

POPULISM, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE

Edited by Matevž Tomšič

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Matevž Tomšič*

INTRODUCTION: POPULISM AS A EUROPEAN POLITICAL PHENOMENON

An ambiguous concept

Populism is one of the most frequently discussed political phenomena of recent years. Scientists, politicians, journalists, and other opinion leaders talk about its characteristics, reasons for its growth and impact on the functioning of modern political systems. In doing so, it is often presented as problematic from the point of view of the existence of the European Union and its democratic structure. Political leaders who are labelled as ‘populists’ – be it former US President Donald Trump or Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban – are usually portrayed negatively in the mainstream media (Tomšič 2022a). This treatment of populism is interesting considering that in the 19th century, when this label appeared, it had a predominantly positive connotation, in the sense of something coming from ordinary people and serving the interests of the masses, especially their emancipation and increase in prosperity.

However, various dilemmas, ambiguities, contradictions, and simplifications often arise when dealing with populism. Namely, it belongs to the category of debatable concepts, about which there is no broad and general agreement (Tomšič 2022b). It is even often used as a label that members of established political elites and their supporters stick to their critics. In this context, we can sometimes even talk about a kind of ‘populist pomp’ and the spread of anti-populism. It is a concept that is very flexible and diverse. It is difficult to draw a clear line between populism and non-populism, it is difficult to determine whether an action is populist or not, whether a certain political leader is populist or merely popular. Therefore, it is necessary to

* Matevž Tomšič is political sociologist and Professor who works at the School of the Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica, the Faculty of Information Studies in Novo mesto, Rudolfovo – Scientific and Technological Centre Novo Mesto, and Study Centre for National Reconciliation.

establish clear and consistent criteria for detecting populism and to avoid politically or ideologically motivated biases.

The character of populism

Due to its elusive nature, it is difficult to give a concise and universal definition of populism (Chiran and Tomsic 2020). It can be thematized from different aspects, as a multifaceted phenomenon that is connected to different aspects of political life. First, it can be perceived as an ideology, albeit varied, incoherent and often 'hollow' (Riedel 2017). However, it rests on some ideological principles. Mudde (2004, 534) defines populism as an ideology which considers society to be divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' on the one hand and the 'corrupt elite' on the other, and which claims that politics should be an expression of the general will (*volonté générale*) of the people. Second, populism can be understood as a specific type of political behaviour (Soare 2017). We are talking about the type of leadership, and we mean above all the relationship between the leader and his followers, where the key component is trust. This means that populist leaders have to prove – or at least pretend – that they are 'one of us', that is, that they are part of ordinary people. Third, populist behaviour is related to political strategy (Weyland 2017). Its main goal is to mobilize citizens' support for a populist cause. This refers to the choice of topics, the way citizens are addressed, the attitude towards political rivals and the choice of political and social alliances. And finally, populism can be perceived as a political style (Moffit and Torney 2014). This mainly relates to his communication style. Populist messages are very important for activating support for the ideas of populist political actors. The increased role of the media in the political process or the so-called 'mediatization of politics' has led to the fact that the modern mass media, especially the electronic ones, increasingly build their stories on the 'spectacle', where the image plays a more important role than ideas and programs. The role of new digital media in the rise of populism should not be overlooked. Social networks make it possible to spread political messages outside of traditional media channels (as shown by the example of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, where he managed to 'bypass' the traditional media - which we mostly dislike) through Twitter and other new media.

We can say that populism is a divergent political phenomenon in various respects (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013). We can talk about 'varieties of populism' (Ivaldi et al. 2017). It is varied in

its ideological orientation. Both in academic circles and the general public, right-wing populism is the most talked about when parties such as the National Front in France, the Lega in Italy, the Freedom Party in Austria or the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands are mentioned, as they have the greatest political weight according to the election results. But in some places, we are also dealing with strong left-wing populism, such as Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and Left in Slovenia. There is also the so-called centrist populism, which rejects political positioning, as was the case of ANO 2011 in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, populists differ in terms of their thematic focus, i.e. in terms of what their main issue is with which they want to gain voter support. Some raise the question of migration, others the question of regional autonomy or national sovereignty, and others focus on the fight against capitalism. There are also differences in their orientations regarding international connections. Thus, some European populists (the majority) are pro-Russian, while others (the minority) are anti-Russian.

Despite the many differences, there are some common features of populism (Tomšič 2022). The most important is anti-elitism. As said, it is a clear opposition to the established elites, who are presented as selfish, exploitative and incompetent. This is not only about the political elite, it is often joined by other influential groups, such as the business (corporate) or intellectual elite. That is why populists proclaim themselves to be the protectors of the people who want to free them from elitist oppressors. It is paradoxical that some of them, such as Silvio Berlusconi, Donald Trump or Andrej Babiš, come from the very top of the social elite. The concept of the political community as a homogeneous entity is also common to populists. They tend to glorify 'the people' as an indivisible whole with shared values, desires and interests. They are therefore averse to pluralism, as it leads to undermining the unity of the people. This is also related to the rejection of power-sharing, as populist politics is supposed to be an emanation of the popular will, so the leader, party or movement should have a relatively 'free hand' in making decisions when it comes to power. And finally, in the context of the European Union, populism is associated with Euroscepticism, either in its 'hard' or 'soft' version. Almost all populist parties are also Eurosceptic and vice versa. At the global level, populists typically share anti-globalist orientations, rejecting global neoliberal capitalism, criticizing transnational corporations, and opposing the authority of transnational political organizations.

Populism, globalisation, transnationalism, a crisis of democracy

The rise of populism is strongly linked to the social dynamics that define contemporary Europe and the world as a whole. The tensions resulting from globalization processes in the economic, political and cultural spheres strengthen people's susceptibility to the messages of populist politics (Adam and Tomšič 2019). For example, Dani Rodrik (2018) claims that globalization has gone too far. The emergence of populism should thus be understood as a reaction to an insufficiently regulated system of free trade. Many see this as a threat to the strength of national economies, as competition from product manufacturers and service providers could also lead to the collapse of domestic companies, which would lead to the loss of many jobs.

In many countries in Europe (but also worldwide), people fear the loss of their national sovereignty. There are two main factors they see as the bearer of external dominance. The first one is the inflow of foreign capital, which raises the fear of dependence on large foreign corporations, which will become the owners of domestic companies, thereby controlling the national economy and, consequently, people's lives. The second one is the increasing number of immigrants from other countries, which raises the fear of losing national identity. In Europe, this was particularly evident during the great migrant wave of 2015, when more than a million people arrived, mostly from the Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa, which reinforced feelings of threat to their way of life from the side of an alien culture.

In general, one can state that the effects of globalization processes are contradictory. They are beneficial for some countries, regions or social groups since they bring them easier access and better opportunities for participation in the transnational exchange of goods. However, they are harmful to others, as they threaten their job security and thus their livelihood, while at the same time undermining local ways of life. The latter is susceptible to populist messages.

One can notice contradictions in populist behaviour. The populists reject the European Union, often with the argument on its democratic deficit and detachment of ordinary people (adam and Tomšič 2019). However, they forge links with undeniably autocratic global players such as Russia and China whose regimes openly reject basic democratic principles.

Threats such as the loss of national sovereignty or economic dependence can only be solved by a strong state, according to the populist belief. A strong leader and a strong state are two sides

of the same coin. In this respect, we can state those populist regimes inevitably lead to the establishment of state capitalism, that is, arrangements where the state has great powers in various fields, including the economy since it is said to be the only way to protect national interests. Because the populists consider themselves the guardians of these interests, the media, that (if they come to power) they have the right to intervene in economic affairs.

In the last decades, we witness a widening gap between traditional political parties and the electorate showing the former's alienation from society. In addition, there is a widespread perception of the inefficiency of democratic political institutions and a lack of leadership, i.e. incompetence and irresponsibility of established political elites. Poor coping with the first financial and later migrant crisis at both national and European levels strengthened these feelings. Particularly the latter played a very important role. It turned out that the Union had no scenario of how to effectively deal with the great mass of people from its nearer and more distant surroundings who wish to settle within its borders. The poor performance of European institutions in dealing with migration issues it gave a strong impetus to populist political forces.

Populism reflects also in the resistance to those ideological currents that advocate transnational integration and question the primacy of national identity. This primarily applies to multiculturalism, which on the notion that cultural diversity is something that is almost inherently positive (Heywood 2012). It claims that individual culturally specific communities must have the right and the opportunity to cultivate their values, customs and lifestyles. It argues for equality among these communities, focusing on the rights of minority communities *vis a vis* cultural majority (for example, immigrant communities within European societies). It is largely endorsed by members of the academic community and other opinion-makers as well as by part of the political elite. Some even perceived it as something universalistic. However, the problem of this ideology is in its downplaying of the relevance of (too wide) cultural differences and their potentially problematic impact on the functioning of society. With the migrant crisis, these ideas were met with wide opposition all over Europe. Many blamed multiculturalism of (a part of) the elite as the reason for the poor handling of migration-related problems. And the right-wing populists make advantage of these sentiments.

Many public opinion surveys ask about the attitude towards democracy and different types of management and leadership (European Values Survey, World Values Survey, Pew Research Centre, European Social Survey). The data shows that a significant part of the European

population is disappointed with the political elite and the parliamentary form of democracy. On a declarative level, people still abide by a democracy, but it is often not their first choice when they are confronted with alternatives. "They are willing to support undemocratic forms of government, which are supposed to be more effective. Amidst all this confusion, populist political figures are finding it easy to emerge, promising a new beginning and solutions to the many pressing problems" (Adam and Tomšič, 2019: 696). The established elites are unable to effectively face this challenge; how would they achieve that trust in them - which is very weak in many places - would be strengthened again?

Strength of populist parties and movements in Western and Eastern Europe

Despite the numerous claims that picture a rise in populism in Europe, there are significant differences between countries in this regard. On the one hand, we have a country like Italy, which some call the 'promised land of populism' (Tarchi 2015), while in some other places populism is not very perceptible.

This is related to considerable differences in the power of populist politics, in terms of electoral support for populist parties and movements as well as the strength of the latter in the decision-making process (i.e., to what extent are they integrated in government structures). Populists are the strongest in Poland (*Law and Justice*) and Hungary (*Fidesz*) where they are *de facto* ruling political force (although in formal terms, the government is a coalition in both countries).¹ In some countries, populists are the senior partner in the government coalition, as is the case with Italy (*Five Stars Movement*),² Czechia (*ANO 2011*) and Slovakia (*Ordinary People and Independent Personalities*). In others, they are junior partners in government coalitions as is the case with Spain (*Podemos*).³ Even when populists are not in power, their political 'weight' vary significantly. In certain countries, populists are strong opposition and, as such, they nevertheless have some political influence, as is the case in France (*National Front*), the Netherlands (*Party for Freedom*) or Sweden (*Swedish Democrats*). However, there are also countries where

¹ In Poland, the coalition fell apart in August 2021.

² Italy represented unique example in the years 2018-19 when it had coalition of two populist Italy parties/movements on power (*League* and *Five Star Movement*).

³ This was also the case in Austria during former government where Freedom party was a junior partner.

populists are almost insignificant, playing the role of a weak opposition at best (Ireland, Portugal).

We can state that manifestations of populism are specific to each country. This means that they depend on the historical heritage, the national political culture, and the specific socio-economic circumstances in which each country finds itself. Different national traditions are among main causes of the above-stated varieties of populism, i.e., the existence of multiple types of populism across Europe.

Despite this, we can talk about certain regional patterns. There are differences with regard to the manifestations of populism in the European ‘West’ and in the ‘East’, i.e., between established and new post-communist democracies. In general, populists in the East represent a stronger political force than the rest of Europe. Populist politicians more often become part of the political mainstream, in terms of occupying government positions. There is several examples of so-called populist ‘niche parties’,⁴ usually with strong personalized character, that succeeded in their march to power. However, later this trend appeared also in the West, with Italy (again) as the most evident example.

‘Eastern’ populism is often highlighted as a more problematic version. It is associated with tendencies to introduce ‘illiberal democracy’ or even some new version of authoritarianism (Bugarič 2019). The ruling populists are accused of introducing (post) authoritarian practices like exerting control over media and undermining the principles of the rule of law (Bugarič 2015; Lengyel and Ilonszki 2012). This holds particularly for Hungary and Poland since both countries are facing repeated criticism and condemnations not only from the side of domestic and international civil society but also from the side of the European Commission and European Parliament for undermining the autonomy of the judiciary as well as other societal subsystems.

Populism in Central and Eastern Europe is said to be characterized by a high level of exclusivism (higher than its Western version). As a rule, it is based on ethno-nationalist grounds. Therefore, it is characterized by a negative attitude from ethnic and other minorities and

⁴ ‘Niche parties’ (sometimes labelled as ‘single issue parties’) reject traditional class-based orientation of politics, transcend socio-economic cleavage and are – unlike traditional ‘catch-all parties – focused to a narrow set of non-economic issues (Meguid 2005; Wagner 2012). To this category belong parties of ecologist, regionalist or ethno-nationalist orientation.

opposition to mass migration. However, to understand populism in East-Central Europe, and especially the popularity of populist leaders and their parties, it is important to understand the context of the post-communist transformation facing these countries. This has caused many social upheavals and frustrations among people. Weak institutions of the system are not able to deal effectively with social anomalies. The anti-elitist and anti-European populism can be perceived as a revolt of disappointed ‘masses’ against ‘unresponsive’ established pro-European elites (Krastev 2007). These masses are convinced that the way in which the post-communist transformation was carried out did not meet their expectations and that the progress of their countries, which is most obviously expressed in their inclusion in the Euro-Atlantic integrations (EU and NATO), is not reflected in the quality of their lives.

In addition, the collective memory of the people in this region, which stems from the experience of the communist era, has to be taken into account. Due to its long-standing subordination to the regional hegemon (the Soviet Union at that time), the importance of maintaining national sovereignty is significantly higher than in the West. Due to this, in these countries, the main focus is on the protection of national self-determination from external interference (Verovšek 2019). What is from the side of liberal established elites understood as populist nationalism is seen by a large part of the population in Central and Eastern European countries as defending the hard-won right to decide on matters of vital importance to them within their own national institutions.

How to approach populism?

Both in academic and wider public discourse, populism is usually presented as a phenomenon that is problematic or even a threat to a democratic society. The rejection of pluralism, disparagement of the rule of law and a negative attitude towards various social minorities are most often highlighted. This is especially true for new democracies, such as those in Eastern and Central Europe, as populism is said to be associated with tendencies to introduce 'illiberal democracy' or even outright authoritarianism. At the same time, due to the black-and-white painting of the page and the simplification of the solutions it offers, populist politics would not be able to successfully face the most critical development challenges.

However, the situation is more ambiguous. The line between populist and non-populist politics is rather blurred. Political success in a democracy requires popularity, without which good electoral results cannot be achieved. Therefore, from time to time, almost every political actor, regardless of other characteristics (ideology, political positioning, personal political style) practices at least certain elements of populism, if not in the content of their actions, at least in terms of discourse.

Given that populism is not a uniform phenomenon, there are also differences in its effects on democratic life. Depending on the intensity of the populist approach and behaviour, we can talk about different levels. On the one hand, we have so-called 'soft' populism, which despite populist rhetoric respects constitutional principles such as the separation of powers, fundamental rights and freedoms; on the other hand, there is the so-called 'hard' populism, which rejects these constitutional principles. While the former has no serious effects on democracy, the latter can be problematic from this point of view.

Populism is a complex political phenomenon that needs to be tackled in a sophisticated interdisciplinary fashion. It shall be thematised from different points of view. In this respect, the application of various conceptual and methodological approaches is necessary. Different perspectives must be considered. Only in this way, we can avoid ideological and subjective biases.

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Milan Zver*

POPULISM: A SHOE SEEKING ITS FOOT THE DIFFICULTIES OF CONCEPTUALIZING A POLITICAL PHENOMENON

Conceptual difficulties with populism

In terms of social science, particularly political science, populism is a relatively new concept, barely more than half a century old. If we were to look for a definition of the term in dictionaries of an earlier date, for example, we would be hard-pressed to find it. And neither could it be found in most of the recent ones.⁵ The main reason— given that it appeared in the political realm first in the antique period and resurfaced *en masse* in the 19th century – is that populism as a political phenomenon is extremely diverse, a 'veritable hodgepodge'. It is therefore very difficult to define a recognizable, unified and consistent core of content, an entity of its own. The term has no home even in any of the classical ideologies, e.g. in liberalism, conservatism or socialism, or any other modern one. It is closer to the truth to say that it draws a little here, a little there. Rather than a common content, we could define it in terms of characteristic forms of behaviour or a typical political activism or even an approach to communication.

But if a phenomenon such as populism has no recognized and comprehensive entity, if it is not 'le fait social' (according to Durkheim, a social fact as a thing) that can be empirically investigated, as rigorously as natural scientists do, is it better to abandon this 'mission

* Milan Zver is a political scientist and a member of the European Parliament.

⁵ Exceptions prove the rule: The Cambridge Dictionary in 2017 selected populism as the 'concept' of the year in 2017: "Political ideas and activities that are intended to get the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want". It is a fairly general and simple definition with the notable advantage of not labeling populism in terms of value, as is usually done in media or political discourse (Ökrös, Mátyás, 2023. "Constructive Populism: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal". In *The Curse Of Popularity. Portraits, Ideologies, Programs From The Past And Present Of Populism*, edited by Kristóf Mihály Heil and Bernadett Petri, 108. Budapest: Centre for Fundamental Rights, Christian Democratic Institute and Foundation for a Civic Hungary.)

impossible', leave it to itself, and pursue in science the more easily identifiable phenomena that are relevant to the scientific research endeavour? We have known for centuries that the phenomenon is among us, but it was very late to be explored, and even then rather shyly. But it seems that its time has only come in the last decade, both in social reality and in social science, where it is increasingly recognized as a relevant social phenomenon, undoubtedly worthy of scientific research. Especially since it is closely related to concepts such as democracy, the people, popular will, community, etc. It is important to rid the concept of populism of one-sided value labels. But the road to getting there is strewn with thorns, as there is a lot of disagreement, as well as abuse, in both science and politics and the general understanding of the concept.

The first to illustrate the issue with the concept of populism was Isaiah Berlin, one of the most prominent social science gurus of the second half of the last century, who said, for example, that where there is a shoe, that is to say, a concept, there should somewhere also be a foot, that is to say, a content, but it should not be just any kind of content (Petri 2023,7). In such an uncomfortable situation, many have sought for the lowest common denominator to define the concept. The broader the definition, the greater the risk of it being invalid. Most often, in these murky circumstances, the theorists pointed out that populism represented anti-establishment or anti-elitism, the original popular sovereignty and unity. This is a view that is at odds with the theory of elites put forth a century ago by Joseph A. Schumpeter, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and to some extent Max Weber and others, who argued that the people, which in their view no longer even existed as such in modern society because of its internal fragmentation, could no longer govern itself and that professional and political elites were needed to do it for them. Even democracy, according to these theories, is necessarily elitist, so that we cannot speak of the rule of the people. But this is supposedly just an old, outdated theory (e.g. Schumpeter).

