment that the majority is discriminated against minorities.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes also pointed to the fact that Mao Tse-tung made references to political correctness in the 1930s.

deformation, especially when language and ideology were combined and merged in *Newspeak*. But both Fascism and Communism have deformed the respective language as politicians (=dictators) have tried to recreate minds using altered language and cultural codes. A dictatorship that controls society has not to cope with problems of acceptance. This background is important for Eastern European states whose cultures and language had been deformed by communist political systems.

In general, each political and social system is reflected in linguistic codes and also cultural patterns. In Western Europe, it had not been a change of the political system after 1989 (1991) that brought about changes, but changed attitudes in regard to social groups within the framework of a liberal-democratic model.<sup>11</sup> For our purpose it is interesting who drives the process, how political correctness influences language and how it leads to new codes, transforms or limits language.<sup>12</sup> The controversial Swiss politician Christoph Blocher made remarks on how to look at the problem: „*I understand: We have an astonishing diversity of newspapers, but no diversity of the press. All editors together seem to be afraid of the same taboo issues. It seems that most of the journalists have agreed to an imaginary press code*” (Blocher 2004).<sup>13</sup>

## Dimensions of Political Correctness

In Germany,<sup>14</sup> persons who dared to bring up those issue were mostly outsiders (i.e. persons who did not belong to the political elite or media establishment), such as a writer of cat novels or conspiracy theorists.<sup>15</sup> This however should not distract attention away from the fact they had some valuable points. Those critics argued that political correctness – the use of certain terms and the support (or not) for certain topics – was necessary to be allowed to participate in political life. Political correctness considered issues such as minorities, migrants and immigration and their

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<sup>11</sup> Fairclough (2003: 21) added that the neo-liberal discourse inherent in international organizations (World Bank, OECD) changed language much more fundamentally.

<sup>12</sup> See DW (2013b) for a view on language, language codes and political correctness.

<sup>13</sup> Author’s translation. Original: „Mir scheint: Wir haben zwar eine beeindruckende Titelvielfalt, aber keine Pressevielfalt. Auf allen Redaktionsstuben scheint die gleiche Angst vor den gleichen Tabuthemen vorzuherrschen. Offenbar haben sich die meisten Journalisten auf einen imaginären politischen Knigge verständigt.“

<sup>14</sup> Switzerland, Austria or the Netherlands have experienced similar discussions or developments (for Austria see for example Auer 2002).

<sup>15</sup> The cat novel writer is the German Turk Akif Piringçi (2014). Piringçi later in 2015 was “executed” by the media when they distorted statements he made during a rally of the Pegida-protest movement (Welt Online 2015a and 2015b). For the “conspiracy” version see Udo Ulfkotte (2013) and his contributions at Kopp Online, for example Kopp Online (2015).

effects on society, and allowed to support only the „official“, positive narrative publicly.

The only person being part of the German elite who dared to raise the negative sides of issues considered of being political correct publicly was Thilo Sarrazin. On 30 August 2010, he published his book „Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen“ [Germany Is Doing Away with Itself].<sup>16</sup>

The emotional discussions of the books content proved that something indeed was wrong. A wave of press and political protests broke loose with the book still being in print – as there had been only single print-outs in the press for the German weekly *Der Spiegel* and the daily *Bild*. Thus, most reactions were made in a preemptive way as those criticizing the book could not have read the book. Such the critics followed Christian Morgenstern’s „weil... nicht sein kann, was nicht sein darf“.<sup>17</sup>

A serious and objective discussion of the topic how the influence of migrants had been changing Germany was not possible, especially due to fact that the author argued migrants were not significantly contributing to the welfare of the German state, and that the welfare issue would aggravate in future with a growing migrant and decreasing native population. The common media and elite consensus had been for years that migrants had been necessary to ensure prosperity and a guarantor of the well-being of the country, and that culture or intelligence basically did not matter.

As Sarrazin argued, the population of Muslim-background had particular problems to integrate into mainstream society, and to upgrade socially and economically. The subsequent discussion (or rather the topics not discussed) showed that there was another taboo within the taboo – connected to the claim that religion did not matter.

