

Liberalism Today -- Freedom First  
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**Abstract:**

Liberalism has affected each and every one of us in some way. The fact that many of us strive for freedom and democracy, that we think highly of human rights, that we treasure tolerance and pluralism and that we see market economies as the way to prosperity is a measure of how important liberal ideas have been in shaping our lives and ideas. And even if liberal ideas haven't been successful in many of our countries, there are many who continue to struggle for liberal reforms.



After a long period of the 20th century dominated by socialism and social democracy, liberalism has made a comeback. It has scaled new heights. The 'velvet revolution' - that saw the end of communism as a serious force threatening to shape our future - was a bloodless liberal revolution. The universal standards on human rights we accept today are predominantly liberal. The consensus concerning international trade and the objectives pertaining thereto, tearing down tariff barriers and eliminating subsidies, are liberal in the broadest sense of the term.

And yet in many of our countries what we know about liberalism, liberal ideas and liberal policies is rudimentary. There is very little access to liberal literature. The claim is often made that liberalism is in some way a 'Western ideology.' (Strangely, no-one claims that socialism is a Western ideology!) Moreover, there are very few liberal parties and highly visible and vocal liberal initiatives.

So: what is liberalism? Is it an ideology or a frame of mind? What are its basic values, concerns and goals? What kind of policies do liberals espouse? How important is liberalism when it comes to finding answers, sustainable answers, to the many challenges we face both at a national and a global level? These are the questions we will address in our seminar event in Gummersbach, Germany.