Matevž Tomšič (2023, 151) identifies the reasons for the resurgence of populism as a political and theoretical phenomenon in the ineffectiveness and irresponsibility of traditional political parties. Although he considers it difficult to formulate a precise and universal definition of populism, he nevertheless points out some common features, such as anti-elitism, the understanding of the people as a homogeneous entity and the rejection of the separation of powers. Today's populism is Eurosceptic and anti-global. Since populism implies a kind of distrust of political parties ('lack of leadership'), it is easier for so-called new faces to emerge under it, presenting themselves as non-party or even apolitical. The author analyses precisely the differences and similarities between populisms in different parts of Europe, noting that soft

populism can have a positive impact on the state of democracy, while the hard form can be seen as a threat to democracy (ibid, 161).

When we study the theoretical literature on populism, we come across a number of interesting explanations and comparisons. The most interesting is the thesis of left-right ideological cohabitation, precisely in the case of populism by the historian and political scientist Márton Békés (2023). He compares the political thought of two extreme thinkers, Antonio Gramsci and Carl Schmitt, from the first half of the 20th century, placing both in a context of non-liberal democracy. It is well known that the first half of the 20th century was a time of searching for answers to the elementary questions of communal living, namely what the organisation of society, especially the economy and politics, should be. The far left and right, epitomised by Gramsci and Schmitt, built their concepts on a critique of the 'capitalist' economy and parliamentary democracy. At their core, the concepts of 'cultural hegemony' (Gramsci) and 'political hegemony' (Schmitt) are very similar, especially in their attitude towards liberalism and in their desire to radically change the world. In Gramsci, we find elements of the extreme right, while in Schmitt we find elements of the left.

Historic reflection: Did populism really only emerge in the 19th century?

Many authors explain that populism is a modern phenomenon that emerged in the North American or Russian social conditions of the 19th century. This is partly true since it really did appear in greater numbers on both continents at that time but in some of its dimensions it had been around for a long time, at least in periods when they already had a political life, such as in antiquity and ancient Rome. It would therefore make more sense not to forget, alongside the modern and the contemporary, the old, *ancient* populism.

Early populism

In fact, forms of populism could already be spoken of in the various ancient Greek poleis, particularly in Athens. The extremely complex organisation of the Athenian polis during the reign of democracy was based on some 50,000 free male citizens representing the demos or people. Foreigners, immigrants and women had no political rights (Davis 1907, 128-129). Thus, although to a limited extent, there was a (political) people. Moreover, it was the basis of the

ancient Greek democracy, which had elements of directness. But not everyone had an uncompromisingly positive attitude towards it, e.g. Aristotle, the giant of ancient Greek thought, in his famous work *Politics*, thought that democracy could be a perverted form of government, where the 'common' people ruled only for their own benefit.

It is well known that the term populism is derived from the Latin word *populus* (people/people), which also had a political role in Ancient Rome. The Roman republican system, with its two consuls, senate, popular tribunals and other institutions, sought to ensure the stability of the empire on the basis of the aristocracy's supremacy, while the populists (*populari*) of ancient Rome emphasized the rights of ordinary citizens. Political rivals fought verbal and physical battles, as well as assassinating their opponents, in the Senate and beyond (ibid, 155-158, 165-172, 179-184).

Certainly, early populism cries out for further research. The fact is that populism as a political phenomenon existed in antiquity, and with it, of course, the individual elements of populism, but it certainly came into its own in political modernity when the parliamentary form of popular rule also began to gain ground.

Modern populism

This is the label given to the populism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a time of the intense emergence and rise of nation-states (and their mutual contradictions), the central institutions of modern states, including democracy, the strengthening of industrialisation and agriculture, international trade, culture, education becoming a public good, the print media, the enormous growth of the population, urbanisation, etc.

Particularly after the civil war between North and South and the abolition of slavery in the second half of the 19th century, the United States of America was a 'promised land' that attracted immigrants from all over the world. Initially, especially in rural America, the population grew rapidly and faced many problems that they could not cope with alone. Increasingly, demands were being made on the state as such, and the beginnings of a more mass American populism can be placed in the second half of the 19th century. In 1891 they even founded their own People's Party, which they called the Populist Party. Its social vehicles were peasants whose demands could hardly be placed on the left or the right or, in the American case, on liberal or

conservative ideology. Populism was also later linked to constructive government policies in the US, e.g. the New Deal during the Great Depression of the early 1930s, as well as post-war McCarthyism (named after Senator Joseph McCarthy). The author believes that populism can also play a positive role, especially in the process of 'nation-building' or when it comes to dealing with serious crises such as the 'Great Depression' of 1929 in the USA (Paár 2023, 83).

The even earlier origins of modern populism in the 19th century can also be found in the nationalists of Tsarist Russia where the social, political and cultural situation was quite different. The weak pro-Western elites were accused by the Russophile nationalists of being uprooted from Russian culture and the Russian nation. The differentiation between 'us' (the people) and 'them' (the alleged oppressors and exploiters) was enforced to the extreme limits by the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution and the victory of the Red Army (ibid. 93).

The differences between early American and Russian populism are abundant: American populism lived in democracy while the Russian populism developed under autocracy and later dictatorship.

The first half of the 20th century was a time, as mentioned, of searching for answers to fundamental questions about the organization of society. The far left and right built their concepts on a critique of the capitalist model of the economy and parliamentary democracy, and a desire to radically change the world (Békés, 2023). All three totalitarianisms of the 20th century also contained strong elements of populism: national socialism, fascism and communism. Of course, all the other authoritarian systems that drew on their Soviet (Stalin), Italian (Mussolini) and German (Hitler) models should not be ignored either. Let us take a short walk elsewhere in the world and see what populism in political modernity has looked like in theory and/or practice.

Let us first look at the case of Latin America, where in the first half of the 20th century a wave of early populism swept through Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. The second wave, according to Depablos, was to be the mid-century populisms of Peron in Argentina, Vargas in Brazil and Cardenas in Mexico. Castro's populism in Cuba also emerged at that time. The neoliberal

populism epitomized by Menem in Argentina belongs to the third wave of Latin American populism,⁶ which in our classification can be included in the modern period.

Let us also mention here the populist movement in Hungary in the first half of the 20th century, which went beyond politics and influenced other areas, such as literature. In Hungary, as in the USA in the 19th century, the social vehicle of populism in the first half of the 20th century was the peasantry. The National Peasants' Party was closely linked to the popular movement, which was anti-elitist and emphasized national sovereignty. The period during the Second World War led to cooperation with other movements in Hungary, including the Communists, which were growing in strength. However, after the fall of communist rule and the restoration of democracy, parties at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s that had built on the platform of the National Peasant Party, such as the Magyar Demokrata Fórum (Hungarian Democratic Forum) and the Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja (Justice and Life Party), failed to revitalize their original strength (Hajdi 2023).

A kind of populism, with a clear critique of Western capitalism and party parliamentarism, can also be found elsewhere in Eastern or Central Europe, especially in Austria. The Austrians, under the rule of the dominant People's Party (and the considerable influence of the Catholic Church), have been building a specific statist system as an antipode to the capitalist economy and parliamentary democracy. In the second half of the 19th century, the Christian Social movement was also led in Slovenia by the influential Karl Vogelsang. Under his influence, Janez Evangelist Krek founded a broad cooperative movement which not only curbed the economic decline of Slovenian agriculture and the countryside but also greatly strengthened it by the First World War. The models of statist democracy, which in a broader context could be called *statist populism*, also resonated strongly in Slovenia (Zver 2002).

It was particularly favoured by the conservative Slovenian People's Party (SLS), which had a large support base in rural areas, where by far the largest population lived at the time. Despite the rapid industrialization of Slovenia, agricultural production remained dominant in the first half of the 20th century. These were ideal conditions for so-called agrarian populism. Despite

⁶ Depablos (2023) also identifies a fourth wave in recent years, which was not global, without Latino specificities. Well, Alejandro Peña Esclusa thoroughly debunks it in his book *Forum Sao Paulo and the Culture War* (2022).

the predominance of a Christian social platform based on solidarity between the parties, democracy was knocking louder and louder at the door of the strongest Slovenian party.⁷ Krek would be the first to realize the political power of the people. He finally succeeded in convincing the 'conservatives' in his party. He felt that the conservatives did not trust the people, and the people did not trust them: "And yet it is the people /that/ will speak in this century!" They became the first political force to defend the rule of the people. They played this role as long as democracy lasted in Slovenia.⁸

In the first Yugoslavia, the SLS managed to preserve Slovenia's relative economic independence and relative political and cultural autonomy. It was certainly the strongest party in terms of populism, both in speech and in deeds. While the classical liberals of the 1920s and 1930s became pro-Yugoslav and the socialists internationalist, the SLS also remained the most loyal guardian of the Slovenian nation.

Like totalitarianisms elsewhere, the Slovenian/Yugoslav regime was heavily populist. Because of its lack of legitimacy, it emphasized popular ends, even though its ideology was based on the theory of class struggle. This was demonstrated with all the ruthlessness of the mass killings during the Communist revolution. At the level of ideology, populism is most clearly expressed in the concept of self-management. Edvard Kardelj took the structure of the pre-war corporatists into his own model, naturally with a strong Marxist ideological charge (Zver 1990).

Contemporary populism

On American soil, it is supposedly being reasserted by former US President Donald Trump in the form of 'one-man populism' (Paár), while on European soil it is being labelled as distinctly negative by the left-wing mainstream media who see it as a right-wing approach employed by the likes of the Hungarian President Viktor Orbán, the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the Polish government of Mateusz Morawiecki, supposedly managed behind the scenes by the

⁷ There is a well-known saying by Krek from the late 19th century, when he stated that the most radical democracy is better than absolutism (Zver, Milan, 2002. *Demokracija v klasični slovenski politični misli*. Ljubljana: Orbis, 38).

⁸ Slovenian liberals were sceptical about democracy in the beginning, but even under democratic conditions, especially in the cities, they maintained their political power. The social democrats never succeeded, except occasionally at a local level, in establishing themselves as a strong nationalist political factor.

populist Lech Kaczynski. Of course, populism in recent years could also be attributed to the left, in particular to Greece's Syriza and Spain's Podemos (Tomšič 2023, 147). Both extremist parties have risen to power with extreme positions and promises. Let us also recall the populist 'likes' of the Brexit protagonists on the island, which led to the historic departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Elements of populism can also be found in other countries in recent years, including Slovenia, where Svoboda came to power with populist promises that were known from the outset to not be achievable.

In recent years populism has also been explored on European soil, Stefan Maximilian Drexler (2023, 322) for example with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. He starts his study with her quote: "Sometimes I am liberal, sometimes conservative, sometimes Christian Social". The author demonstrates her inconsistency and proves that there was precious little conservative about her political stance. He considers her to have run the country in a technocratic manner, accusing her of populist measures, in particular the abandonment of nuclear power, which Britain and France had not even considered. She is also known for her populist attitude towards migrants, inviting them into Europe and causing huge waves of migration and problems in other countries in the Alliance. Her "pacifist and anti-militarist" attitude towards the military is why Germany still has problems in the field of security and defence today. Merkel persuaded the public with the slogan: "Wir schaffen das!" She aligned herself with the left, the author notes, and branded the conservatives as nothing but populists.⁹

The driving force behind the latest wave of populism is the work of the notorious Sao Paulo Forum, which brings together a number of left-wing governments and their presidents in Latin America (Peña Esclusa, 2022, 83).¹⁰ Latin America is a chapter in itself, Peña Esclusa concludes, and contemporary populism must be seen through the work of the Sao Paulo Forum, which brings together left-wing governments and their presidents in Latin America. He sketches this Latin American movement, which, in his view, threatens the whole of Western civilisation. The abuse of democratic institutions and the poor cultural environment have been a source of frustration for leftists such as Evo Morales (Bolivia), Hugo Chavez (Venezuela), Lula de Silva

⁹ In his paper "Between the Demand for Security and the Accusation of Populism" Stefan Maximilian Drexler looks for elements of populism in the reign of German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Drexler 2023).

¹⁰ Contemporary populism in South America cannot be understood without taking into account the findings of two recent works by Alejandro Peña Esclusa: *Forum Sao Paulo and the Culture War* (2022) and *Electoral Fraud of Forum Sao Paulo* (2023), both published in Ljubljana by the New Horizons.

(Brazil), Nestor Kirchner (Argentina), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), Rafael Correa (Ecuador) and other loyal successors of Fidel Castro, a necessary condition for achieving power, but obviously not yet sufficient – direct electoral fraud is also necessary to win and keep power, according to the 'Sao-Paulo' elite! Governments are strongly linked, backed by the narco mafia, interest groups and the secret services of countries with hybrid political systems. But they are aware that they cannot do without the formal 'support' of the people, which is abused in many ways (Peña, 2023). That is why they act outwardly as 'of the people', by the people and for the people.

Conclusion: there is no need to fear populism

The aim of any scientific treatment of social phenomena is objectivity and truth in order to avoid the value-laden and cheerleading articulations that are not lacking even in science. To uncritically dismiss or, on the other hand, glorify the phenomenon would clearly be the wrong approach. However, in the media and in politics, this cannot always be avoided, because it is a wholly different genre of communication.

Political science is trying to establish a general theory of populism, but because of the difficulties mentioned above, it is not yet in sight. But that is not the most important thing. What is important is that political phenomena are discussed; the wider and in-depth the discussions are, the closer we come to scientific truth and the more useful it is for users of social science debates. If there is more scholarly treatment of the field, there will be fewer of the questions that are being asked today, e.g. whether populism is just a style of (political) communication or a consistent theory, whether populism is the gravedigger of democracy or just a corrective, etc.

Since it has no ideological being of its own, the definition of populism has to be eclectic, depending on the historical moment, the broader situation, the political tradition and culture in the broadest sense of the word. It is, therefore, useful to define and understand the concept of populism in a narrower sense, as a method of political communication, or as a means by which politicians persuade 'the people' to give in to their demands. These demands are usually not particularistic, least of all elitist, but follow what was understood as *demos* or *populus* in ancient times. This may be at odds with the pluralist conception of modern parliamentary democracy today, but it is far from meaning that populism is a threat to democracy. In its own way, populism is outside the framework of any political system, including democracy, because it can

reside within or outside it. There are well-known populist movements that have attacked the party system, where political elites are supposed to divide the nation among themselves (criticism of partocracy, present in our country as well). In short, if science cannot arrive at a universally valid theory of populism, researchers resort to definitions of specific populisms, placing the populisms of Roosevelt, Juan Peron, Vargas, Chavez, Morales, Trump, Orbán, Merkel etc., in various typologies. There is no ideal type of populism. It may have some common characteristics, such as invoking the nation and opposition to the elites, parochialism and anti-globalism, but not much more. It is simply not possible to find a broad common denominator in terms of content, such as ideas, programmes, principles and, above all, values.

An additional issue in attempting to deal with this phenomenon comprehensively is its misuse, naturally for political purposes. Populism is first labelled as something negative, harmful, even threatening, turned into a bad word, and then personalized or linked to a politician. The left-wing media, and politicians too, are particularly good at this. In recent years, Donald Trump and, in Europe in particular, Viktor Orbán, have been two notable cases in point. If we were to analyze the content of the most prominent speeches made by politicians at the European level, we would come to an interesting conclusion: over the last decade, left-wing politicians have been accusing the right of being populists with increasing intensity. What is more, the right has also picked up the habit, adopting a left-wing understanding of populism. This has led some right-wing politicians to subscribe to the left's rhetoric on a formal level, which has, among other things, led to public confusion and the public opinion decline of moderate centre-right parties. Just how deeply populism/anti-populism has also become embedded in European political discourse and politics, in general, can be seen from what happened at the first meeting of the Delegation for Relations with the United States of America in the European Parliament in the last convocation after Trump's victory. All the speakers, from left to right, were scathing about Trump's victory in the US presidential elections, saying that he won – by populism.

It is therefore a rather uncomfortable situation in the general vernacular when everyone is talking about populism and almost everyone is interpreting it in their own way. On the other hand, it is true that populism has become the most exclusive modern political concept. But the

panic and the fear of populism are unnecessary¹¹ because it is not a social phenomenon that threatens the fundamental values and principles of modern society. It is gaining traction in science, although there is a great deal that has not yet been settled about populism, including a universal definition. Nevertheless, debates on populism are productive, not least to prevent the term from being used wrongly or otherwise being distorted in public debate, especially in politics.

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¹¹ For example, the Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Tanja Fajon tweeted that “the greatest hindrance to global solidarity and security is populism” (Valič Zver, Andreja, 2023. “Populism and Tanja’s New Language”. *Demokracija*, no. 37, 11.)

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Ladislav Cabada*¹²

RISE OF NATIVISM AND CONSERVATIVE POPULIST AGENDA IN CENTRAL EUROPE¹³

Introduction

Nativism, historically associated with the premodern period, has become an important component of contemporary politics. Similarly, as in the cases of previous waves of nativism, the contemporary situation also has the characteristics of a revitalisation movement against openness, modernity and more general globalisation. Nativist actors stress the necessity to promote the interests of native inhabitants and tend to prefer social chauvinism practices, economic protectionism and even autarky, successfully securitise the migration issue and develop historical narratives based on national populism, traditionalism, anti-modernity and anti-liberalism. The proponents of nativism also skilfully include the traditional instruments of populist and far-right actors such as anti-EU stances, invoking ‘normality’ regarding gender and family issues, etc.

Anti-modern and anti-liberal rhetoric is an important part of the public performance of political actors with populist backgrounds and often authoritarian tendencies. This matter of fact has become even more evident during the last decade when such actors achieved important electoral successes in many liberal democratic regimes. Nevertheless, within the last decade, we can observe an important shift from populism as a ‘non-ideological’ strategy towards a distinctively more problematic state where the populist actors revitalize and modernize the anti-liberal legacies and revive the premodern nativist discourses. The West seems to be undergoing a strong wave of traditionalism, undermining important narratives and structural parts of its (post)modern situation such as individual freedom, general equality, free market etc. Alongside

* Ladislav Cabada is an Associate Professor, Metropolitan University Prague

¹² This chapter partly uses and further develops the knowledge, ideas, and analyses presented in some of my previous works, mainly (Cabada 2019), (Cabada 2021a), (Cabada 2021b) and (Cabada 2022).

¹³ This chapter is the result of Metropolitan University Prague research project no. 100-1 “Political Science, Media and Anglophone Studies” (2023) based on a grant from the Institutional Fund for the Long-term Strategic Development of Research Organizations.

other impulses (regarding the EU, especially the institutional crisis and enlargement incapability since the mid-2000s), the fiscal and economic crisis after 2008 changed the situation dramatically. As Klíma (2020) shows, this juncture was provided by electoral earthquakes and the establishment of second post-transitive party systems. Next to the anti-corruption rhetoric the new actors also used anti-European and nationalist narratives based on criticising the catching-up process as a failure.

This period was already accompanied by the politics of emotions, above all fear from the renewal/consolidation of a peripheral position of East-Central Europe (ECE) in European architecture. Contrarily, in Western Europe, the economic crisis strengthened the doubts about the prospects of the all-European Integration Project (Ágh 2019, 44–6). Furthermore, the next juncture – the migration crisis in 2015 and beyond – further strengthened these feelings and brought a new wave of patriotism, nationalism and xenophobia into politics and societies. As Klíma (2020, 158) stressed: "The immigration issue indeed covers a cultural identity conflict, or a fundamental security dimension, incorporating a highly emotional component in the form of fear".