But let’s have a closer look to selected theses discussed. The German weekly *Der Spiegel* or the daily *Bild* had some of them printed before Sarrazin’s book was published. For example: „*Die sozialen Belastungen einer ungesteuerten Migration waren stets tabu, und schon gar nicht durfte man darüber reden, dass Menschen unterschiedlich sind – nämlich intellektuell mehr oder weniger begabt, fauler oder*

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<sup>16</sup> According to his statements he was sacked indirectly by German Chancellor Angela Merkel already on 29 August 2010 from his post at the German Bundesbank (Sarrazin 2015: III).

<sup>17</sup> Translated as: „For that which must not, cannot be.“ According to Sarrazin, he had asked a member of the daily *Süddeutsche* whether he had read the book, and he admitted he had not. The *Süddeutsche* had been among the papers that had reported not correctly on the book’s contents. Other examples of reporting were *Welt Online* (2010) listing all arguments Thilo Sarrazin ever made considered of not being „correct“. See also Deutschlandstiftung Integration (2010). Interesting in this context is also Sarrazin’s presentation in a Swiss TV show (Youtube 2013a).

*fleißiger, mehr oder weniger moralisch gefestigt – und dass noch so viel Bildung und Chancengleichheit daran nichts ändert“ (Bild 2010b).<sup>18</sup>*

Thus, Sarrazin not only raised the tricky issue of migration, but dared to connect it with intelligence and education. He also brought up the issue of political correctness and found (as quoted by *Bild*): „Die Tendenz des politisch korrekten Diskurses geht dahin, die Menschen von der Verantwortung für ihr Verhalten weitgehend zu entlasten, indem man auf die Umstände verweist, durch die sie zu Benachteiligten oder gar zu Versagern werden“ (Bild 2010b).<sup>19</sup>

Media perceptions were consistently negative, if not devastating, and Detlef Rost (2013: 8) commented: „[...] die Reizworte ‚Intelligenz‘ in Verbindung mit ‚Vererbung‘ [genügen], um in den Medien einen Sturm zu entfachen. In Kombination mit der Migrationsproblematik wurde daraus ein Orkan der Entrüstung“.<sup>20</sup> In the end, German State President Joachim Gauck had to add that the political class could learn from the success of Sarrazin’s book because: „[...] ihre Sprache der politischen Korrektheit bei den Menschen das Gefühl weckt, dass die wirklichen Probleme verschleiert werden sollen“ (Tagesspiegel 2010).<sup>21</sup>

The discussion showed that the phenomenon of political correctness consisted of several dimensions: Political correctness was connected to certain topics which were not to be discussed in public (i.e. the existence of taboo topics). Sarrazin’s book had discussed the critical aspects of demography, family policy and migration (Bild 2010b).<sup>22</sup> Mohr (2013) included migration, crime statistics, and gender. Ulfkotte (2013) also included Islam, and the social costs of migration from non-European cultures. All of them criticized that media, politicians, experts or scientists had been

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<sup>18</sup> “The social leverage of an uncontrolled migration had been a taboo topic ever since, it has been impossible to talk about the topic that people are different – namely in terms of intelligence; that some are lazier or more industrious, do not have the same morality.” (Author’s translation).

<sup>19</sup> „The political correct discourse has the tendency to absolve individuals from the responsibility for their own deeds in pointing to the circumstances that lead to their behavior; for example it was widespread to justify brawls in migrant camps/homes with the difficult situation of the persons.“ (Author’s translation). The daily *Bild* however published a table of those relying on social welfare in Germany (Hartz IV) and stated: „90 Prozent der Libanesen kriegen Hartz IV“ (Bild 2010c) [90% of Lebanese on social welfare]. See Bild (2010a) on the perception of Thilo Sarrazin.

<sup>20</sup> „[...] to connect the provocative word ‚intelligence‘ with ‚heredity‘ is sufficient to cause a media-storm. To combine it with the problems around migration led to a ‚hurricane of outrage‘,“ (Author’s translation).

<sup>21</sup> „[...] their language of political correctness was sensed in the population as a cover-up of the real problems“ (Author’s translation).