Since 2010, national populist actors have been strengthening and we can observe their electoral successes. Along with the election of D. Trump, we have to mention the success of J. Bolsonaro in Brazil, the Brexit issue, the electoral success of national populist parties in the United Kingdom, France or Italy, as well as the domination of these parties in some ECE states. "Increased insecurity in Central and Eastern Europe created by the unrest in Ukraine and Russia's increasing regional belligerence; the apparent weakening of the EU ... the war in Syria and the inflow of refugees into Europe ... the hardening of nationalism-infused regimes from Ankara, to Budapest and beyond; and Trump-driven nativism in the US, gave a sense that things would not be 'normal' again" (Harper 2018, 6). Let us stress the general scepticism about the development trajectory and prospects of society in CE with some statistical data: in 2018 79% of Poles and 73% of Hungarians thought that society was broken; 50% of Poles and 70% of Hungarians were convinced that society was in decline (Eatwell and Goodwill 2018, 218).

All of these, and many other impulses (incl. the ongoing pandemic), strengthened the anti-liberal tendencies and legacies in ECE, the national populist and nativist actors, the politics of negative emotions, and launched them as the new round of culture wars in the region. After two

decades of democratic consolidation after 1989, when the anti-modern actors were marginalized within the processes of socialization, Westernization, and Europeanisation, we can observe the revitalization of nativist ideology and the strengthening of national populism as the political strategy (not only) in ECE.

The former pariahs of European politics – V. Orbán and J. Kaczyński – present themselves as ‘authentic Europeans’ criticising the ‘weak, (ultra)liberal Brussels’ and appealing for a cultural counter-revolution in Europe. The polarisation of Europe and Western societies continues and almost any new electoral campaign and result brings a new round of debates about this polarisation and clashes between two distinctively different political camps promoting (and growing from) distinctively different and competing political cultures. The picture of the Central European (CE) nations as the most successful new democracies was remodified into a new brand of ‘problematic children of Europe’ (Lovec et al. 221, 2). Such a brand is not limited to individual nations or regimes but has become one of the important tools for new East-West debates in Europe and the EU (Cabada 2019). Thus, not only the contemporary regimes in Hungary and Poland but also the regional cooperative structures such as the Visegrad Group (V4) or Three Seas Initiatives are labelled as populist (Söderbaum et al. 2021).

The aim of this chapter has to be reduced from general debate and analysis of nativist restoration in the world to less extensive goals. Firstly, I will reduce my analysis spatially and focus on the development in Central Europe. Nations of the Visegrad group and Slovenia are usually included in Central Europe by contemporary political scientists (cf. Ágh 1998; 2019; Cabada and Walsch 2019; Fink-Hafner and Haček 2000). Despite different developments after WWII, Austria is also often included in Central European comparisons (Cabada and Walsch 2019; Hloušek and Kopeček 2004). For the group of the six mentioned nations, I will apply the concept of nativism searching for manifestations of a nativist approach and policies. I will search for actors using nativist rhetoric and strategies as well as for the most important themes and paroles used by Central European nativists. Furthermore, I will analyse the overlap in Central European nativist performance and their cooperation. I assume that nativism in Central Europe is strongly related to the unfinished and deformed modernisation processes. From this presumption I derive the first thesis: *The cultural conflict (clash of cultures) that arose in Central Europe during the process of modernisation, lasted out the period of the non-democratic regime after WWII and was revitalised after 1989.* Based on this thesis I ask the

first research question: Does the contemporary nativism in Central Europe grow from visible and shared anti-liberal legacies? In the first 10-15 years of democratic consolidation the anti-modern and/or nativist actors were marginalised within the processes of socialisation, Westernisation and Europeanisation. The grand narrative of the ‘Return to Europe’ raised ‘general’ optimism in Central European societies and the proponents of ‘counter-cosmopolitanism’ were relatively weak in this period. Nevertheless, after the mid-2000s the nativist ideology and national populism as a political strategy has been revitalised and transformed from being relatively peripheral in politics and society to being the political mainstream.

On one hand, I presuppose that the small parties usually located outside the mainstream used the nativist and conservative populist agendas which existed before the important junctures of 2010 (earthquake election) and 2015 (migration crisis as a new impulse for the poly-crisis situation). On the other hand, I presuppose that the mainstream parties started to use similar strategies and rhetoric only after 2015 due to tactical reasons. The situation might differ in individual countries, but in all cases I assume the combination of ideology and strategy by the mainstream actors while the ‘original’ nativists were gained by these new mainstream nativist actors, or pushed again to the margin of the political arena. From these presumptions I derive the second thesis: *After 2004, the mainstream parties in Central Europe often labelled as national-conservative marginalised the traditional nativist formations and/or adopted their ideology, programme and strategies.* Based on this thesis I ask the second research question: Are we observing the general mainstreamisation of the nativist issues and strategies in Central European political arenas?

Additional aim of the present chapter is to analyze the interconnection between the contemporary anti-liberal and anti-modern narratives and manifestations in CE and the historical legacies other than Communist. My basic assumption is here that the recent ‘culture war’ in the region displayed in ‘three theatres’– politics of memory, politics of identity, and politics of morality (Hesová 2021, 135–9) – grows out of the interwar as well as the older period/s and is related to the process of the unfinished or deformed modernization and re-modification of the clash of cultures (*Kulturkampf*).

In the first part of the analysis, I will operationalise the general terms such as nativism, national populism, xenophobia, autarky, etc, and frame this terminology with two big concepts. From

the best described case of nativism (United States/North America) I will derive the main terms and concepts into the more general framework for political science analysis. Secondly, in the case of ECE I will present the process of unfinished or deformed modernisation and the revitalisation and re-modification of the clash of cultures (*Kulturkampf*) in the last 30 years. In the second part I will apply this theoretical framework to the Central European case.

The chapter is rooted in comparative analysis, combining the synchronic and diachronic approach and focusing on the development of political parties with nativist tendencies in ECE. Based on the two theses or assumptions presented above I focus on the development of party politics and those parties that advance the nativist attitudes. In the political discourse of individual countries, I search for typical strategies, signs and terms of the nativist narrative such as the systematic criticisms of minorities, cultural and other types of racism, moral disqualification of ‘the other’, idealisation of peasantry, peasant life and common sense, support of majoritarian democracy tools, above all plebiscites, the concept of naturalness, emphasis on patriotism and ‘correct’ European values and ‘Christian Europe’, etc. Behind the national discourses I then search for similarities and shared strategies of nativist actors, as well as mutual reasons for their strengthening.

Nativism as concept, social phenomenon and program of identity politics

As already mentioned, the phenomenon of nativism is strongly interconnected with the development in North America and ethnogenesis¹⁴ of the ‘native’ (North) American nation. Katerberg (1995, 495) describes nativism as an ‘umbrella term traditionally used by North American scholars to describe anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, racist and antiradical agitation ... Like nationalism, it originates in common customs religion and ethnicity’ (Katerberg 1995, 495). As the symbolic and general expression of North American nativism, the abbreviation ‘WASP’ is usually mentioned, stressing the exclusive position of the English language and predominance of Anglo-Saxon or protestant cultural values and institutions (Simcox 1997, 132). Barša and Císař (2006, 417-19) describe the development of the nativist-rooted American nation as the ethnicisation of a folk community of settlers that led to the ‘nativist’ image of

¹⁴ We understand the ethnogenesis as the ‘individual seek to achieve a measure of belonging and terrestrial immortality through identification with a group rooted in land and kinship’ (Kaufmann 1999, 444–5).

America as the country of the descendants of the original immigrants in the 17 and 18 centuries, but not the land of contemporary and future immigrants. As an important political actor rooted in this conviction, they mention the seventh U.S. President Andrew Jackson. ‘Jacksonians’ are rooted in evangelical Christianity stressing their own root to God. They regard the human being as limited and prone to ‘sin’. Often, they consider the world endangered by dark powers – the Catholic Church, global Communism and recently the global ‘Islam’. Particularism and isolationism are typical segments of their thinking.

Let us stress two important facets in this basic definition of nativists – xenophobia and the idealisation of the traditional pre-modern society rooted in agrarian and a rural/small-town lifestyle. Simcox (1997, 30) stresses that ‘xenophobia and racism are concepts often subsumed in the general concept of nativism’. Together with anti-Catholicism¹⁵, xenophobia and racism are usually reflected as the most important patterns of American nativism (Friedman 1967: 408–9). As Sundstrom (2013, 80) underlines, ‘xenophobia is conceptually prior to nativism’ and nativism ‘indicates a positive political project to actively exclude or expel those judged to be too foreign to belong, or to hoard the national community’s resources and keep them from being exploited by foreigners’ (Sundstrom 2013, 72). Nativism is centred on the ‘us first’ idea, it is rooted in the fear that strangers will undermine the traditional way of life (Crepaz et al. 2014, 943). Nativism is most often associated with anti-immigrant sentiments motivated by ethnic or racial bias (Bosniak 1994, 442-3).

Let us acknowledge the second above-mentioned aspect – traditionalism and idealisation of the pre-modern societal structure. Nativists prefer and force a ‘traditional version of American culture’ (Knoll 2013, 153). Nativism evinces typical conservative positions stressing the degressive development of humankind. Often, we can observe the idealisation of the ‘Golden Age’, the idealisation of peasantry and rurality, and the rejection of modernisation. Here we have to stress the paradox that nativism grew out of roots similar to that of communitarianism, both stressing the importance of *Gemeinschaft*. As Crepaz et al. (2014, 943) stressed: "What nativism and civicness both have in common is an emphasis on community: nativists see their own culture and ways of life threatened by foreigners, while others argue that a decline in civic behaviour will undermine the very foundations and working of democracy".

¹⁵ Catholicism was depicted as a false religion and danger to the United States. ‘From 1820 onward, the notion of Americans as genealogical descendants of Englishmen also gained in currency’ (Kaufmann 1999, 446).

If we analyse the contemporary debate about nativism through the lenses of philosophy, we can find an important overlap of this ‘nostalgic’ concept with a selected environmental stream, especially deep ecology and ecopolitics (Mathews 1999, 253–5). Namely, in many aspects, the nativist stance rooted in deep ecology shares the criticism against the (post)modern society. To distinguish the ‘reactionary’ political nativists and the ecopolitical nativist, I use the term ‘eco-nativists’ for the latter. Regarding urbanisation, eco-nativism stresses the negative consequences of rapid urbanisation and industrialised agriculture. Against this development, eco-nativists present the ‘ideal of the native self’ related to small rural or semi-rural sustainable communities. Furthermore, eco-nativists stress the necessity of spatial identity related to geographically small units, the necessity to belong to a place, ‘to have one’s identity shaped by the place to which one belongs’ (Mathews 1999, 245). The idealised ‘home’ presenting the small community should develop an eco-nativist self-identity (Storey 2012, 11) rooted in the care and maintenance of nature.

Both types of nativism negate the modernity related to the creation of open society (Bergson 1936; Popper 2011) in a political but also broader societal and cultural sense. As one of the inherent characteristics of an open society is the opening and removing the borders, nativists defend the juxtaposition and promote the ‘ideal’ of a closed society. Next to open borders, mobility is also considered a negative sign of modernity and is attacked. The nativists especially deny ‘immigration’, while the eco-nativists deny mobility, especially tourism, entirely (Mathews 1999, 247). Nevertheless, both types of nativists negatively regard ‘extensive’ mobility and the blending of (groups of) people with different identities. In their opinion, such ‘openness’ undermines the ‘state of indigeneity’. In this sense the nativists are strongly interconnected with the theories of ‘rise and fall’ (Kennedy 1987) or theoretical works about the collapse of states or civilisations, more precisely with those who stress the amalgamation of societies as one of the more important or even dominant reasons.¹⁶

¹⁶ Let us quote from Mathews (1999) who belongs to the eco-nativist authors, but paradoxically shares important positions with the xenophobic political nativists: "Being native is an existential condition which imperial civilisations such as Rome, but even more particularly those of Europe in the modern era, tend to render obsolete ... The state of indigeneity becomes more and more attenuated amidst the flux of peoples and cultures and economies that imperial regimes, particularly those of modernity, entrain" (Mathews 1999, 244).

Indeed, eco-nativists propose the voluntary limitation of mobility accentuating that the new communication technologies create the 'awareness of a larger frame' and prevent the ecological nativists from 'narrow-minded parochialism, xenophobia, or exclusionary thinking' (Mathews 1999, 267). In contrast, the 'traditional' nativists promote (neo)parochial political culture as the ideal. Their negative perception of (post)modernity creates a vital potential for revitalisation programmes and activities with clearly reactionary contents. Katerberg (1995, 501) labels the repeated waves of nativism as 'crusades' attempting to 'reassert what are held to be traditional customs, values, and practices'. As an important stimulus for such waves the author observes the fear that "heterogeneity would destroy their ability to perpetuate their values, traditions, institutions, and laws" (Katerberg 1995: 508).

Reflecting the North-American development, the first and by far the most important and verbalized expression of nativism was a broad fear that the large mid-century (18 century – quoted by L.C.) influx of Germans would not be assimilated into the dominant English racial culture, and that Pennsylvania therefore might become eventually a German colony. The fear of Germanisation was even strengthened with the obsession "that Germans would convert to Catholicism and then unite with French against the English" (Friedman 1967, 411-2). Another wave came in the 1820s and beyond (the already mentioned 'Jacksonians' (Kaufmann 1999, 455/) negatively reflecting the 'Catholic' population of the United States. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the 'defenders of the Anglo-Saxon roots of Canada and the United States feared that immigrants of inferior racial stock, from southern and eastern Europe, would dilute the quality of American and Canadian blood, corrupt society, and threaten democratic order' (Katerberg 1995, 506).

As we can observe, the 'aliens' change during this time, but the main characteristics of North American nativism were protected. The "aliens' should generally represent two kinds of threats. 'Immigration usually is said to represent two kinds of threats to this country (the United States – quoted by author). First, there is a threat posed by the identity of the immigrants ... Second, immigration is said to cost too much – economically, environmentally and socially" (Bosniak 1994, 440). In this sense, also theoretical works on nativism differ – while some authors stress the economic competition (Friedman 1967: 410; Simcox 1997; Druxes and Simpson 2016); the other group prioritise the cultural dimension. For example, Kaufmann (1999, 437-8) has doubts about the economic reasons for nativism stressing that the "outbreaks of nativism (the 1920s, for example) have tended not to correlate with poor economic times". Similarly, Katerberg

(1995) discusses the search for identity and cultural loyalty as the primary motivation of nativists.

The scholars often stress ‘exceptionalism’ as an important component for this concept. America was described by the Puritans as ‘new Canaan, or the promised land’ (Kaufmann 1999, 441). Among others, millenarian movements and churches used the term ‘New Jerusalem’. After the 1840s the belief that WASP-settlers were destined to expand across all of North America created the platform for the so-called manifest destiny. An important part of this exceptionalism was the ‘global mission’ the U.S. often stressed, including the role of leading soft power. As recent analysis of the Trumpian period of nativism has stressed, this role was abandoned. Furthermore, the global expansion of English created a situation where ‘aliens’ speak English along with their native languages, while Americans, living in the ‘American glasshouse’, do not learn foreign languages (Krastev and Holmes 2020, 184–6).

Nativist actors stress the necessity to promote the interests of native inhabitants and tend to prefer social chauvinism practices, economic protectionism, and even autarky, successfully securitizing the migration issue and developing the historical narratives based on national populism, traditionalism, anti-modernity, and anti-liberalism. "The nativist component of authoritarian populism is sharply at odds with cosmopolitan values ... The concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’ suggests that all humans live in a single global community – the antithesis of authoritarian nationalism" (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 78–9).

Among the typical strategies, signs, and terms of the nativist narrative belong xenophobia and moral disqualification of “the other,” cultural and other types of racism, stigmatization of minorities, idealization of rurality and peasant life, idealization of the ‘Golden Age’ and rejection of modernity, emphasis on the common sense and support of majoritarian democracy tools, above all plebiscites, the concept of naturalness, emphasis on patriotism and ‘correct’ Western values and ‘Christian Europe’ (Cabada 2021a, 287-9; Friedman 1967, 408-9; Knoll 2013, 153; Simcox 1997, 30; Sundstrom 2013, 80).

To summarise, nativism might be understood as a social phenomenon and political program as well as a concept. Nativism could be understood from very different perspectives – for example philosophy or linguistics could reflect it in a ‘neutral’ manner, while social sciences mostly stress the negative influence of nativism as a political strategy on democratic development. For

my research, the most important question is how far – and if – the concept of nativism might be applied in a different environment than North America. As presented, the (North) American nativism was born in a very specific situation and also (some of) its characteristics are unique. Nevertheless, I am convinced that many of these characteristics might be applied as general features observable in other societies including the Central European nations.

Regarding the important formative component of national populism – authoritarianism – the scholarly debate about this term and concept, as well as about the related terms and classification of political regimes, goes far beyond the limited scope of this chapter. We can observe a striking nexus between populism and anti-liberal or anti-democratic positions, both in the rhetoric and political practice. The analyses of the ‘democratic backsliding’ or hybridization of the Western or ‘new’ democracies as a rule point out the correlation between the (national/right-wing) populism and authoritarianism (Ágh 2019; Liebhart 2020; Procházka and Cabada 2020). Reflecting the performance of Hungarian leader V. Orbán, Norris and Inglehart (2019, 14) note that "behind the populist façade, a darker and more disturbing set of authoritarian values can be identified."

Norris and Inglehart (2019, 8) present the concept of ‘authoritarian populism’ that "favors policies where the state actively intervenes to restrict non-traditional lifestyles It is the triumph of fear over hope. " Lorenz and Anders (2021, 3) also stress that the "dismantling of counter-majoritarian institutions is frequently accompanied by a contestation of liberal social and cultural norms, i.e. the rejection of pluralism and an increasing mobilization along the social-cultural axis of political contestation."

Repeatedly, we can observe here emotional politics as a distinctive frame of (national) populism that "creates such issues as migration, security, national culture and welfare, in the language of emotions (fear, anger, and hate)" (Šadl 2021, 387). As the author concludes: "Emotivism reduces the complicated policy issues on the binary ‘great’ – ‘horrible’". Furthermore, emotions are not negotiable, as far as they contain a prominently irrational component. In the case of CE, such an irrational background for emotivism growing out of negative sentiments might be perfectly demonstrated on the migration issue: "People living in ultra-conservative countries that have strong national populists but low immigration often look at what is happening in the West with horror and alarm" (Eatwell and Goodwill 2018, 141).

Anti-modern and nativist legacies in Central Europe

Since the beginning of the democratic transition in ECE, scholars have been discussing the question of the specific political culture of the nations in this region. One of the main issues discussed is the limited, partial, unfinished and/or deformed modernisation in comparison with the European West. Sztompka (1993) talked about the ‘fake modernity’ in Eastern Europe after WWII, Bernik (1997) about the ‘submodern society’, both scholars stressing the top-down character of such ‘modernity’ unrooted in civil society.