<sup>22</sup> As Sarrazin also remarked equally important for him had been poverty, employment and education. However, experts rather neglected those (Sarrazin 2015: X).

discussing those topics only from a certain perspective; this also meant to use of language codes.<sup>23</sup>

A viewpoint that does not hurt anybody can have the disadvantage that inconvenient things or controversial points are not touched upon; it also can imply that the needs of larger social groups are ignored. The costs of migration have been such a topic.<sup>24</sup> Other topics are questions around the loss of jobs due to migration for the native population (i.e. assuming migrants are ready to work for lower salaries) or cultural concerns (so-called „Überfremdungsängste“, i.e. a fear of domination by foreign influences).<sup>25</sup>

Such a one-sided reflection would prevent a fruitful discussion, and also run counter to the freedom of speech. The German publicist Henryk Broder remarked in this context: *„Und das erstaunlichste an diesem Versuch [politisch korrekt zu sein] ist, das er nicht von oben geschieht. Es gibt keine Reichsschrifttumskammer, keine staatliche Instanz [...]. Das ist eine Tendenz, die aus der Gesellschaft selbst kommt. Man könnte sagen, die Gesellschaft kastriert sich freiwillig, indem sie auf den Gebrauch bestimmter Begriffe verzichtet“* (Deutschlandradio Kultur 2013).<sup>26</sup>

But is there more behind this phenomenon than the use of certain terms and the existence of taboo topics? Some are convinced political correctness is an expression of the over-moralization of politics: *„Die Moralisierung des politischen Lebens ist ein Kennzeichen unserer Zeit [...]. Wir erleben heute, dass tendenziell aus jeder politischen Frage, die ja zunächst lediglich auf einen auszutragenden Interessengegensatz verweist, ein Kampf zwischen Gut und Böse gemacht wird. Dabei ist Political Correctness ein probates Mittel der Empörungsverstärkung. [...]. Die*

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<sup>23</sup> For the latter Harald Martenstein in *Deutschlandradio Kultur* (2013) referred to terms used for certain strata of the population. The German „Armutskonferenz“ [National Anti-Poverty Conference Germany] for example compiled a list in 2013 with terms that should be banned from active use (Faz.net 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, this issue in the context of the mass migration to Germany from summer 2015 onward was not touched by the media until later autumn 2015 and then only reluctantly, while social media and the so-called „Stammtisch“ had raised the issue almost immediately.

<sup>25</sup> See also the contributions in the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* (also for the example of Germany).

<sup>26</sup> „And the most surprising aspect of trying to be politically correct is that it has not been ordered from „above“. There is no „Reichsschrifttumskammer“ [Nazi compulsory organization for writers controlling the book market in the sense of national-socialism], no state institution [...]. It is a tendency that comes from society itself. One could say that society castrates itself voluntarily in resigning from the use of certain terms.“ (Authors’s translation).

*korrekte Sprache ist also tatsächlich eines der letzten Symbolfelder politischer Auseinandersetzung“ (Fleischhauer 2014).<sup>27</sup>*

The second dimension of political correctness thus would be a symbolic one (good vs. evil, or legal vs. illegal).<sup>28</sup> As we have seen the first dimension of political correctness is tied to language (speech codes and taboo words). Both dimensions have been backed by politics, media, experts and social scientists, and by liberal democratic elites in general. The broad support base ensures that political correctness has a direct influence on the liberal-democratic culture.

Authors such as Hölscher (2008: 13) therefore have argued that accusations of being correct (as well as of not being correct) are directly targeting the political culture of a given society: *„Der PC[political correctness]-Vorwurf ebenso wie seine Zurückweisung zielen damit in Wahrheit auf die politische Kultur des Gemeinwesens, [...]“*.<sup>29</sup>

A future step would be to provide a legal basis for the phenomenon. David Bernstein already pointed to this problem in 2003 when he criticized the growing power of anti-discrimination laws.<sup>30</sup> They would lead to the limitation of *civil liberties* emphasizing *civil rights*. This ultimately means to discriminate the majority in favor or a minority, and to foster a „minority-cult“.