After the fall of Communism, the ‘grand narrative’ of unfinished modernity and an anti-liberal notion was challenged by a new narrative of liberal democracy. Anyway, as the ‘alternative’ or ‘parallel’ model in only partially or defectively modernised societies, the traditional anti-modern narratives were developed too. The civil society in ECE often survived the Communist period in the form of a rather ‘bad civil society’ or uncivil society. In times of crisis such an uncivil society becomes a strong supportive vehicle for the populist politicians stressing the ‘glorious past’, ‘national interest’, ‘normality’ or ‘the right and duty to oppose the political correctness of Euro-elites’. As Corbea-Hoisie (2013) stresses, the interconnection of different anti-Communist movements and pre-Communist anti-liberal and anti-modern narratives might be observed in ECE. He is talking about the ‘camouflaged continuity’ of these movements after the transition.

The issue of development and modernity in the formation and identity of different European nations is raised by many scholars and observers. Since the Enlightenment period, two different ideal types – the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ – as the European macro-regions are presented based on different cultural patterns. Between these two macro-units the ‘in-between’ area is often situated, namely Central Europe playing the role of the ‘Western periphery’ or the transitive region between the West and East. For example, Hofmannsthal labelled the Central European population and the citizens of the Habsburg monarchy ‘semi-European and semi-Asian nations’ (Kozuchowski 2013, 86). At the end of the 19th century, Hope (1894) took a similar position when introducing the concept of Ruritania: a German-speaking, Catholic land in Central Europe, an absolute monarchy driven by deep social conflicts where the most important tension was between the (almost) western urban elites and the rural ethnics settled as the (semi)peripheries. Similarly, Gellner (1998, 2008) places the Habsburg monarchy at the

epicentre of the decisive modernisation conflict between the cosmopolitan liberals ('the Viennese') and the representatives of 'post-feudal obscurantism and authoritarianism'.

I assume that this phenomenon of a 'clash of cultures' is still present in Central Europe, or – in other words – that the totalitarian period as well as three decades of democracy building did not surmount or erase the anti-liberal political culture rooted in nativism and (ultra)conservatism. Despite the revolutionary rhetoric, the Communist regimes were often rooted in conservative postures, especially regarding the issues related to postmodern values (one example is the very restrictive policies regarding the LGBT communities and/or induced abortion in many states of the Soviet bloc). Also, nationalism was very strong in Eastern Europe, based on the violent homogenisation of local populations during and immediately after WWII, as well as the almost impermeable borders and lack of contact with the representatives of other ethnicities, nations or cultures. Such 'mental introversion' became even stronger with the demolition of liberal streams and mass emigration from the region. As depicted by Kitschelt (2003) in his typology of Communist regimes, Central European Communism also did not constitute the modernisation factor, or if so, only partly.

In 1989, a juncture came with the fall of the Communist regimes and the beginning of the democratic transition. EU-membership as the second juncture presents the symbolic end of the 'accommodative' period when the new democracies in ECE underwent important changes in economic, political and institutional sectors. Nevertheless, these changes also restored the internal divisions in the societies – usually we label the two ideal typical societal groups as 'winners' and 'losers'.¹⁷ Specifically, "the boundaries between the rural and urban have remained porous in Eastern Europe, as they were under socialism" (Buzalka 2008, 760). The reason is the massive influx of rural populations to the cities after WWII that preserved the 'rural' narratives, morality, imagery and ideology that might be more or less equated with Hope's or Gellner's concept of Ruritania. With the exception of Czechia, such a 'rural' narrative is also strongly interconnected with religiosity (Buzalka 2008, 762–8).

I assume that the anti-modernists, facing new challenges in the form of the postmodern European community and globalisation, were relatively passive during the 1990s, suppressed

¹⁷ For example, Ther (2014, 20) presents the dichotomy rich cities vs. poor countryside, while Ágh (2020) speaks about the well-developed 'European' cities and backward countryside.

by the new (neo-)liberal political actors pragmatically bringing their nations into the EU. Nevertheless, in the beginning of the 2000s we already saw the anti-European streams in ECE nations, often also using anti-modern and nativist rhetoric. Usually, these actors were relatively weak and positioned outside the political mainstream, but some of the mainstream parties capitalised on such a narrative (Czech Civic Democratic Party /ODS/ under the leadership of V. Klaus might be a good example). Some of these actors achieved success in the second-order elections (League of Polish families in 2004 EP-elections), and some of them were invited into the governments.

The wave of the so-called earthquake elections at the turn of the 2000s and 2010s changed the situation. Many newcomer parties presented the national populist rhetoric, and also some of the established mainstream parties developed the nativist segment in their policies. If we analyse the important social cleavages related to the above-mentioned segmentation of societies into the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ camps, at least three important cleavages should be mentioned, playing important and even decisive roles in the polarisation of these societies.

Table 1: Structuring cleavages in CEE democracies

support of post-national political institutions (for example, EU)	opposition to post-national political institutions (for example, EU)
free (global) market allocation	economic redistribution or protectionism
liberal-cosmopolitan values and recognition of cultural diversity (secularism)	authoritarian conformism, social cohesion and cultural homogeneity (including clericalism)

Source: Rensmann, 2012: 77.

All these cleavages are directly related to the nativist question. While the proponents of the stances presented in the first column might be understood as ‘cosmopolitan liberals’, the defenders of positions described in the second column tend to national or even nativist postures. Rensmann (2012) suggests labelling them as ‘counter-cosmopolitan’. In his opinion, this term better describes the basic position of anti-modernist societal groups in Central Europe and also opens the possibility of reflecting the nativist tendencies outside of a concrete ethnic/national environment. As he stresses, both the ‘nativism and counter-cosmopolitanism are generally non-inclusive orientation’, but there exist some differences. While nativism is "limited to

territorial substrates, counter-cosmopolitanism 'can also be grounded in religious ... or broader cultural references" (Rensmann 2012, 75).

Counter-cosmopolitanism refers to the general opposition to all social processes associated with existing globalization. Counter-cosmopolitanism is neither limited to welfare protectionism nor 'single-issues' such as anti-immigrant policy; rather, it combines opposition to: 1) socioeconomic globalization and the global capitalist market economy; 2) cosmopolitan cultural transformations, signified by increasing cultural diversity and hybridity ...; and 3) political transformations associated with global and post-national governance' (Rensmann 2012, 74). In fact, the author reflects counter-cosmopolitanism as the contemporary position, but one rooted in historical legacies with clear nativist features.

Nativist politicians are able to flexibly change the 'enemies' as well as combine them and squeeze them under one constructed label. So, the Hungarian Fidesz and Polish PiS share irreconcilable positions against the left, liberals, intellectuals, 'old networks', the EU and other transnational activities and structures including the general principle of globalisation (Fehr 2016, 25). One of the symbols of the nativist attack against open society equated with globalisation became the Hungaro-American philanthrope George Soros, attacked not only by the national conservative actors in Central Europe, but also by the declaratively left-oriented populist actors such as Slovakian Prime Minister R. Fico and Czech President M. Zeman (Matulík, 2019).

The nativists successfully addressed the societal groups that were – objectively or subjectively – negatively economically affected during the transformation process. Usually they presented the minor and 'radical' actor next to the mainstream populist party or parties that also stressed the 'protection of the poor' – let us stress the co-existence of PiS and LPR in the Polish government in 2005-2007 or the repeated cooperation of the Slovakian party Direction – Social Democrats (*Smer*) with the Slovak National Party, as well as the cooperation of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) with the NSi. Similarly, Liehbart (2020) also comments on the government cooperation of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and FPÖ. Often, the government and the mainstream party (partly) adopted the rhetoric and strategy of such minor actors, in some cases erasing them as the relevant party.

Nevertheless, what is more important for my analysis is the fact that during this period, the national populist actors reformulated and ‘completed’ their programme. These actors champion the politics of past and historical memory, including the (re)construction of historical narratives. The nativists formulated the ‘traditionalization’ narrative about the ‘glorious past that never was’, remembering the ‘Golden Age’ of national history. Let us mention here that the "pre-communist past of these countries often coincides with ultranationalist or fascist experiences that emphasized national unity, both spiritual and territorial" (Pirro 2014, 604). The interwar political regimes in Austria, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, the Baltic states or Romania developed in a strictly anti-liberal course and were not capable of developing more than a temporary ‘façade democracy’. Historical reflection of inter-war regimes in many Central European nations led to the ‘resurgence of neo-romantic, populist, anti-modern forces in the region ... In all these societies, movements and parties have emerged that romanticize the past and idealize authoritarian traditions’ (Tismaneanu 1998, 3; cf. Pirro 2014, 603). An important part of this construct is also the mythicisation of the pre-Communist state of affairs, associated with the exile – this narrative plays an important role in Slovenia (Šori 2015), Croatia and also Bulgaria and the Baltic states.

Analysing the most important legacies influencing this process of (re)construction of historical narratives, Pirro (2014) presents a set of pre-communist, communist and post-communist issues. In the first group he stresses the predominant role of irredentism and clericalism. The ‘combination of nativism and Christianity generally tends to reinforce the ‘us versus them’ contraposition’ (Pirro 2014, 606). Presenting the history of the American nativist, we mentioned the key role of anti-Catholicism. Let us stress that the construct of Judeo-Christian society presents one of the keystones of WASP-nativism (Cainkar 2007, 10), as well as an important part of the European narrative. Despite the partial changes regarding the North American development¹⁸, the development in the last decade shows that Huntington’s ‘American Creed’ that "is impregnated with Protestant rather than universally Christian morals" (Weidinger 2017, 60) still presents the main ideological frame for the activities of such movements as the Tea Party, combining traditionalism, localism and racism.

¹⁸ "While earlier waves of American nativism featured strong anti-Catholic sentiment, combining religious and racist (White nationalists) motives, the explicitly anti-Catholic ticket is not available to nativists anymore: Catholicism is now the biggest single congregation in the United States, and Catholics hold key positions within the Christian Right. However, the equation of ‘Protestant religious identity with being American’ is still championed by relevant actors" (Weidinger 2017, 56).

In Europe, a similar process of combining nativism with orthodox Catholicism might be observed, as Buzalka (2008) stressed analysing the LPR, and its activities within the government led by PiS after 2005. Doubtless, the nativist groups in contemporary Europe stress the 'Christian Europe' concept, while this group of 'defenders' of Christian roots of Europe often includes such divergent actors as the ultraconservative 'mystic' J. Kaczyński and the former Social Democrat M. Zeman that developed after 2013 as the President of Czechia into the new 'national-conservative' role of 'defender of Christian Europe'. As Weidinger (2017, 63-5) stresses while analysing the switch of the Austrian FPÖ from liberal-national towards 'belonging without believing' and 'Christendom above Christianity' positions, Zeman and similar politicians (mis)use the rhetoric of defending the Christian values to win the support of nativist-minded voter groups.

Naturally, churches often present themselves as important institutions defending 'traditions' and present important actors in politics. Nevertheless, in the case of Central Europe we can also observe another important tradition that is similar to the development in the U.S., namely the nationalisation of the church/es. It is more than clear that the Polish Catholic clergy strongly oppose the 'modernisation' of the contemporary Pope Francis; the same might be said about the tendencies in the Slovenian and Croatian Catholic clergy. We can similarly evaluate Czech Catholic officials, also supplemented by the existence of the national 'Hussite Church' with strong nativist tendencies (Cabada 2019, 126-30). The church/es are playing an important role also in political decisions regarding family issues (marriages of same sex persons), perception of the LGBT community members and gender issues in all of ECE. Nativist actors in Bulgaria (Ataka) propose the endorsement of Christianity as the state religion, both Fidesz and the Jobbik Party present Hungary as a country based on Christian moral principles, the Slovak National Party as well as LSNS promote the national, Christian and social principles (Pirro 2014, 612). National populists champion the politics of the past and historical memory, including the (re)construction of historical narratives. They formulated the 'traditionalization' narrative about the 'glorious past that never was' remembering the 'Golden Age' of national history. The establishment of this historical politics was made much easier than in the West by the "existence of large blank spots, which should rather be referred to as the 'minefields' of collective memory in many cases" (Miller 2012, 3). Hesová (2021, 135) talks about 'remembrance wars' launched by the national populists. Such wars have become the key component of public political, and media discourse. The national populist actors in CE promote the nation-centric narrative

constructing a glorious, betrayed past. "Recent activist usage of history has been accompanied by a series of novel, sometimes revisionist remembrance practices aimed most often at re-appropriation of the memories of World War II" (Hesová 2021, 136).

As regards the communist issues, Pirro (2014, 608) stresses two important legacies – social national economics and anti-Communism. As regards the first, he stresses the ‘buy national’ movements as well as domestic production and agriculture (Pirro 2014, 615). The contemporary COVID19-crisis even strengthened such tendencies including the calls for ‘food autarky’ declared by the Czech government and generally the tendencies towards economic protectionism. The process of constructing the new national bourgeoisie in Hungary is also well described (Ágh, 2019). Nevertheless, for nativist politicians the most important issue seems to be the media. In Hungary, the process of nationalising the media scene is almost completed. Immediately after the second round of presidential elections in Poland, the leader of PiS J. Kaczyński declared the next main goal to be the ‘repolonization’ of the media market, including the preparedness of the government to buy the media from foreign owners. Furthermore, we can also observe in Central Europe an important switch from ‘public’ towards ‘national’ media that could broadcast patriotic news. It’s not only in the case of the media that we observe among the Central European nativists hostility towards foreign capitals and anti-EU, anti-Western or anti-German¹⁹ sentiments (Rensmann 2012, 86).

As regards the anti-Communist legacy, it became one of the key instruments of nativist actors to delegitimise their political opponents. Usually, anti-Communism is combined with anti-intellectualism and anti-liberalism, i.e. the intellectuals and liberals are generally presented as leftist and the left is presented as post-Communist (issue of continuity) and even collaborating (Fehr 2016, 24–7). Kaczyński, Orbán, Janša as well as the leaders of Slovakian nativist parties invented de-Communisation as an important theme of conflict and framed this theme with the paradigm of a national conservative counter-revolutions Kaczyński and Orbán labelled their goal in 2016 at their meeting in Krynica – rooted in moral revolution, re-traditionalisation and anti-modernisation (Fehr 2016).

¹⁹ As Fehr painstakingly shows in the analysis of the 2012/13 Czech presidential campaign, the national conservative actors can also team up effectively with leftist populists or radicals in some countries – in Czechia with the Communist Party. Throughout the campaign, M. Zeman was billed as a ‘genuine Czech’ in a showdown with the ‘non-Czech’ K. Schwarzenberg. National conservatives, Fehr stresses, here play the same cards that the Communists relied on before the transition: "In both Poland and the Czech lands, hatred of the Germans was the Communists’ last hope" (Fehr 2016, 114).

As the most important post-Communist legacy, Pirro (2014, 608) depicts the minority issues as the "variant of nativism in post-communist countries". During and after WWII Central Europe underwent dramatic demographic changes and both absolute and relative ethnic homogenisation. The situation of closed or semi-closed borders even strengthened the 'ethnic isolation' by including the mistrust and fear of other nations. The fear caused by otherness remains an important feature in the region. In domestic politics we often observe anti-Romani rhetoric, as well as repeated anti-Semitic postures. While in the case of an anti-Communist legacy Austria cannot be included into the comparison, in the minority issues the FPÖ might be understood as a trend-setter for the Central European nativists, especially after 2015. Similar to the case of the FPÖ, the nativist actors in ECE developed the combination of anti-migrant and Islamophobic rhetoric stressing the need to protect the 'Christian character' of Europe (Weidinger 2017, 42).

An important additive in the nativist discourse became Christian allusions combined with the conviction that Central European nations historically saved the Christian West from the menace from the East (Turks, Russians) (Weidinger 2017, 41). Furthermore, the populist and nativist actors from ECE present themselves as the saviours of European 'Christian' / traditional values before the 'ultraliberal' and declining West ('Brussels'). V. Orbán and J. Kaczyński repeatedly stress that if the West wants to survive, it has to imitate the 'East', i.e. them, the Visegrad Group and in general the ECE populist nativists (Krastev and Holmes 2020, 59).

An important component of these "theatres of culture war" is the politics of morality, strongly interconnected with the previous two. The national populists reject the 'false' political correctness as an alien concept brought from the West, justified with the preference of (peasant) common sense, as well as the promotion of minority rights. Specifically, they victimize minorities as actors that diminish the stability and internal coherence of the (national) societies. Along with religious and national minorities, the nativist actors also assault other minorities, typically the LGBT community and women, often using the strategy of moral disqualification. As Šori (2015) demonstrated, the nativist and (ultra)conservative arguments are usually mixed. The LGBT community is accused of diminishing the normality and negatively contributing to the demographic decline in Europe that immediately provokes the next negative issue – immigration. As regards the 'female issue', nativists often stress the 'natural' role of woman as

mother and criticize the (post)modern individualism that leads to the abandonment of this 'natural' role.

In national populists' view, the culture war has to successfully end with the creation of a new political regime. PiS and J. Kaczyński present the project of the new populist and anti-pluralist system – the so-called 'Fourth Republic'. The role of the state "was to be substantially strengthened overall. Crucial parts in this were to play by Polish nationalism, a thoroughgoing decommunization, moral renewal driven by Polish Catholicism and a new union between the people and the political elite" (Havlík and Hloušek 2021, 118). Similarly, since 2009 the Slovene national populist Janez Janša has been developing the idea of the 'Second Republic' as the only alternative to the 'Socialist Slovenia' stressing the necessity of a valuable change in the country (Janša 2014).

Conclusion

As our analysis shows, in the last decade we have observed a dynamic development in ECE. Firstly, newcomer parties and actors have arisen with nativist features, usually taking a more radical approach than the 'historical' parties from the period before the electoral earthquakes. Examples of such parties are both parties established by the Czech nationalist T. Okamura, the extreme and clerofascist party of M. Kotleba (ĽSNS) in Slovakia or the Polish party KORWiN. In some cases we have observed the programmatic transformation from (ultra)conservative positions towards a combination of populist and nativist stances (NSi).

Nevertheless, as a more alarming trend we are observing the 'mainstreamisation' of nativism in ECE. Here, the Hungarian Fidesz and Polish PiS are the clear trend-setters not only in the region, but also in the EU. The Austrian case and the presence and role of the FPÖ in the government also demonstrates these trends. At the time of finishing this chapter, all polls before the parliamentary elections suggest that Slovakia, where R. Fico has completed the turn from left-wing populism to nativist-rooted anti-liberalism, will join the trend. As Mudde (2014) emphasises, in situations where the mainstream political parties adopt extreme right themes including nativist attitudes, fewer opportunities are given to the small 'single-issue' radical parties. In this sense V. Orbán and J. Kaczyński have monopolised the nativist camp in their countries, utilising the salient counter-cosmopolitan preferences (Rensmann 2012, 64–5).

It's not only in Central Europe that we can observe the negative consequences of poly-crisis and growing disillusionment in the last decade. Such development seems to be similar to the notion of anti-modernity in the second half of the 19th century that grew primarily out of disillusionment with Europe's industrial revolution. Nowadays, we observe similar processes regarding the globalisation, negative consequences of neoliberal reforms and the transition toward an information society (Industry 4.0 etc.). In such a poly-crisis the return of traditionalism, anti-modern and anti-liberal narratives is logical despite the question of whether we face and observe the new anti-modern revolution or a new version of traditional conservative (counter-)revolutions. We are definitely witnessing the 'return' of traditionalism in Central Europe with regional aspects but also national 'specifics' – in Czechia and Slovakia we repeatedly observe a 'coalition' of (former) Communists and pan-Slavic conservative streams (geopolitically oriented on Russia and partly also China, cf. Waisová 2020); in Hungary and Poland the situation is different regarding the strong actors stressing the important role of history, Christianity/Catholicism and also presenting specific reflections of the interwar period. Nevertheless, a common feature of Central European 'traditionalist' belief is the criticism of the 'ultraliberal' West Europe/EU presented as overall disillusionment with European values – again the typical manifestation of nativism.