The second part of this paper concentrates on forms on political correctness in connection with the „migration“ topic, in particular in Germany<sup>31</sup> and Switzerland. The discussion in Germany had made a difference between „old“ migration and „new“ migration. Such the topic had both consequences on the domestic and foreign socio-political setting.

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<sup>27</sup> „The moralization of political life is a characteristic of our time [...]. We are experiencing today that political questions, that become relevant because of different interests, develop to a battle between good and evil. And political correctness is an instrument to fuel outrage [...]. Correct language is actually used as a symbol on the political battlefield.“ (Author’s translation).

<sup>28</sup> The culmination of moralization so far was reached with the recent mass immigration to Germany, Austria or Sweden, starting from later summer 2015, when it was „evil“ until the Cologne New Year’s Events to express concerns in regard to mass migration or even to be against uncontrolled migration.

<sup>29</sup> The danger of not being correct is that certain topics are no longer discussed, or only from a certain point of view, and this within a political culture that has claimed to be transparent and participative. (Author’s translation).

<sup>30</sup> See Gallina (2017) for some examples.

<sup>31</sup> As his paper had been written in 2013/2014 it does not analyze the recent mass migration to Germany and other countries and the significance of political correctness in this context. Some aspects are covered by Gallina 2017.

## Political Correctness and Migration

In Germany, the book of Thilo Sarrazin pointed to a topic that had disappeared from the political discussion. It considered mainly minority groups or „foreigners“.<sup>32</sup>

Another interesting example is Switzerland. Its system of a direct democracy allows for popular initiatives („Volksinitiative“). Such popular initiatives in recent years have led to some important discussions in the Swiss society, especially in regard to topics on which the opinion of the traditional parties and a significant part of the Swiss electorate has been different. An initiative on the federal level has a direct effect on the democratic system, as it results in changes of the Swiss Federal Constitution („Bundesverfassung der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft“).<sup>33</sup> Individuals, interest groups, but also political parties propose an initiative if they are convinced a certain topic is ignored by politics. An initiative thus allows for politically not desired results and laws. More recent examples have been initiatives co-sponsored by the „Schweizer Volkspartei“ (SVP – Swiss Popular Party), namely to prohibit the construction of minarets and the initiative against mass immigration („Gegen Masseneinwanderung“), passed in favor by 65% and 50.3% of the cast ballots respectively.<sup>34</sup>

An indicator for the relevance of the topic „migration“ for the population was the fact that the initiative „Gegen Masseneinwanderung“ got 120,000 signatures within two and a half months (Bund.ch 2011). Critics from the right-wing populist political camp had argued the topic was not discussed critically and in-depth, also as a result of political correctness. Because the migration issue had been ignored by politics the population had voted in favor of a regulation.<sup>35</sup>

The passing of both initiatives caused significant attention on the national and international arena. In the first case it had been the possible breach of the Swiss Federal Constitution or the European Convention on Human Rights. In the second case it was the possible influence on the relationship with the European Union, especially on the regulation of free movement with the EU („Freizügigkeitsrecht“). The right to

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<sup>32</sup> As already noted, there is a lack of scientific research on the topic, and therefore this paragraph rather has to be understood as the author's presentation of relevant topics and phenomena, and not as a scientific synthesis or analysis of representative character.

<sup>33</sup> A federal popular initiative („Eidgenössische Volksinitiative“) has to be put in front of the electorate if 100.000 signatures are collected. Since 1891, there have been slightly more than 300 initiatives, and the population cast a ballot on more than 185 initiatives. 20 were passed, the most in the last 25 years (Degen 2013).

<sup>34</sup> The „Bundesverfassung“ was changed accordingly, prohibiting the erection of minarets („der Bau von Minaretten ist verboten“). In the second case of the initiative against mass immigration („Gegen Masseneinwanderung“) the detailed constitutional change has not yet been made (admin.ch 2014, sem.admin.ch 2015b).