This brings us back to the Ruritania concept and to the conflict between two different cultures and societal groups in this region. In my opinion, there exists in ECE a tendency to accept only the 'technical' part of modernisation (industrialisation, welfare), but not the 'ideological' part (liberal democracy). In Ágh's (2019) terminology, the Europeanisation was successful regarding the creation of formal institutions, but failed in its socialisation part. Similarly, Krastev and Holmes (2020) reason that the imitation failed because of the absence of genuine liberal democrats both in the political elite and societies of ECE. Furthermore, the assertive anti-liberal or illiberal actors in the region enforce the turn in the process – the West has to imitate the ECE nativists, if it wants to survive.

Nativists, labelling themselves patriots, are balancing between nationalism and xenophobia using social chauvinistic rhetoric. They create a world in which it is presumed that 'compatriots take priority' (Bosniak 1994: 445), and this was also fully proven during the contemporary pandemic. Furthermore, the ECE nativists, often very successful in the domestic political arena, continually strengthen and radicalise their rhetoric and political praxis. This might also be

documented in one of the newest examples of such nativist rhetoric, namely the speech of V. Orbán on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Treaty. The analysis of this document would require a separate article, but to summarise the main ideas, Orbán described the Hungarian nation as the steppe tribe that created a Christian state in the Carpathian basin. This state was strong and independent, but under permanent danger from both the East and West. Trianon is presented as the betrayal of the West and an attempt to destroy the Hungarian nation. In his opinion, in 1918 "the thousand-year-old historical Hungary was stabbed in the back by the conspiracies in Budapest" – such rhetoric commemorates the radical ultraconservative and nativist position of German generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff after WWI. Repeatedly, Orbán stresses the Hungarian nation as the manifestation of ‘blood and land’ (Orbán 2020).

In my opinion, the speech from Sátoraljaújhely presents the peak of nativism in Central Europe so far. What is even more embarrassing is the “Trianon industry” formed after 2010, presenting Trianon "as the metaphor to express the discontinuity of the ‘natural’ trajectory of modern Hungary’s history" (Gyáni 2012, 102-3) and interconnecting the academically marginalized historians and the official political discourse and institutions reached a new peak with the direct inclusion of the Prime Minister. Orbán’s speech also confirms what Hesová (2021, 141) recognizes about national populists, i.e. that they "frame their policies as restorative revolutions in which they reject the liberal hegemony." They present liberalism as ‘hegemonic’ and ‘repressive’.

Orbán and other nativists seek to build a transnational network of nativist actors within the EU. Very ambitious project unifying the nativist and anti-liberal (formally) Christian streams in Europe is the *Declaration on the future of Europe*, presented at the beginning of July 2021. Among the 16 politicians that signed the document, we can find the name J. Kaczyński in the first place, V. Orbán in the fourth. Along with M. Salvini and M. Le Pen, the representatives of several smaller ECE parties also signed the document. The Declaration is the essence of the cultural counter-revolution and fight for ‘Christian’ Europe. The liberal ideological framework of the integration and all efforts for the ‘European’ approach are depicted as a disruption of the principal of the coexistence. The EU becomes more and more the tool of radical forces trying to achieve the cultural and religious transformation of Europe, aimed at the creation of the European supstate and the destruction of European traditions and a remodification of basic social institutions and moral principles – so says the Declaration. As the main author of the

document J. Kaczyński is seen, who has to host also the programmatic conference of the like-minded parties in autumn, 2021. Indeed, in the argumentation and rhetoric, the decisive influence of V. Orbán might be recognized.

Nativism and radical right-wing populism are not limited to ECE, but above all the Polish and Hungarian examples make this region kind of a trend-setter. Nevertheless, these parties ‘demonstrate some similarities across Europe, displaying a combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism’ (Pirro 2014, 601). They focus on "sources of identity such as the ethnic community, they are anti-establishment and thus anti-corruption by definition and they champion anti-Western orientations" (Pirro 2014, 606).

My first research question asked whether the contemporary nativism in Central Europe grows from visible anti-liberal legacies. As our analysis of the general development of Central European nativist actors demonstrated we can reflect on on important legacies related to the pre-Communist parochial political culture, as well as the legacies developed within the national-accommodative types of Communist regimes. Naturally, each case study also presents a specific set of ‘domestic’ characteristics; still, we can distinguish some general regional specifics – especially salient specific ideological cleavages and political preferences. ‘Shaped by specific post-communist legacies, the conflict axes that these cleavages generate on the demand side can be distinguished from Western European contexts. Those legacies engender a significant counter-cosmopolitan segment of the electorate that opposes economic market liberalism, cosmopolitan cultural diversity, and post-national European political integration’ (Rensmann 2012, 68). The most important negative legacies that might be detected are "communist-authoritarian and ethnically exclusive societies ... authoritarian conformism, strong support of social cohesion, and ethnic exclusivism" (Rensmann 2012, 73).

As regards the second research question, we also demonstrated how the nativist agenda became an important part of the Central European mainstream parties’ agenda. In some cases, the mainstream party took over the strategy and ideology of smaller nativist parties (PiS; Fidesz, Austrian People’s Party), in other cases a new mainstream party was established including the nativist background (Czech ANO 2011), and we can also observe the combination of both scenarios (Slovakian *Smer*). Generally, we can speak about the anti-modern and counter-cosmopolitan wave, inset into the all-European and even global nativist revolt.

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Simona Kukovič*

POPULISM ON THE RISE: THE INTRIGUING CASE OF SLOVENIA

Introduction: What is populism?²⁰

If we were to look for one concept that has come to the fore in recent decades and has seen its heyday in academic circles and discourses on the political situation, it would certainly be populism. With the election of Donald Trump as the U. S. President in 2016 and subsequent impact it had on the Republican Party, the Brexit, and a number of anti-establishment leaders and political parties in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, this concept has moved from academia to public discourse. Populism seems to have become a central concept for anyone interested in politics. Tens of thousands of academic works and millions of newspaper articles, blogs, and posts on social media (Boros et al. 2020) in the last decade only further support this claim.

Even though populism got a breath of fresh air during and after the Great Depression and especially after the three shocking events in the three oldest democracies, we must realize that populism is nothing new; it has accompanied democratic politics for a long time, and its activity and success have experienced ups and downs. Before the mid-1950s, the term was associated with two phenomena: the Russian *Narodniks*, who assumed that revolution comes from the people, and the rural politics of the Populist Party in the U. S. Midwest (Deiwiks 2009; Gidron and Bonikowski 2014; Mendilow 2021). Despite promising starting points about the origins of populism, the definition of populism has changed, fragmented, and coalesced into a hodgepodge of different concepts throughout the history, particularly due to the time and the

* Simona Kukovič, PhD, is Associate Professor at the School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica and at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Contact: simona.kukovic@fuds.si

²⁰ The basis of this chapter was originally prepared for multi-author book entitled *The Rise of Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, published by Edward Elgar Publishing. See sources Kukovič and Just (2022) and Kukovič (2022) in the references.

political and social context in which populism manifested itself at the time (Mendilow 2021, 6–9).

Moreover, populism is difficult to define even among academics (see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). The variety of definitions offered reflects the disciplines of scholars from political science, sociology, cultural studies, political psychology, communication and media studies, economics, and, more recently, business and leadership studies, as well as the attributes on which they focus (communication strategy, style, form of discourse, ideology, political strategy). The latter also explains why the content analysis of published scholarly articles has failed to classify the concept of populism into some common and generally accepted categories. Nevertheless, scholars have emerged (e.g., Jensen 2011; Moffit and Tormey 2014) who felt that some kind of common use of the term populism would be necessary for academic purposes. This attempt was rejected by scholars because, in their view, such a definition would assume that populism is a single phenomenon, which would reduce complexity, could not explain mass-based parties, and would not account for the dynamics of particular environments. Moreover, populism cannot be isolated from the circumstances in which it emerged. It must therefore be viewed in terms of waves that are geographically and temporally contingent (Houven 2011).

Years later, there is still an academic debate about how to categorize the concept: Is it an ideology, a style, a discourse, or a strategy? Throughout all these debates, however, scholars agree that populism has two basic tenets. First, it must claim to speak on behalf of ordinary people, and second, these ordinary people must stand in opposition to an elite establishment that prevents them from realizing their policy preferences. Moreover, people are ‘pure and good’ while the elites are portrayed as ‘evil and corrupt’. These two core principles are combined in different ways by different populist leaders, parties, and movements. In any case, populism is found on both wings of the political continuum, the right wing, and the left wing. While the cases of populism on the right have been more intensively covered by academic research and publications so far, there are also some cases of left-wing populism, mainly associated with the left-wing political parties in South America. In general, left-wing populists’ ideas about ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ focus on socioeconomic grievances, while right-wing populists’ ideas about these groups generally focus on sociocultural issues such as immigration. It should be noted, however, that it is sometimes difficult to categorize left- or right-wing populism, not only because there are parties that cannot be classified along traditional political divides, but also because some political parties espouse political programs that are close to the

ideology of the opposite pole of the political spectrum. Despite the fact that so called centrist populism has not been studied so frequently in general, there are several studies focusing on this phenomenon in the Central and Eastern Europe as many political parties and movements in the region avoid classical left-right divide (e.g., Havlík and Voda 2018; Pop-Echles 2010; Učeň et al. 2005).

Populism refers to a particular pattern of anti-establishment ideas, styles, or strategies employed to gain or maintain power. As such, it has neither negative nor positive connotations. We must emphasize, however, that populism has gotten a bad rap in recent years because it is often associated with authoritarianism and anti-immigrant ideas, which is particularly true of right-wing populists, even though these characteristics have more to do with the ideology of the radical right than with populism itself. Moreover, some authors (e.g., Bryant and Moffitt 2019) argue that populists are disruptive because they position themselves as outsiders who are radically different and distinct from the existing order and environment. From this perspective, populists often advocate for change in the status quo and can make the case for the need for urgent structural change. They often do this by spreading a sense of crisis, whether true or not, and presenting themselves as the solution.

There is considerable tension between populist forms of political mobilization, which tend to focus on the charisma and individual appeal of the leader, and the traditional understanding of representative democracy, which favours the role of political parties in representing the will of the public. The fact that populists often seek to change the status quo, ostensibly on behalf of the people, means that they can pose a threat to the democratic norms and social practices that many people value (Bryant and Moffitt 2019). Moreover, extensive analysis shows that many populist leaders use various tools to change the constitution or parts of it and make profound structural and institutional changes when they come to power. Landau (2018) finds that a number of populist leaders and parties have recently either replaced the existing constitution entirely²¹ or adopted far-reaching amendment packages.²² Moreover, he argues that all of these amendments within populism serve three core functions: a) the deconstruction of the existing political system, b) an ideological critique that promises to overcome flaws in the previous

²¹ For example, President Fujimori in Peru (1995), Chavez in Venezuela (1999), Correa in Ecuador (2008), Morales in Bolivia (2009), and Prime Minister Orbán and his Fidesz Party in Hungary (2011) (Landau 2018).

²² Among them, President Erdogan in Turkey (2007).

order, and c) the consolidation of power in the hands of populist leadership. To prevent these harmful actions, Landau (2018) suggests two avenues of inquiry. The first step is to stop the most enduring negative effects of populism by placing limits on forms of legal and structural change that hold on to power for long periods of time. The second step is to prevent populists from making antidemocratic changes and to respond to the political forces that empower them (Kukovič and Just 2022, 1-3).

Populisms in Central and Eastern Europe and in Slovenia

Populism and its consequences are a growing problem. Among the general public, it is seen as an ideology, a strategy, a discourse style of political mobilization, or a political practice based primarily on the antagonism between us, the ‘pure people’, represented by the populist leader, and them, the ‘corrupt elite’ (i.e., the political opponents), supported by the argument that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). In recent years, populist leaders have won elections in many Central and Eastern European countries, from Hungary to the Czech Republic, Poland, Austria, Slovenia, and others. It is undeniable that both populist parties and populist leaders have emerged in politics, and many of them have begun to successively win elections and/or establish themselves as major political forces in their respective political systems. We substantiate this with the findings of Boros et al (2020), who found that the assumption that populists are incapable of governing and would soon fail once they took over the government has been proven wrong. Although populists often pursue harmful and even dangerous policies, they usually remain popular in government and tend to be re-elected, especially when they govern without a coalition.

But why did Central and Eastern Europe become so popular region for populists? To find the reasons, we need to get a broader picture of this particularly turbulent region. One of the most important factors is undoubtedly the historical trauma of non-democratic regimes and the path dependency shared by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The second reason could be the social and economic situation, which worsened during and after the global economic crisis and led to growing insecurity in the labour market. The next trigger for growing populism could be the migrant crisis that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have been struggling with for several years. This was the perfect time to create strongly xenophobic, anti-EU and nationalist parties, which subsequently found strong popular support.

The traditional centre-right and centre-left parties suffered an unprecedented decline in support, while alternative political parties attracted increasing numbers of supporters and voters. This has led to a crisis of traditional political parties and institutions and a challenge to liberal democracy. Moreover, the influence of social media has increased enormously, as so-called charismatic leaders who have penetrated the political space through online tools have become much more popular than technocratic parties. It seems that the politics of attack, strong language, and confrontation have become more attractive than the politics of collaboration. Moreover, Boros and colleagues (2020, 6) argue that emotions have become more important than facts and that respect for the elite has been replaced by anti-elitism. Global coronavirus pandemic was also not helpful to improve the situation. The rapid spread of the virus caused severe illness among those infected and claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands. Social isolation and lockdown measures had a tremendous impact on individual and societal mental health, quality of life, and the economy, standard of living, and welfare. Trust in political parties in Central and Eastern European countries continued to decline.²³ All of this has led to populist leaders and parties becoming even more influential as people become desperate and look for pleasant motivational speeches as well as sympathetic policies. In this sense, populism is a mirror that spurs us to confront and respond to the weaknesses of liberal democracy (Panizza 2005; Kukovič and Just 2022, 3-4).

The tradition of political partisanship in Slovenia is not very long. Although the first political parties were formed at the end of the 19th century in two large blocs (Catholic and Liberal) and a smaller one (Socialist), after the end of the Second World War political parties were gradually banned and replaced by socio-political organizations, with the Union of Communists as the leading political force. Its monopoly on political associations was abolished when the (socialist) constitution was amended in 1989. Political associations were now legal and allowed again (Fink-Hafner 2001, 241; Haček et al. 2017, 3–4). Since the declaration of independence, Slovenia expressed both in its strategic development documents and at the highest political level its readiness and goal to become a full member of the European Union (EU). Soon after the country's independence, membership in the EU became one of Slovenia's most important goals and the leading Slovenian political parties were able to unite and work together towards this important political aim. Accession negotiations between Slovenia and the EU were

²³ See data from Standard Eurobarometer 91, 93, 95 and 98.1 (European Union 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022).

concluded in 2002 and the Treaty of Accession of Slovenia to the EU was signed in April 2003. Slovenia thus became part of the European family of nations on 1 May 2004.

Shortly after EU accession, regular parliamentary elections were held in October 2004, bringing with them significant political change as the 12-year rule of the centrists Liberal Democracy came to an end, foreshadowed by the retirement of long-time Prime Minister Janez Drnovšek to the post of President of the Republic in 2002 and the results of the elections at European Parliament a few months earlier, where Liberal Democracy suffered its first defeat in 12 years. For the first time ever, the winner of the elections was Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), which formed a center-right coalition led by new Prime Minister Janez Janša. The new center-right government faced three major challenges (Haček et al. 2017, 202–205), all three of which were closely linked to the EU. The first challenge was the introduction of the Common Currency. Slovenia adopted the Euro on 1 January 2007 and joined the eurozone as the first new Member State. The second challenge was joining the Schengen area on 22 December 2007, when Slovenia stopped carrying out border controls at its internal land and sea borders with EU member states. The third challenge appeared to be the most demanding, as Slovenia assumed the EU Council presidency and led the community that unites 27 member states and nearly half a billion people. Slovenia seized an extraordinary historic opportunity, as this was the first presidency of a Member State that joined the Union in the 2004 enlargement, and the first ever EU presidency of a former communist state.

However, despite successfully overcoming three demanding challenges, the next regular parliamentary elections in September 2008 brought another political reversal as the ruling center-right coalition suffered defeat. The reasons after a relatively successful and stable term in office are complex and largely the result of the deep socio-political division in Slovenian society, which has its origins in the political divisions of the early 20th century. The result of this political division is also a constant political, economic and social conflict between the so-called left-wing political forces, which are more closely linked to and supported by non-governmental organizations and the major media, and the mostly less influential right-wing political forces, which failed to seize the opportunity presented to them during the democratic transition period after the end of communism to make up for the deficit of the half century between the 1940s and the 1990s. This political divide remained largely stable and in equilibrium between the 1990s, when Slovenia gained its independence and went through the process of state- and nation-building, and the 2000s, when Slovenia joined the EU and the

Schengen area, adopted the Euro, and assumed the presidency of the Council of the EU. However, while the accession process to the EU brought some clear positive consequences (such as the possibility to receive EU funds and anti-corruption legislation), the negative consequences, in particular the lack of a next major political goal and the strong nostalgia towards the former non-democratic political and especially social system, allowed the slow rise of the populist agenda and populist politics, as large part of Slovenian political actors and institutions never really adopted a democratic political culture, but continued to tend towards an authoritarian political culture.

The chapter examines and analyses the growing influence of party-based populism in recent Slovenian political history, in the period following Slovenia's accession to the European Union. We raise the issue of the continued relevance of political parties and their leaders in a populist political environment and discuss the questions a) whether populism poses a challenge to traditional forms of political action in the (still) fragile Slovenian democracy and b) whether populism might contribute to a (partial) reversal of democratic processes, similar to what has happened in some other countries in the Central and Eastern European region (Agh 2020, 23–26).

The painful years of global crisis and democratic regression

Almost immediately after the new left-wing government took power in November 2008, Slovenia was hit hard by the global economic crisis,²⁴ and it was easy for Slovenian public opinion and the opposition to see that the government was having great difficulty dealing with the crisis, as not only did it appear to be in a major economic crisis, but the economic crisis was also turning into a major political crisis, delivered by the inability of the then prime minister Borut Pahor to effectively steer the government out of the crisis. Instead, the government appeared to be weak, indecisive, ineffective and, above all, disunited, which contributed to the growing distrust of Slovenians towards politics in general and towards political parties in particular. This was clearly demonstrated in the second European Parliament elections in June 2009, where turnout was among the lowest in the EU, only 28% (European Parliament 2021).

²⁴ Slovenia was in fact second hardest hit EU member, losing almost 8% of GDP in 2009 and climbing to 2008 GDP per capita level back only in 2017 (The World Bank 2021).