<sup>35</sup> See the political programs of the SVP, statements of right-wing populist politicians, and comments of the topic and the election results, for example *Weltwoche* (2014) and *Tagesanzeiger* (2014a).

free movement had been guaranteed by the so-called bilateral treaties („bilaterale Verträge“) between Switzerland and the EU, taking effect in 2002. The treaty had led to a significant rise of migration to Switzerland: Within ten years, more than half a million persons migrated to Switzerland, with an effect on mobility, infrastructure and self-esteem of the native population. The general discussion, however, focused on welfare and growth-aspects, and neglected the influence of migration on other spheres of life.<sup>36</sup> A controversial aspect discussed had been the crime rates of migrants.<sup>37</sup>

The comparison with Germany showed a different picture of how political correctness was treated: In Germany, single authors, rarely „experts“, would expose themselves with a critique on migration and the existence of political correctness in connection with the topic. Mass media and political parties had a little critical view on the issue. The German State President Joachim Gauck had been an exception when he backed Sarrazin. In Switzerland, the political party SVP (with some 30% of the electorate) and the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* had been consistently bringing up the „migration“-issue, and had been successfully using (also politically) the fact that other main stream parties had politically correctly handled the issue. In contrary to Germany, direct democracy worked as a converter, and resulted in political measures that ran counter to mainstream political views, predominantly part of the „politically correct“ camp.

The issue got another, foreign-political dimension with the extension of the freedom of movement to Romania and Bulgaria.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, this topic was not touched by political correctness. Media reporting and comments in some EU countries were partly of a hysterical nature: Many times, the impression was generated that the future mass immigration of Eastern European poor would lead to a collapse of the social systems. In Germany, there had been a similar debate in extending the freedom of movement to Poland (among others) in 2011. As a result, more than a hundred thousand Polish citizens immigrated to Germany (Mediendienst-integration.de 2014a). Their

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<sup>36</sup> See for example articles in the *Neuen Zürcher Zeitung* – an interesting view is for example presented in *NZZ* (2013). See also *Tagesanzeiger* (2014b) for a collection of articles; further bfs.admin.ch (2016) and sem.admin.ch (2015a). Net migration in the period from 2002 until 2012 was 63,000 persons annually (seco.admin.ch 2013). In 2013, Switzerland had 8,139,600 inhabitants, 2014 it were 8,237,700 persons (bfs.admin.ch 2015).

<sup>37</sup> In the context of the crime-rates-of-Roma-discussion the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* featured a controversial title page (for a documentation see humanrights.ch 2012). The discussion of the crime rates of foreigners and migrants was another hot issue in 2015/2016, and the reason for another popular initiative on 28 February 2016 („Durchsetzungsinitiative“).

<sup>38</sup> In Switzerland this aspect was treated within the general discussion on migration, and it was singled out as dangerous phenomenon, in spite of Eastern European EU citizens being granted only a few thousand so-called „Kurzzeitbewilligungen“ (short-term permits).

unemployment rate however was much lower than the overall unemployment rate for foreigners.<sup>39</sup>

The German State President Gauck in this case also acted as a mediator. But he did not call for mitigation in regard to Romania and Bulgaria. He stated that immigration was good for the country, but political correctness should not prevent to discuss problems, for example with the Roma (Faz.net 2014). In another speech, he criticized how Germans socialized with „*Menschen, die in Deutschland geboren und seit Jahren heimisch seien*“ – *die Deutschen sollten ihnen mit mehr Offenheit begegnen* (Zeit Online 2014).<sup>40</sup> The statements were made when new figures were published suggesting migration had reached a new peak.<sup>41</sup> The German debate was further characterized by ignoring real problems and by avoiding real solutions, for example of how really to solve the problem of high unemployment figures of certain social groups living in Germany.

In Great Britain the politicization and medialization of the topic EU-freedom of movement for Eastern Europeans also was significant. Of special relevance was that since 2004, 1.1 million persons had immigrated to Great Britain from ten Eastern European countries (Migration Observatory 2014).

But this did not mean another discussion of the *illegal political asylum seekers*-debate: In 2003, the *Press Complaints Commission* and had fueled a debate on political correctness in declaring the phrase „*illegal asylum seekers*“ inherently inaccurate.<sup>42</sup> In 2013, when the topic was EU-immigration and not asylum seekers, only single voices were heard that connected the topic to political correctness: The former conservative Minister Lord Patten said in November 2013, that political correctness would prevent politicians to tell the truth about immigration (Mail Online 2013).