Just eight months after the defeat in the national parliamentary elections, the now leading opposition party Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) clearly won the elections with three elected MPs European Parliament (MEP), followed by the then ruling left-wing party Social Democrats (SD) with two MPs.

The period of the European Parliament elections was already strongly marked by poor economic conditions, which continued and worsened in 2010 and 2011. The government prepared several economic reforms to revive the economy and generate economic growth again; the most important reforms were the reform of pensioners (Law on Pension and Disability Insurance) and the reform of the labour market (Law on Prevention of Illegal Work and Employment). The government failed to present and label the reforms as economically necessary and positive for the public, and consequently the reforms were hit hard by the trade unions and the political opposition, who demanded several corrections in each of the reforms and threatened referendums if the demanded corrections were not implemented. With neither side willing to bend, a triple referendum was held in June 2011 for the first time in recent Slovenian history. The referendum was initiated by the trade unions and opposition parties and was instrumental in bringing down the government three months later. The most important of the three referenda was the referendum on the Pension and Disability Insurance Act, which included pension reform. The government staked all its efforts and political clout on winning at least this referendum, only to fail utterly as all three laws were convincingly defeated (71 to 75% votes against with 41% turnout). The defeat only further fuelled the ongoing political crisis, and the government consequently failed to win the confidence vote in September 2011 in the National Assembly (Haček et al. 2017, 176).

The triple referendum defeat led to the first early general elections, which were held in December 2011. We also witnessed what was then a new political phenomenon, as several new political parties were formed in the sixty days leading up to the elections, two of which²⁵ played a crucial role in the elections and subsequent coalition formation. The early elections were surprisingly won by Positive Slovenia (PS), which managed to overtake the favored Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), but the leader of PS, the charismatic and populist Zoran Janković, did

²⁵ First one is Civil List of Gregor Virant, founded by Gregor Virant, former minister of public administration in right-wing government from 2004 to 2008; second is Positive Slovenia, founded by mayor of national capital city of Ljubljana, Zoran Janković, who was always presenting himself as non-partisan figure, but was also always strongly in favor of left-wing political parties.

not understand that in proportional representation he needed a governing coalition to be elected as Prime Minister. PS could not form a coalition, and after several political twists and turns, a new center-right coalition emerged, led by Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and Prime Minister for the second time, Janez Janša. But the coalition proved short-lived as three coalition partners, namely the Civic Alliance Gregor Virant (DLGV), Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS) and Slovenian People's party (SLS) left the governing coalition less than a year later, due to the political fallout from the report published by the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (CPC). The report accused Prime Minister Janša and opposition leader Janković of violating financial disclosure obligations, namely that both had systematically and repeatedly violated the law by failing to properly report their assets to the CPC. Janša rejected the resignation demands and the ruling coalition of two right-wing parties (SDS, New Slovenia-Christian democrats (NSi)) was left to govern with a handful of votes in the National Assembly.

On 27 February 2012, the majority of MPs in National Assembly supported the vote of no-confidence against Prime Minister Janša and at the same time also elected a new Prime Minister, Alenka Bratušek from PS; her election was supported by the center-left coalition (52 MPs) consisting of Positive Slovenia (PS), Social Democrats (SD), DLGV and DeSUS. There was great haste in putting together the new government as the National Assembly appointed the new government in just 22 days. The government had to act quickly in an extremely unstable period characterized by a multitude of political and economic affairs and scandals, resulting in particularly frequent changes of ministers, interpellations, a serious decline in the economy and a crisis in the banking sector. However, the government subsequently fell not because of such instabilities, but because of internal disagreements. Zoran Janković rather surprisingly resumed the leadership of the largest coalition party PS in April 2014, after having been forced to resign from the same position the year before due to the incriminating report of the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption. For this reason, tensions arose both within the party and within the ruling coalition, leading to the resignation of Alenka Bratušek as Prime Minister, her withdrawal from the party and the formation of her own party (Alliance of Alenka Bratušek), all of which led to second consecutive early parliamentary elections, held for the first time in independent Slovenia during the summer holidays, on 13 July 2014, with visible negative effects on voter turnout (52% compared to 66% in 2011).

Growing public distrust towards the democratic institutions

The main characteristic of public opinion is its instability; it changes frequently and often in short periods of time. The comparative data from Eurobarometer research presented in Table 1 focus on satisfaction with democracy as a social and political system in Slovenia and all other 27 EU member states in a period from 2004 to 2022. If we compare the results across years, some changes in satisfaction can be observed. In general, one of the most common observations is that in all new CEE democratic systems there is a high level of dissatisfaction with democracy itself, with more negative trends in the first period after EU accession and more positive trends in the most recent period. Similarly, Slovenia started with relatively satisfactory levels of public satisfaction with democracy in the period of EU accession (57% satisfaction with democracy in 2004), but this moderate satisfaction quickly turned into serious dissatisfaction in the period after the global economic and domestic crises (only 26 and 27% satisfaction in 2012 and 2014, respectively). The situation improved slightly with more stability in politics and the economy in the period from 2014 to 2022. The dissatisfaction may also be at least partly related to the results of the democratic transition and consolidation processes, rather than to democracy as a type of socio-political relations itself.²⁶ In this case, the dissatisfaction may also be expressed through the existing political participation mechanisms such as elections, referendums, political protests, etc. Norris's (1999, 67–72) research confirmed the positive correlation between disintegration processes of contemporary societies and the decline of public trust towards important state political institutions.

²⁶ This emphasis is supported by a number of public opinion polls. For instance, “Democracy in Slovenia” survey, carried out in March 2011 among 907 respondents across the country, asked whether democracy is the best possible form of governance and whether democracy in spite of its imperfections, is still better than other types of social-political relations. Respondents strongly agreed with both statements; on the scale from 0 to 4, where 0 represents “strongly disagree” and 4 “strongly agree”, first statement got estimation 3.49 and the second one 3.38 (School of Advanced Social Studies 2011).

Table 1: Satisfaction with democracy in the EU member states (total satisfied; in %)

	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
AUSTRIA	71	75	80	78	70	64	64	80	70	62
BELGIUM	70	68	66	56	57	63	69	72	61	63
BULGARIA	/	/	26	25	24	21	30	35	36	34
CROATIA	/	/	/	/	/	24	37	35	41	39
CYPRUS	63	63	61	54	33	24	37	41	58	40
CZECH REP.	45	58	51	45	30	47	53	60	66	60
DENMARK	91	93	94	92	90	86	91	91	95	89
ESTONIA	45	43	53	45	38	49	51	61	58	55
FINLAND	83	78	77	69	78	75	77	81	77	83
FRANCE	57	45	65	54	60	49	45	50	52	50
GERMANY	61	55	66	62	70	70	69	73	72	68
GREECE	68	55	63	31	11	19	21	26	43	34
HUNGARY	37	46	24	35	29	35	42	53	54	44
IRELAND	77	75	69	57	50	59	73	79	74	84
ITALY	46	53	40	47	27	30	33	42	48	52
LATVIA	45	41	43	32	42	47	52	59	59	61
LITHUANIA	34	23	24	17	21	30	42	35	51	45
LUXEMBURG	83	83	73	83	84	76	87	82	84	85
MALTA	48	48	53	45	49	62	64	71	52	70
NETHERLANDS	71	75	80	75	75	74	78	82	84	59
POLAND	30	38	48	54	48	59	57	64	57	47
PORTUGAL	39	30	36	29	25	25	52	64	64	68
ROMANIA	/	/	36	20	13	25	38	34	41	47
SLOVAKIA	25	25	35	36	29	22	43	45	46	31
SLOVENIA	57	54	48	38	26	27	36	41	41	48
SPAIN	64	71	77	53	32	22	39	40	51	50
SWEDEN	76	74	80	84	86	82	79	81	83	82
UNITED KINGDOM	63	60	62	59	60	65	64	63	68	/
<i>EU 25/27/28 AVERAGE</i>	58	57	57	51	47	50	53	57	58	56

*The question was: *On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in your country? Only answers to 'Very satisfied' and 'Fairly satisfied' are taken into account.* Sources: European Union (2004; 2006; 2008; 2010; 2012; 2014; 2016; 2018; 2020; 2022).

In general, opinion polls show that new democratic systems face a relatively high level of dissatisfaction with democracy and, consequently, with democratic institutions; moreover, we clearly see that satisfaction with democracy is a very unstable phenomenon. Slovenia is not very different from this general framework, rather the opposite, as on average more than half of the citizens are constantly dissatisfied with the democratic regime after 2008. We can clearly observe that the level of dissatisfaction increases significantly over the years, but especially after 2008 due to the growing impact of the global economic crisis and the feeling that politicians are not effectively managing the crisis. In 2013 and 2014, the level of dissatisfaction with democracy was at an all-time high of 87% (Public Opinion Research Centre 2014), which

gave a boost to populism and populist political parties and leaders, both among the newly formed and traditional political parties. The other important question is also how high the frustration tolerance can be and how much the ‘fragile’ post-socialist democratic political system can withstand before the high level of dissatisfaction turns into denial of the legitimacy of the democratic political system and its key institutions (Kukovič 2022).

Constant political crisis and the reign of instant populist parties

For the second year in a row, a newly formed political party won the early general elections, this time the Party of Miro Cerar (SMC), which was officially formed only 41 days before the election date. The SMC focused primarily on the personality of Miro Cerar, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Ljubljana and a long-time legal consultant to the National Assembly. The SMC framed its campaign as advocating the rule of law, higher ethical standards in politics, sustainable development, social responsibility, and human dignity, while the new party extensively exploited voter dissatisfaction with the existing traditional political establishment and its own demarcation from ‘dirty and corrupt politics’ while offering ‘new, clean politics’. Since the party was formed just weeks before the elections, it did not have a comprehensive political program and presented mainly populist ideas in the campaign, which were attractive to voters, but it was clear that their implementation in the parliamentary political process would be far-fetched. In addition, most SMC candidates were political unknowns and newcomers with almost zero political experience, resulting in an unprecedented campaign in which only two leading SMC MP candidates (out of 88) appeared in the mainstream media throughout the campaign.

Party of Miro Cerar, which in 2015 was renamed into the Modern Centre Party, won 36 mandates, and quite easily established new governing coalition, together with Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS; 10 MPs) and Social Democrats (SD; 6 MPs). Due to the high number of acquired MPs, SMC had superiority also inside the Government with nine ministers, and both coalition partners had seven ministers between themselves. But elections also brought first success to another new political party, namely extreme left-wing The Left (Levica), armed with many populist policies mainly in the social-economic area and using public nostalgia towards former Yugoslav socialist system.

Although the Miro Cerar government brought a higher degree of political and economic stability to the country and operated under more favorable economic conditions compared to previous governments, Slovenia remained largely static and with a high degree of political instability during that period. The government and authorities faced public distrust as the ruling coalition did little effectively to deal with the systemic problems of capture by influential lobby groups, a persistent trend from previous periods, despite the government's Modern Center Party (SMC) promises of 'different policies with higher ethical standards'. Distrust of the judiciary and anti-corruption efforts was also chronic, with insufficient progress to prosecute key individuals, for example. Financial dependencies and political capture continued to hamper civil society and the media. Internal divisions and a lack of political will left the center-left coalition unable to address the country's major problems, such as inefficient public health and irresponsible management of state assets (Lovec 2018, 2-3).

During the Cerar government's tenure, the recovery from the economic recession of 2008–2014 continued. The country's robust economic growth, which reached around 5% in 2017 and 2018, contributed to the reduction of the budget deficit and led to a sharp decline in unemployment. At the same time, however, the favourable short-term economic situation also reduced pressure on the Cerar government to push ahead with policy reforms. Although Slovenia has the largest long-term sustainability gap of all EU members, the announced comprehensive reform of the health care system failed to materialize. On pensions, the Cerar government finally agreed with social partners on the broad outlines of a pension reform to be adopted in 2020 but held back on controversial decisions. The tax reform finally adopted in summer 2016 turned out to be more modest than originally announced, and the minor changes announced by the finance minister for 2017 were only partially implemented. The promised privatization of Telekom Slovenia, the country's largest communications company, fell victim to political opposition within and outside the ruling coalition. The same happened with the promised privatization of NLB, the largest Slovenian bank (Haček et al. 2019).

Another destabilizing factor and fuel for populist rhetoric and politics was the European refugee crisis. Between October 2015 and March 2016, almost 480,000 migrants passed through Slovenian territory. This led to chaos, especially in the first few weeks, and gave the impression that the government was not in control of the situation. The center-right opposition used populist and increasingly negative attitudes towards migrants and the closure of borders, sparking fears that Slovenia would become a 'migrant hole', leading to humanitarian and security crises. In

February 2016, anti-immigrant protests backed by SDS emerged, questioning the government's ability to provide security for the population and suggesting the establishment of a national guard. To balance the pressure and prevent the escalation of political radicalism, the government responded by pushing for the closure of the Western Balkans route, stemming the influx of refugees, and helping to reintroduce border control. In October 2016, the government responded to opposition criticism by drafting further amendments to the Aliens Act that allow for the rejection of migrants already at border crossings, preventing critical situations like those of 2015 from recurring while undermining refugee protection (Lovec 2019, 2–3).

The quality of democracy continued to suffer from widespread corruption. While the Cerar government implemented the Anti-Corruption Action Plan adopted in January 2015 and the Corruption Prevention Commission managed to upgrade its monitoring web platform and launch its successor ERAR in July 2016, two developments raised doubts about the political elite's commitment to the fight against corruption. The first concerned the non-transparent management of a government project to build a second railway track between Divača and the port of Koper. The second concerned investments by Magna Steyr, a Canadian-Austrian company that received large subsidies and unconditional support from the government for a plan to build a new car paint shop near Maribor but failed to manage things transparently and fulfil its promise to bring several thousand new jobs to the region. The inexperience and arrogance of the ruling coalition also caused the conflict between the central government and local municipalities over the constitutionally guaranteed autonomy of the latter (Kukovič 2018, 185).

Cerar government term also marked the first time since fall of Berlin wall and democratization of CEE that Slovenia lost its leading place in the Freedom House's measurement 'Democracy Index'. This happened in 2016, when Slovenian score dropped substantially for the first time since early 2000s (to 2.00) and Slovenia was overtaken by improving Estonia (1.93). The trend, that was not only the result of the failure of Cerar government, but also of previous governments, also continued in 2017 and 2018, when Slovenian democracy score regressed further, and Slovenia was caught up by yet another Baltic country, this time Latvia (Freedom House 2018).

In March 2018, Prime Minister Cerar surprisingly resigned, citing increasing criticism from public sector unions and strong opposition to the government's high-profile project to build a

second railway track to the port of Koper, which led to further early parliamentary elections in June 2018, in which Modern Centre Party (SMC) and most other traditional center-left parties lost their seats due to the rise of another instant party, namely Marjan Šarec's party (LMŠ), led by a comedian who became mayor and came second in the 2017 presidential election, bringing even more populist rhetoric and an even higher level of ignorance of even the most basic political processes into the political process. Five relatively small center-left parties even refused to discuss the possibility of a governing coalition with the winner of the elections, Janez Janša's center-right party Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), which received twice as many votes as its closest competitor. In September 2018, the five center-left parties managed to form a minority government, tolerated by the now even stronger Left Party, which elected Marjan Šarec as its newest Prime Minister (Haček et al. 2019).

The leftist minority government, supported by the opposition populist party The Left, failed to govern even remotely efficiently, and was plagued by internal conflicts and disputes, often being blackmailed by The Left, leading to a loss of public support and a series of ministerial resignations until Prime Minister Šarec also decided to resign at the end of January 2020. Instead of holding fourth consecutive early parliamentary elections, four parties (two center-right parties, SDS and NSi, and two center-left parties, SMC and DeSUS) formed the third Janša government and tackled the global pandemic crisis, but soon faced intense pressure from opposition parties (the former Šarec coalition), mainstream media and civil society organizations, which called for new elections and accused Prime Minister Janša of populist policies under the guise of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both sides failed to work together and accused each other of undemocratic practices, populist policies, and populist rhetoric when Slovenia took over the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the second time in July 2021 (Kukovič 2022). Despite popular discontent with anti-Covid policies and restrictions, weekly protests organised by opposition parties and NGOs close to the Left Party, loss of support in the National Assembly and constant criticism from most mainstream media, the Janša government (now a minority) survived until the regular parliamentary elections in April 2022. Similar to before, the new elections brought new populist actors on the scene, this time anti-Covid populists and conspiracy theorists. Again, the newly formed populist party Freedom Movement, with the former CEO of the state-owned energy company Robert Golob as its candidate for prime minister, won the elections with a record number of MPs (41 out of 90), most of them again being politically completely unknown figures. Some conspiracy theory driven populist parties were less successful, failing to reach the parliamentary threshold with support of just

under 3%. The Freedom Movement formed a coalition with two surviving former opposition parties, namely the Social Democrats (8 MPs) and the Left Party (5 MPs), and adopted much of the latter's political programme.

Conclusion

In order to understand the character of contemporary Slovenian democracy, it is necessary to look back into recent political history. Two key factors can be identified as political constants that have determined this development and, to a large extent, also shaped Slovenian political culture. The first is ideological exclusivism as an expression of great differences in ideas, the second is collectivist corporatism, which, with its tendency towards unity, expressed not only resistance to political conflict but also resistance to differences and competition, because this could violate social harmony. From here comes the strong tendency to overcome divisions in the political space by forming large coalitions, which was the characteristic of the first decade of Slovenian independence. This practice changed after joining EU in 2004 into a more competitive and conflictual mode of politics, constituted by a distinction between authority and opposition. Accordingly, the various ways in which the possibilities of expressing and confronting opposing views and positions are narrowed are not conducive to the development of a parliamentary democracy. However, they are partly in line with prevailing tendencies to limit the possibilities of direct democracy and to extend the influence of ruling political parties to non-state actors such as the media and NGOs. Nor should the revival of populist rhetoric, rituals and ideology be overlooked, which coexist with declining sentiments towards the EU and its institutions, with both tendencies hindering the development of the liberal democratic features of a Slovenian democracy.

The political landscape in Slovenia is characterized by problems related to various forms of nepotism, clientelism and corruption, total public mistrust towards political institutions (especially towards political parties) and an insufficiently developed democratic culture. Public trust in political institutions (compared to the EU average)²⁷ plummeted after the global

²⁷ Public trust into major political institutions in winter 2020/21: National Government 19% (EU average 36%); National Parliament 15% (EU average 35%); Political Parties 11% (EU average 21%); Local Government 36% (EU average 55%); Public Administration 28% (EU average 49%); Army 62% and Police 51% (EU average 74% and 69%). See European Union (2021).

economic and domestic crises, leading to a non-existent trust in traditional political parties and the search for a political messiah. The solution to the problems has often been seen in the deconstruction of traditional political divides in the last decade, leading to the emergence of populist (at the national level) and non-partisan (at the local level) leaders and/or non-partisan (often populist) political parties, sometimes referred to as instant political parties, which inspired public confidence long enough to win large vote shares in subsequent national elections, only to fail and disappoint their voters soon after. Populism is slowly spreading to other, more traditional political parties, both on the (extreme) left and the (extreme) right, destroying more moderate and liberal centrist parties and making any form of political cooperation between the two sides difficult, if not impossible. Slovenian politics since joining EU has turned into a populist partocracy without any sense of democratic accountability to the electorate; therefore, one should not be surprised that Slovenia is no longer the best pupil in the democracy class of the former socialist countries of Central and Eastern European. If Slovenian politics does not change fundamentally in the next few years, which seems unlikely given the constant political conflicts, polarization, populism and voters' distrust of politics and political institutions, the democratic regression in Slovenia could continue for many years to come.