In regard to the freedom of movement of Bulgarians and Romanians, some media titles suggested, Romanians, Bulgarians, Roma and other criminals just could no longer wait to „invade“ the country.<sup>43</sup> A culmination was reached with plans for an anti-UK-campaign in Bulgaria and Romania (Guardian 2013a), and the statement of

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<sup>39</sup> In 2012, 9.6% of the Bulgarians and Romanians living in Germany were without job; the average in Germany was 7.4%. The unemployment figure for all foreigners living in Germany was 16.4% (Zeit Online 2013). A report of December 2014 stated that the overall employment rate for foreigners in Germany was 7% above the figure for Bulgarians and Romanians, the rate being 9.2% in October 2014 (Zuwanderungsmonitor Bulgarien und Rumänien 2014).

<sup>40</sup> „Persons who were born in Germany and had made Germany their home“ – Germans should meet them with more openness. (Author’s translation).

<sup>41</sup> See *Welt Online* (2014); and for adjusted numbers under [mediendienst-integration.de](http://mediendienst-integration.de) (2014b).

<sup>42</sup> A term popular then had been „bogus“ (=fake asylum seeker) (LIP 2004).

<sup>43</sup> See *BBC* (2013a) for the example of Romania.

Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP): „Bulgarians are starving in a mafia-run state“ (BBC 2013b). Romanians reacted with political protests and found they were discriminated against in the EU – but had also answers of sarcastic nature (Observer 2013, Huffingtonpost 2013). Bulgarians reacted less emotionally, and the rejection was considered a fact.<sup>44</sup> The number of Bulgarians and Romanians in the UK fell from January until March 2014 (BBC 2014a; and Guardian 2013b), but citizens in Great Britain were fed-up with migration, and the European election of May 2014 brought 28% for the UKIP (BBC 2014b).<sup>45</sup>

The emotional discussion if citizens of Romania and Bulgaria could live in Germany and other western EU states (and receive welfare), was registered with astonishment and deception in other Central Eastern European EU member states; political correctness was not a topic.<sup>46</sup>

## The Lack of Political Correctness in Eastern Europe

There has been no real debate on political correctness in Eastern Europe, and generally speaking the term it not applied in regard to the Eastern European situation. Public speech is more explicit and direct. However, there has been a discussion that political correctness has distorted political discussions, in particular in Germany. Already in 2013, the Russian journalists Andrei Kobayakov found that one would rather mind words in Germany, which was not the case in Russia (DW 2013a).

Political correctness in Western Europe is tightly connected with social minorities, and minorities stood at the beginning of this development. „Political correctness and migration“ has only considered specific groups of migrants, not including those from Eastern or Southeastern Europe as became clear by the discussion of the migration from Bulgaria and Romania to western EU countries. For Eastern Europe the dimension „migration“ is of less interest, because migration as a mass phenomenon has not been significant.

Questions around minorities have been more relevant, in particular Roma (who also do not fall under political correctness). The statement of the mayor of the Czech city of Josefov, where every third citizen has been a Roma on social welfare, can be considered quite representative: „*Wenn sie [die Roma] meinen Kindern etwas antäten,*

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<sup>44</sup> BBC (2013b) compared the effects in Romania and Bulgaria and gave examples.

<sup>45</sup> Numbers in 2014 continued to grow, and reached 252,000 in September 2014 – compared with 205,000 in September 2013 (Mail Online 2014; recent developments are listed in Oxford’s Migration Observatory (e.g. the report for 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Czechs were rather astonished (Tagesschau.de 2014), Romanians and Bulgarians disappointed.

*würde ich zuerst von meinem Bürgermeisterposten zurücktreten und dann bis auf den letzten Millimeter mit demjenigen abrechnen – persönlich“* (Radio.cz 2013).<sup>47</sup>

Such words are hard to swallow for westerners, but have been accepted in Eastern Europe. The Bulgarian scientist Kjossev (2005: 242 f.) has argued that by using such language outsiders are excluded from communication and from participation. The goal of such language is to present the world as a stage in which „ours“ are acting against the rest of the world, using the language of power. Such observations cannot only be made in Bulgaria. Few are the politicians or „experts“ whose statements are found of not being acceptable by a majority (Recently, one of them became Czech Republic’s President Miloš Zeman). As a rule only statements made off the record fall into this category.<sup>48</sup>

There might be different reasons for a lacking political correctness in Eastern Europe. For example, one could consider political correctness a „luxury“ problem, in comparison with the social, economic, and (geo-)political problems the region is confronted with. Historical questions are much more important than topics connected to political correctness. The relevant conflict lines are not between migrants and „natives“ or between men and women, but between elites and ordinary people, between political lines (communists/socialists vs. „nationalists“). The lack of political correctness could also have to do with the fact that the democratic political culture has not been consolidated in the region.

## Conclusion

We have seen that there are various problems connected to „political correctness“. However, its attractiveness has been high in Western European liberal democracies, especially in the Anglo-saxon and Germanic world. Political correctness even has reached some kind of authority in liberal democratic systems, based on a „different“ picture of humankind: The human being is considered vulnerable and in need of protection; but also considered of being easy to deceive, which makes the being dangerous and reckless – and therefore this being has to be controlled (Heitmann 2013). Critics such as Gottfried Schatz (2012) have found this a convenient model of thinking, because it denies the complexity of human societies: „[ein] *bequemes*

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<sup>47</sup> „If they – the Roma – would harm my children, I would step down from my office as mayor, and then personally settle accounts with them.“ (Author’s translation).

<sup>48</sup> Examples that leaked to the public are comments of a former Czech Prime Minister to Nelson Mandela’s upcoming funeral (Youtube 2013b) or the shooting of a political promotional film of the former mayor of Kharkiv and Ukrainian presidential candidate 2014, Mikhail Dobkin (Youtube 2007).

*Denkmodell, das die Komplexität unserer menschlichen Gemeinschaft verneint. Politische Korrektheit sei daher zu einer Geißel unserer Demokratien und eine Gefahr für die Wissenschaft geworden.*<sup>49</sup>

In Eastern Europe, political elites among themselves, but also citizens and political elites have a very emotional relationship, and mutual attitudes run counter to a realization of political correctness. Additionally, societies in Eastern Europe are characterized by „public mistrust“. If citizens, media, scientists and others do not trust political representatives (or put otherwise: if they are not linked by a common world outlook) it is difficult to develop a political culture based on political correctness. A prerequisite for political correctness is a tight relationship between society and elites, for example through the influence of social groups on political elites or under the condition that certain laws (e.g. anti-discrimination laws) have been enacted which control society in this respect. This has not been the case in Eastern Europe.

In regard to political culture it also has to be underlined that it is difficult to speak of a democratic political culture in Eastern Europe in general. For democratic rules to function such a culture would be necessary. However, this paper has argued that such a culture only partly exists. In western democracies, elites and society are tied by certain rules that are linked to a liberal democratic political culture in the sense of a *thick culture*.<sup>50</sup> The phenomenon of political correctness has to a certain extent questioned the unity between elites and society. The question is how far the disintegration goes and which areas are concerned.

This paper dares to make a final comparison: The firmness of political correctness in Western Europe is in some regard comparable to the firmness of a democratic political culture in Eastern Europe. Both are part of the *thin culture* and are not accepted by large parts of society.

Here we might observe another difference: The parts of society in Eastern Europe not supporting democratic political culture speak out openly, while it is more difficult for their western counterparts not supporting political correctness to speak out openly without consequences. Therefore, the part of the population that does not agree has kept largely silent, also in surveys or polls, and only speaks out to friends (or the famous „Stammtisch“). This makes it difficult to assess the internalization of political

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<sup>49</sup> „This is a convenient model of thinking denying the complexity of our human society. Political correctness therefore has turned to a scourge of democracy and a danger for science.“ (Author’s translation).

<sup>50</sup> The recent migration wave in direction to Germany and Sweden can be considered as a stress test for the liberal democratic political culture.

correctness in countries such as Germany. Switzerland with its instrument of direct democracy has shown that a considerable part of the population is ready to support „not correct“ views.

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