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Petra Kleindienst*

IS POPULISM A THREAT TO HUMAN DIGNITY?

Introduction

Both left- and right-wing populism are on the rise in the European Union and around the world as well. The growing anger over globalisation and its economic consequences held by many people, including a more critical stance on neoliberal economic policies, is frequently linked to the increased support for populist parties and populism generally (Donders 2020). Undoubtedly, populism is a political phenomenon that has received considerable attention in recent years. While dealing with populism, various conundrums, ambiguities, inconsistencies and simplifications often surface. Scientists, politicians, journalists and academics discuss its traits, the causes of its rise, and its effects on the functioning of contemporary political systems (Weyland 2001; Barr 2009; Jansen 2011; Müller 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2016; Mudde 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Babones 2018; Schmitter 2019; Donders 2020; Lavi 2022; Betz and Oswald 2022; Tomšič 2022).

The literature often tackles the discourse on what populism means for fundamental human rights and freedoms. Roth (2017), for example, implies that the global rise of populism is a global attack on human rights values. Müller (2016) argues that populists are always anti-pluralist. Many authors (for example, Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Müller 2016; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Donders 2020) highlight that populist movements and parties neglect the rule of law, reject immigration, criticise pluralism, the value of diversity and special minority rights; populism thereby substantially impacts democracy and human rights. Although the dominant literature pays considerable attention to the impacts of populism, it does not explicitly address the question of the impacts of the rise of populism for human dignity. While certain authors mention such dilemmas about human dignity in connection with populism (for example, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Gaonkar 2017; Babones 2018), no work

* Petra Kleindienst is lawyer and sociologist, Associated Professor at the School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica.

explicitly addresses this topic in a holistic manner to, on one hand, consider the true nature of human dignity and, on the other, simultaneously research the specific features of populism that are key to understanding human dignity in the context of populism. This article therefore focuses on the research question: What does the rise of populism mean for the concept of human dignity? Which qualities and aspects of human dignity does the phenomenon of populism bring to the fore and which outcomes does populism hold for the human dignity of an individual? Is populism a global threat to human dignity?

After the introductory chapter, the article presents the meaning of human dignity in the second chapter, concentrating on the distinction between traditional and contemporary paradigms of human dignity. Here, the article also refers to certain historical periods and authors who have contributed to the meaning of human dignity as it is known today. In the third chapter, the article describes the importance and placement of human dignity at the levels of the Council of Europe and the European Union and connects human dignity with some fundamental values of the European Union and democratic tendencies. In the fourth chapter, the article elucidates the phenomenon of populism, outlines its prevalent definitions and presents its positive and negative effects. In the process, the article suggests a distinction between hard populism and soft populism. In the fifth chapter, populism is connected with human dignity and both positive and negative aspects that populism brings to the human dignity concept are presented. Finally, in the sixth chapter, the article provides an answer to the research question and draws a final conclusion.

Human dignity

The aim of this chapter is to explore the traditional and contemporary paradigm of human dignity on the theoretical level while illustrating the importance of the individual human in the European Union context. This is accomplished by relying on the concept of dignity, itself made up of initial and realised dignity. In this respect, the chapter considers a few aspects of the human dignity concept that have been somewhat ignored, yet are essential for the individual and their functioning as well as for future research.

Traditional Paradigm of Human Dignity

The ‘traditional’ paradigm of human dignity has dominated throughout history and is primarily associated with the views of thinkers like Cicero, Leo the Great, Pico della Mirandola, and Immanuel Kant. Sensen (2011a) analysed the philosophy of these thinkers and found certain similarities among them. Sensen thus describes how, in the traditional paradigm, human beings differ from the rest of nature or creation by their possession of certain abilities (reason, freedom, autonomy), which are either given to humans by nature or by God. These abilities vary by author. Based on these abilities, human beings are guaranteed a special or exalted position in the universe (ibid.). In the sections below, we discuss how the notion of human dignity has changed over the course of several historical eras.

The Greeks used the terms ‘axia’ (lat. dignus) and ‘axioma’ (lat. dignitas), which were connected with value, merit (‘worth’, ‘desert’, ‘value’ – see Owens 1971; Lebech 2004; 2009; Echeñique 2012), that determined the extent to which one counted in society (Lebech 2004). The term ‘axia’ was also used by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he follows the principle of distributive justice. According to Aristotle, dignity must be earned because it does not exist by itself. Lebech (2004) notes that Aristotle does not convey the idea that all human beings, simply because they are members of the human species, possess the same ‘axia’. Instead, Lebech adds, human beings are not equal and do not enjoy equal status. The justice of existence in distribution is thus determined by their different ‘axia’ (ibid.). Kraynak (2008) explains that Aristotle viewed man as a rational being with a human soul, and therefore as occupying the top of the hierarchy of the conscious beings. Yet, Aristotle did not see human beings as unique absolute beings within the cosmos of unlimited value since the celestial bodies are more perfect than humans.

Siedentop (2014) states that in ancient times the centre of society was represented by the family, which was not only a civil but also a religious institution, headed by the ‘pater familias’ who held the role of family judge and priest. The family's greatest concern was to prevent its extinction and to conserve its worship – the family represented an instrument of immortality. Caring for one's fellow man was not considered a virtue and would probably not have then been understood in that way. The ancient citizen enjoyed a special honour, which according to Ober (n.d.) means that during classical antiquity dignity in most communities was based on privileges. Hence, according to Siedentop (2014), ancient thought was based on natural

inequality and hierarchical order. The exception was Athens following the introduction of Athenian democracy, where ‘civic dignity’ was the norm within a democratic system in which mutual respect and public participation were encouraged (see Millett 1989).

In Roman society, dignity (*dignitas*) was related to social reputation, position and status, people were basically not equal to each other, but had to achieve a certain level of dignity. McCrudden (2008) states that at the time honour and respect were given to a person who was worthy of them due to their special status. For example, the appointment of an individual to a particular public office also brought dignity with it. In this sense, dignity was closely related to social honour.

The concept of human dignity was somewhat expanded by the Stoics with the basic principle of equality. In the circle of the Stoics, dignity was thus not tied to the status held by an individual (Ivanc 1999). Possibly under the influence of Stoicism (see Rosen 2018), Cicero (1913) mentions the term ‘*dignitas humana*’, albeit very rarely. Today, it is considered an important early source of dignity (Bloch 1986). Some authors state Cicero was the first to use the term dignity in order to express the idea that all human beings are endowed with dignity and that therefore human beings hold a superior position in the universe (Sensen 2011b). The described articulation of dignity (as an inherent and universal characteristic) was, however, not the majority opinion during the time of the Stoics (Glensy D. 2011).

The Christian thinking that has dominated the West since the late Roman Empire hence placed the idea of the human being at the centre. Human beings are created in the image of God and consequently endowed with human dignity (Erhueh 1987; Kraynak 2008). It is not essential that God is the creator of human beings since this does not yet distinguish man from all the rest of creation. What is important is that God created man in his own image, and it is exactly this element that enables the rise of human dignity and for humans to be distinguished from the rest of creation (Dan-Cohen 2011). The essence of the Christian tradition is described by Siedentop (2014) who explains that following Jesus’ crucifixion and his resurrection from the dead, the individual was given the opportunity to submit to the mind and will of God. The place of the ancient family with its characteristic of immortality was thereby replaced by the individual. According to Christian teaching, human beings occupy a unique place in the universe (Grant 2007).

While researching Christian thought and the Christian idea of human dignity, we must not overlook the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, Leo I, also known as Leo the Great, his sermons and his two-part concept of dignity. Similarly to Cicero, Leo the Great bases this dimension of dignity on the special abilities of man, i.e., reason, which gives the individual the ability to control sensory stimuli. Unlike Cicero, Leo the Great connects human dignity with God and claims that human beings are created in God's image.

During the Renaissance, the importance of man, his value and his essence came to the fore, leading to many works emerging on the meaning of human dignity. Some authors (e.g. Donnelly 2013) characterise Renaissance humanists and their ideas as predecessors of modern ideas about human dignity. Italian Renaissance author Giovanni Pico della Mirandola dealt with human dignity and should be particularly emphasised in this context. From the point of view of human dignity, his work *De hominis dignitate* (English title: *Oration on the Dignity of Man*) from 1486 is worth mentioning. This work is often called a manifesto of Renaissance humanism. Pico della Mirandola sees human dignity in man's freedom to create his own destiny and essence. Man can degenerate into a lower vegetal or animal nature or elevate the soul to the angelic and divine level (Pico della Mirandola 1997). With the aim of elevating the soul, Pico della Mirandola encourages man to suppress the stiffness and aggressiveness of the lion lurking within (*ibid.*); therefore, man is encouraged to repress his own passionate tendencies and control the fury of the lion within. When Pico della Mirandola tempts a man to motivate him to attain dignity on the divine level, he actually elevates the human being to the level of divine creations and places the human alongside God and the angels.

The Christian Church, on the other hand, contradicts Pico della Mirandola by stating that people's actions are guided by God and people should follow the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures since this is the way to avoid the influence of the Devil and a pernicious life. Pico della Mirandola, in contrast, leaves man alone while giving him the power to make the most of himself with the help of the actions he is willing and able to do. In this context, Pico della Mirandola does not lead a man to a certain life path, but leaves a free path without guidelines for him at the same time because he generally believes that man will stay on the path.

When reading Pico della Mirandola's *De hominis dignitate*, one can perceive the beginnings of the process of individualisation, which then disappeared and flourished again a few centuries later. Still, these days we are certainly witnessing it more than has happened at any time in

history. Pico della Mirandola's encouragement of man to create oneself, one's essence and one's identity is more than a cue for the process of individualisation, which Habermas (2010) stresses in relation to human dignity. The existentialism of modern man, the individual's search for meaning, the search for an answer to the question of what a human being is, the pursuit of man's goals and plans – these are all typical questions that today occupy every individual and inspire many authors. Habermas (2010) explains that historically the original idea of the universality of human dignity (i.e., the idea of the equal dignity of all human beings) was joined by the idea of the development of the human personality, their individual freedom, autonomy and self-improvement. Today's concept of human dignity thus combines the two: on one hand, the universality of human dignity and, on the other, it preserves the human being's uniqueness (see Kateb 2014). This means that, first, the idea of equal human dignity of all is ascribed to all human beings and, second, each individual is still interwoven with the idea of the individualisation process, i.e., self-realisation and the pursuit of one's goals or perfecting one's personality.

In relation to the Enlightenment period, Immanuel Kant's philosophy is key to understanding the concept of human dignity. Immanuel Kant is described as the father of the modern concept of human dignity (Bognetti 2005). While dignity in the Christian tradition builds on the idea that man is created in the image of God, in Kant's thinking human dignity is based on autonomy and reason. Kant's seminal work to be considered when seeking to explain human dignity is the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant 2018). For Kant, although human dignity is based on human reason or autonomy, a person must act according to the practical imperative and, while exercising their autonomy, they must always regard themselves as well as their fellow human beings as the purpose of their actions. This means that man is always the goal (and not only the means) of human action in relation to both his fellow man and himself.

Kant characterises dignity as an intrinsic, unconditional and incomparable value. Donnelly (2013) notes that, according to Kant, a human being is a creation holding value (dignity) that is truly beyond measure and is found outside the domain of the instrumental values. Many authors (e.g., Shell 2003; Donnelly 2013) contend that Kant had a significant influence on later ideas in human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the modern liberal mindset.

Contemporary Paradigm of Human Dignity

The views of the different authors presented above belong to the traditional paradigm of human dignity. In contrast, the contemporary paradigm of human dignity did not exist before the 20th century and these days can be seen in documents of the United Nations and other similar organisations. This paradigm does not offer connections between human dignity and reason, the autonomy or any other traits of the human being. Namely, it is significantly different from the traditional paradigm that can be recognised in the philosophy of some of the above-mentioned thinkers. Sulmasy (2008) similarly claims that dignity cannot be defined based on certain characteristics or attributes of human beings, such as the capacity for rational decision-making and freedom, because that would mean that dignity does not belong to all living beings (e.g., not to mentally disabled people etc.).

In the contemporary paradigm, human dignity can be understood as a concept with two dimensions: initial and realised dignity. Initial dignity implies the respectable status of a human being, or the status of the individual's absolute inner value. It indicates the dimension of human dignity that belongs to the individual simply by virtue of the fact that they are placed in the group of the human species. Initial dignity originates from human nature as such and distinguishes human beings from the members of other species. It thus means a kind of metaphysical element that is inseparably connected with man and hence exists in all time and space (Kleindienst 2017). Considering that all human beings are endowed with inherent dignity, since they are human beings, we may conclude that it is initial dignity which represents the essence of a human being. We can say that the initial dignity constitutes a human being and may therefore be characterised as a constitutive element of such a creature (Kleindienst and Tomšič 2022). Initial dignity thus goes hand in hand with some of Kant's designations of dignity as an internal, unconditional and incomparable value. For Kant, if an individual has human dignity they cannot be valued and he does not recognise any equivalent (Kant 2018).

We can denote initial dignity as a characteristic that exists independently of anything else, i.e., a 'non-relational property' (Sensen 2011a), as an objective and inherent value characteristic of a person that cannot change in any circumstances in which a person finds themselves. A human being who possesses this characteristic has a special immanent and objective value as a result, which enables them to make demands to assert their rights vis-à-vis other people.

In terms of meaning, initial dignity is close to Cohn's understanding of human dignity: dignity is associated with man's exceptional position in nature and with a synonym for the value of a human, which represents their inherent excellence that separates them from other living beings (Sensen 2011). It is a permanent, stable dignity that does not have different levels. Man simply carries it within himself, and its extent is unmeasurable; it belongs to every individual to the exact same extent: to the extent that makes humans exceptional and excellent. Being human thus means being the bearer of initial dignity, which means that it is the individual's inalienable humanity that brings them respect (Kleindienst 2017; Kleindienst and Tomšič 2022).

Initial dignity is inevitably associated with the position or status of a human being. This allows a person to demand respect from his fellow man and respectful conduct and behaviour. In other words, such a position for a person brings with it the starting point of asking other people to treat them accordingly with the virtue of humanity. From this, the need to respect every human being arises simply due to the existence of the individual's initial dignity (Kleindienst and Tomšič 2022).

Realised dignity is a dimension of human dignity that reveals the extent to which human dignity is achieved in the case of a given individual. This means it is not necessary that every human being naturally endowed with initial dignity at the same time also enjoys realised dignity. Unlike initial dignity, realised dignity is impermanent and unstable (it can only be temporary). It can have different degrees, which means that a certain person has a larger or smaller amount of realised dignity than their fellow human. When we say that someone has lost their dignity, we are talking about their realised dignity (Kleindienst and Tomšič 2022).

Human Dignity on the levels of the Council of Europe and the European Union

With references to human dignity and fundamental rights starting to increase in international legal acts after the Second World War, the trend continued on the level of the Council of Europe. At this level, we should especially mention the very relevant document the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) which, despite its preamble referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, does not explicitly refer to human dignity. Unlike the text of the ECHR, human dignity is much more distinctly mentioned in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which has labelled human dignity as the very essence of the

Convention. This is, for example, emphasised in the ECtHR decision *Pretty v. United Kingdom*. Human dignity is also mentioned in certain later documents of the Council of Europe such as the European Social Charter (1996), the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (1997) etc. (Kleindienst 2017).

The beginnings of the European Union may be characterised by the avoidance of human rights in the founding treaties rather than protecting them. Economic and political reasons were especially at the forefront of the European integration, whereas the protection of fundamental rights was not so prominent early on. The European Union which, compared to its member states and the Council of the Europe, for a long time did not have developed standards in place for the protection of human rights, later began to acknowledge that it was inevitable it would have to develop its own standards for the protection of fundamental rights.

Only with the Treaty on European Union, i.e., the Maastricht Treaty, in 1992 did culture appear on the edge of the ‘third wave’ of European integration (Akaliyski, Welzel and Hien 2022). The aim of the EU’s stronger interest in culture, as identified by some scholars (e.g., Jarausch 2010; Karlsson 2010), was to strengthen European identity and increase the legitimacy of EU institutions by promoting shared values (Lähdesmäki 2016; Akaliyski, Welzel and Hien 2022).

In the European Union context, human dignity is nowadays regarded as a general principle to be followed by all member states. In the primary law of the EU, human dignity was explicitly mentioned (in writing) only after the Lisbon Treaty (2007) had been adopted (Kleindienst 2017). The Treaty on European Union provides that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities which are "common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail" (Article 2). Some scholars contend that the values stated in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union are not just lofty ideals but hold the status of legally binding principles and fundamental principles of EU law (Kochenov 2017). In the preceding treaties, the wording had remained ‘principles’; only with the Treaty on European Union did the term ‘values’ appear (Akaliyski, Welzel and Hien 2022), which led to some terminological confusion from a legal point of view (Kochenov 2017).

Human dignity is also referred to in the preamble of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights; moreover, its first article is entitled *Human dignity*: "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected". Human dignity is also mentioned in secondary European Union law and the case law of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). However, the first explicit formal recognition by the ECJ of human dignity as part of the general principles of the EU was observed in case C-377/98 *The Netherlands v. European Parliament and the Council*.

As described above, initial dignity is the essence or a constitutive element of a human. By placing initial dignity at the core of the democratic system, a person is given the opportunity to realise their ability to determine their own goals (see Kant 2018), develop their identity, and their self-fulfilment/self-realisation. According to Maslow (1970), self-realisation means realising the essence of an individual's existence. Since we are living in a pluralist society, there are many possible ways for the individual to engage in self-realisation. Yet, as stated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (2007), pluralism is supposed to prevail in the member states. Pluralism must be separated from plurality since pluralism also predicts the recognition of the rights of other members of society and striving for the common good of society. Considering some authors (e.g., Dworkin 2011; Rhonheimer and Murphy 2013), we cannot talk about a truly democratic society if it represents a collection of egoistically oriented individuals and individualistic tendencies. Instead, a democratic society prefers to build on the achievement of individual goals in a valuable way; in a manner that considers the common good and respect for one's fellow man. Dworkin (2011) believes it does not only mean the maximised self-realisation of the individual, but first of all, it is necessary to develop a critical attitude, to pursue good and to create one's own life in a meaningful way. A meaningful way to shape one's own life also includes some restrictions that are in line with the realisation of the human dignity of every individual. This allows us to conclude that initial dignity is the basis from which the tendency for pluralism in the European Union derives, whereas the realised dignity of every individual is the final goal of pluralism and European democracy as such.

Populism

In the past few years, the discourse on populism has become widespread. Populism has been researched and discussed in many different ways and perspectives. It is claimed to be an essentially contested concept (Mudde 2017). While some authors refer to an economic

definition of populism (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991), others suggest a definition of political populism. In the context of the latter, populism is sometimes interpreted as a *(thin-centred) ideology* which distinguishes the pure people from the corrupt elite and promotes the idea of the general will of the people (Mudde 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), related to the particular moralistic imagination of politicians that sets morally pure and united people against corrupted elites (Müller 2016); or a mass *movement* using anti-establishment politics (Sikk 2009; Barr 2009). A few authors describe populism as a *political strategy* of personalistic leaders to exercise power based on support from large numbers, mostly unorganised followers (Weyland 2001). Populism is sometimes interpreted as a *political style* (Moffitt and Tormey 2014; Block and Negrine 2017), particularly referring to the style of communication (Jagers and Walgrave 2007) or mode of persuasion (Kazin 1998), and generally avoiding technocratic language and instead using slang, being extremely demonstrative (Moffitt and Tormey 2014) in order to come closer to ordinary people. In terms of populism, Ostiguy (2017; 2020) deploys a socio-cultural, relational approach that defines populism as a political relationship between political leaders and a social basis relying on the socio-historical circumstances. To summarise, the term populism is used widely to refer to a great variety of political strategies, ideologies, styles, movements etc. According to Donders (2020), the existing definitions of populism have their proclamation of being anti-establishment and anti-elitist in common. Populist movements and parties accordingly claim to speak for ‘ordinary people’ whose voices are not heard by the establishment and elite (ibid.).

Populism is often described as a phenomenon that is problematic or even dangerous to the functioning of democracy, neglecting the rule of law (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Müller 2016; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Many authors also considered that lying at the core of populism is a rejection of pluralism (Müller 2016) as it undermines the people’s unity and glorifies the people as an indivisible whole with common values, wishes and interests (Lavi 2022; Tomšič 2022). Populists will always claim that they and they alone represent the people and their true interests. Müller (2016) also shows that, contrary to conventional wisdom, populists can govern based on their claim to exclusive moral representation of the people. Yet, populists are supposed to emanate from the people’s will and thus a leader, party or movement should have a relatively ‘free hand’ in making decisions upon coming to power. This leads to the conclusion that populism is also related to the rejection of the division of power (Tomšič 2022). According to Müller (2016), if populists have enough power, they will end up creating an authoritarian state that excludes all those not considered part of the ‘proper people’. Finally,

in the European Union context, populism is coupled with Euroscepticism as almost all populist parties are also Eurosceptic, unlike non-populist parties (Conti 2018; Tomšič 2022).

Nevertheless, Tomšič (2022) argues that populism is responsible for different effects on the functioning of a democratic order. On one hand, for example, we have ‘soft populism’, which while employing populist rhetoric respects constitutional principles like the separation of powers, fundamental rights, and freedoms. On the other hand, there is ‘hard populism’ that rejects these constitutional principles. While the former has no serious effects on democracy, the latter can be problematic from this viewpoint (ibid.). Similarly, Schmitter (2019) identifies the positive aspects of populism (opening of the political space, the deconsolidation of sclerotic party systems, the mobilisation of previously passive individuals and groups, and expansion of the range of possible political solutions), as well as the negative aspects of populism (destabilising the decision-making process, raising unrealistic expectations among citizens, creating mistrust in the political system, introducing exclusivism and intolerance into political life, and the professionalisation of politics). According to Tomšič (2022), populism is problematic mainly in combination with personified politics, i.e., a charismatic, strong leader who makes decisions independently without close regard for other branches of government. The concentration of power, when combined with the rejection of pluralism, can ultimately lead to the establishment of (semi-)authoritarian political practices, for instance, undermining of the rule of law and civil liberties, control over the media and civil society etc. (ibid.).

Human dignity in the context of populism – discussion

The human dignity concept is closely related to two processes: universalisation and individualisation. First, the contemporary idea of human dignity can be linked to the universalising of the status held by human beings, i.e., the egalitarian idea that all human beings are equally endowed with human dignity simply because they belong to the human species. In this regard, human dignity is considered to be a natural endowment of all human beings. Second, Habermas (2010) explains that while the egalitarian idea is surely the result of the universalised position of human beings, the process of universalisation was followed by the process of individualisation. The idea of the universality of man was hence joined by the idea of the development of the personality, individual freedom, autonomy and self-realisation of every individual. This new perspective concerning the development of the human being which

rose to the surface gave impetus to the values of self-expression (Inglehart and Welzel 2001). Today's concept of human dignity combines the universality of human dignity on one side, while preserving the uniqueness of the human being on the other (see Kateb 2014). This means that on one side it features the idea of the equal human dignity of all human beings yet, on the other, the realisation of human dignity is only possible when considering that every individual is still part of the individualisation process, i.e., self-fulfilment, the pursuit of one's goals or self-realisation of one's personality.

When researching the connection of human dignity with the process of individualisation, one can draw a few parallels between human dignity and populism. Betz and Oswald (2022) refer to Laclau's (2005) individual-level approach, arguing that the analysis of populism must commence on the individual level. In this view, according to Betz and Oswald (2022), populism is the outcome of people's aspirations that are not addressed within the current democratic framework, mostly because the political establishment is unresponsive to these demands. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) use the notion of 'the common people' which, in contrast to this elitist view, vindicates the dignity and knowledge of groups that objectively or subjectively are being excluded from power due to their sociocultural and socioeconomic status. Similarly, Babones (2018) thus argues that populism forces the political class to respect the dignity of the electorate. He explains that a functioning democracy requires that the most exalted experts engage seriously with the 'mundane' views of ordinary citizens.

Populism accords recognition to ordinary people, their anxieties and concerns (Jansen 2011) by satisfying the need for psychological compensation via a rhetoric that chiefly appeals to a range of mainly negative emotions such as anger, indignation and resentment (Betz and Oswald 2022). Former US President Donald Trump, who is considered to be a populist, for example, in his campaign speeches evoked personal uplift. Thereby, Trump's 'magical' lifting of his audience who no longer feel like strangers in their own land, raising their moral value (Lamont, Park and Ayala-Hurtado 2017; Hochschild 2018; Betz and Oswald 2022), gives the impression that such a rhetorical approach stresses the dignity of 'ordinary' people. Given the fact that the idea of the human dignity concept is intertwined not only with the process of universalisation but the process of individualisation as well, we may conclude Trump's approach, at least on the rhetorical level, pursues the idea of the worth of 'ordinary' people in horizontal relationships between different human beings. In Trump's speeches, the dignity of 'ordinary people' is particularly elevated as they are not heard by the corrupt elite, following Kant's idea that the

individual should treat himself and all others never merely as a means but always at the same time as an end in themselves (Kant 2018). On this basis, we note Gaonkar (2017) who contends that the view that populism is mere rhetoric, exclusionary, and bereft of social content is both reactive and unproductive. Gaonkar instead argues that all populist movements invariably draw their normative force from the egalitarian impulse for equity and dignity (ibid.).

Still, Nguyen, Salmela and Von Scheve (2022) explain that two types of negative emotions appear behind the motives for right-wing populist support: fear and anger. Fears and insecurities are also capable of transforming directly into anger through another mechanism, namely, blaming others for those insecurities. Fear also feeds anger's focus on payback since vulnerable people believe that getting back at wrongdoers is a way of re-establishing their lost control and dignity. However, any kind of payback in the sense of revenge contradicts the idea of the worth of every individual and thus this kind of conduct is not in line with Kant's idea nor the idea of the human dignity concept as such.

Further, social and cultural concerns play a significant role in the growth of populism. Immigration and the decline of traditional cultural and religious identification have altered societies and given rise to xenophobia, racism and fear. In response to these anxieties, populism opposes immigration and criticises pluralism, including the value of diversity and minority rights (Donders 2020). Populists' expressions of racism and xenophobia or similar conduct that invoke racial resentment, intolerance of multiculturalism, nationalistic isolationism, nostalgia for past glories, mistrust of outsiders, traditional misogyny, and sexism, and racial and anti-Muslim animosity evoke the Us vs. Them sentiment (Norris and Inglehart 2016). Such an attitude might hold significant consequences for democracy and democratic values and principles. Particularly threatened is the human dignity concept which states that every individual is considered to be a human being endowed with absolute inner worth and needs to be treated with respect.

Conclusion

As we can see, hard populism which rejects constitutional principles like the separation of powers, fundamental rights, and freedoms can have serious repercussions for the human dignity concept and is no doubt a serious threat to the realised dignity of an individual. Yet, as Tomšič

(2022) notes, populism can be perceived as a reminder about the lack of representation and responsiveness in the democratic system. It calls for improvements in institutional effectiveness with respect to the capacity for problem-solving, responsiveness, and accountability to the citizenry, as well as a strengthening of the common identity. It is a symptom of the crisis of established politics and the deficiencies of mainstream political elites (ibid.). Moreover, as this article has shown, the normative power of populism lies exactly in egalitarian ideas about equality and dignity. This means that soft populism, which respects fundamental democratic values in principles while using populist rhetoric, cannot be viewed as necessarily a threat to realised dignity. Instead, it calls for the mainstream political elites to reconsider possible ways for the realisation of human dignity of all citizens. Along these lines, populism can even strengthen the realised dignity of an individual.

Finally, it must be stressed that when it comes to populism only realised dignity might be diminished. Realised dignity is in fact precarious and unstable (it may only be temporary); it can have different levels such that someone can possess a higher or lower level of realised dignity than their fellow human (Kleindienst 2017). Unlike realised dignity, initial dignity cannot be dependent on a phenomenon like populism or any other circumstances or conduct. Initial dignity is simply attached to a human being and cannot be deprived or taken away. It belongs to every individual to the exact same extent. It is innate and inalienable, meaning that in its essence it cannot be removed from a person or infringed upon. The inseparability of initial dignity from a member of the human species makes a human being exceptional and ascribes them with a special value (Kleindienst 2017).

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Erika Džajić Uršić*

THE ROLE OF DEMOCRACY IN SHAPING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction

The global discourse has been grappling with the twin crises of energy and environment, both intrinsically tied to the planet's resource availability and usage, for nearly half a century. Regrettably, these issues have often been addressed disjointedly, by both supranational institutions and individual nations (Williams 2020). These concerns have gained amplified significance, and the urgency for viable solutions has intensified over the past decade. This change was prompted by the eruption of a global crisis – both economic and social – that disrupted conventional growth and development models. It starkly highlighted the pressing need to overhaul economic, energy, production, and environmental policies, embedding a heightened degree of overall sustainability within them.

The constant flow in the world's population and the steady rise (albeit inconsistent) in living standards have fuelled an exponential demand for energy, raw materials, and consumer goods. The significant surge in demand, which is a by-product of our previous "linear" development models (characterized by consumption of raw materials, production, and waste generation), correlates directly with the ever-shrinking availability of the planet's natural resources. This surge is also linked to a dramatic increase in the production of climate-altering emissions, which continually and irreversibly harm our already fragile terrestrial ecosystem (Széchy 2020).

Given these circumstances, it's now crucial to implement and promote more holistically sustainable development models. The goal is to halt the growing imbalance between consumption and availability while trying to restore the health of natural environments. The theory of Sustainable Development, first introduced in the late '80s and subsequently refined

* Erika Džajić Uršić is Assistant Professor, Rudolfovo – Scientific and Technology Centre Novo mesto.

and expanded, has enabled us to frame the problem from both scientific and institutional perspectives, providing guidelines for defining sustainability.

This holistic model's translation into an actionable economic framework was achieved with the introduction of the Green Economy into national and supranational political agendas. As defined by the UNEP, the Green Economy aims to "improve well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities." (UNEP 2018)

Since the 1992 Rio Conference, where the Green Economy began to be mentioned in working documents and political strategies, the international community's focus has gradually shifted from purely environmental aspects (reducing emissions and human impacts on the climate and global ecosystem) towards issues more closely related to the sustainability of production processes and resource efficiency (Yıldırım and Yıldırım 2020).

Actions taken by EU governments at different levels should be complementary and coherent while focusing on enhancing synergies and minimizing potential negative effects across sectors. Partnerships and involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes are considered essential to effectively mobilize resources, knowledge, skills, and technologies.

The idea of sustainability, besides stimulating academic debates, has gained political attention, especially when paired with 'development'. As the famous Brundtland Report (or 'Our Common Future') mentions, sustainable development is about meeting present needs without jeopardizing future generations' abilities to fulfill their needs (ANSA 2021; Yaman and Ghadas 2022)

The steps that EU members make in achieving sustainability are also influenced by its political systems. So actually our preliminary research question is "What are the key challenges and opportunities present in aligning principles of sustainability with democratic systems in the EU?"

Understanding Sustainability

Today, the word ‘environment’ is endowed with a vast and comprehensive significance when linked to the aspiration for qualitative growth and *sustainability*. It embodies a novel perspective, grounded in age-old values of respect, which can serve as the foundation for the holistic growth of a nation and its industrial fabric. In this landscape, we cannot deviate from fundamental tenets like innovation, competitive advancement, and work quality. This necessitates an immediate shift in our approach, prioritizing environmental sustainability and making bold yet sensible, non-deferrable economic policy decisions

Consequently, such a shift will result in altered industrial and fiscal policies and a redefined set of strategic choices and priorities. We need to move away from the notion of instant profit, which ignores its impacts on the environment and future generations. This challenging journey potentially impacts our very condition of existence within modern societies. Political decisions must steer us towards environmental sustainability, while each individual’s responsibility and commitment act as the driving force behind this endeavour.

The well-being of individuals, communities, and the resources they depend on doesn't automatically align with GDP growth anymore. Economic investments need to consider these non-negotiable factors centrally. Thus, it is crucial to make decisions that promote qualitative growth, without jeopardizing the environment we inhabit. In this context, the environmental aspect permeates all sectors as new opportunities for economic development arise (OECD 2019).

The transition towards a sustainable society free of fossil fuels relies heavily on the broad and systematic usage of renewable energy, from solar to wind and geothermal in certain regions. Moreover, when energy conservation and efficiency become part of the equation, a profound ripple effect is created across various sectors, including construction, which is currently facing major difficulties with severe job implications. In such circumstances, new players who can facilitate and direct investments towards these objectives should step up, generating fresh employment opportunities. In a broader sense, contemplating areas such as the green transformation of urban environments, mobility emerges as a field ripe for sustainable reform. Entities in charge of public services bear significant responsibility in this respect. Waste

management is yet another critical aspect that underscores the move towards an eco-friendly societal model. Lastly, the agriculture sector calls for a revamped approach, one that harmonizes agricultural activities, soil preservation, rational water use, and biodiversity conservation with the enhancement of life quality and general wellness. In this context, companies that prioritize high-quality, organic products linked to the sustainability of production spaces, play a vital role in fostering and embedding an environmentally-conscious culture (Baloch et al. 2021).

In terms of technological innovation and competitiveness, new, non-polluting products and production processes signify a challenge for a nation's present and future, and its ability to adapt its industrial policies accordingly. Each industrial sector should, therefore, pivot towards sustainable practices through constant improvements led by research, development, and the transfer of knowledge from scientific and academic communities to the production frontlines. By strategically investing in both public and private sectors, a nation can build its competitiveness while promoting economic growth. Such growth, rather than considering environmental implications as obstacles, should view them as opportunities for advancement. Such processes need to be facilitated through strategic alliances and partnerships, involving various stakeholders, promoting a participatory approach to ensure a prosperous future and more balanced decision-making. Key issues involve reorienting struggling sectors to prioritize job preservation and wealth distribution, in addition to maintaining competitiveness in an increasingly global marketplace (Gruppo dell'Alleanza Progressista dei Socialisti&Democratici al Parlamento europeo 2021).

Among these challenging and complex circumstances, public administrations play a pivotal role in guiding and fostering specific processes over others. Effective resource allocation can be ensured, for instance, by investing in industrial reformation and the development of skills and professionalism in new, sustainable economies. This aligns with the urgent need to protect our planet and its inhabitants.

The coronavirus pandemic, against which the world was fighting, confirms that health and climate emergencies are more closely linked than we thought. The pandemic crisis produced increasingly destructive effects on the economy and our social structure. It is difficult to say how dramatic these effects were. This largely depends on the political decisions we make today. The pandemic and its social and economic impact add to the urgency of conceiving and pursuing an alternative model of development in Europe and the world. The crisis dramatically

reveals the limits and contradictions of our societies and our dominant socioeconomic system. In a globalized world, marked by a growing concentration of economic interests, hyper-concentration of wealth, and a contraction of the role of governments favours of unrestrictive policies, the natural habitats of our planet and our climate continue to be relentlessly destroyed, leaving vast territories and millions of people behind. One of the essential premises of an alternative development model is a broad political agenda capable of addressing and resolving the complexity of the systemic and interconnected crises we are called to face. As the world's leading climate scientists and experts increasingly fear that global warming will reach unprecedented levels in the history of Earth's natural systems, awareness grows that the climate and ecological crisis is also a new and powerful source of social injustice. If any person will not intervene in the face of growing social injustice, it will generate further inequalities and deepen our social crisis, plunging us into an endless vicious circle (Coronas 2013).

Understanding Sustainable Democracy

Banik (Banik 2022) in his research explores that global leaders are continually facing tough choices regarding environmental conservation and development, as well as the significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions needed to tackle the climate emergency. Due to rising awareness and concern among the public, environmental and climate matters have taken center stage in numerous recent election campaigns worldwide. Regular reports, like those from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (Smith et al. 2009; IPCC 2023; Smith et al. 2009), have amplified global media coverage on the necessity for sustainable development and the bold actions needed to prevent the Earth from overheating. Banik mentions several social movements, like the youth-driven *Fridays for Future*, spearheaded by activists like Greta Thunberg, are rallying new groups of citizens to protest and demand accountability from political and business leaders for their lack of action (Sarno 2021).

As Banik (Banik 2022) argues, a significant part of this activism is driven by concerns about today's political decisions that could drastically affect the health of our planet and future generations' lives. In response, opposition groups are rallying citizens against the profound changes that environmentalists and climate advocates propose to current lifestyles and consumption habits. Therefore, the democratic discourse on climate change and sustainable

development is becoming increasingly divided. While some voters resist the shift away from a fossil fuel-dependent world economy, others are questioning the enormous costs of transitioning to a green economy and whether such efforts will produce the necessary impact.

How exactly does democracy relate to sustainable development? Compared to the extensive literature on democracy's role in economic growth and poverty alleviation, surprisingly little scholarly attention has been given to *sustainable democracy* in the EU in connection with sustainable development.

For instance, we can define sustainable democracy as the establishment and maintenance of a democratic system core, on how effectively both, the governing body and the public join specific conditions. This implies that even though it's the government's duty to lay the foundation for a robust democracy by providing critical resources such as education, healthcare, safety measures, and economic stimulation, the responsibility falls on the citizens to use these resources wisely to support their part in a lasting democratic system (Lues 2014)

Different individuals and groups hold varied views on how development, or the absence of it, influences them, and what they perceive to be the appropriate course of action for attaining development. While climate change and global warming are undoubtedly worldwide concerns, the discourse on sustainable development is not equally disseminated globally. It's noteworthy that while nations like India and China, along with other significant players in the Global South, are increasingly focusing on sustainable development, many global discussions and high-level forums and summits often adopt a predominantly Western perspective (Chakrabarty 2017).

Although the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by global leaders in 2015 restored the concept of sustainable development, debates are far from settled (United Nations 2023b). Numerous disagreements continue over how the global community should tackle challenges related to 'Our Common Future' – the title of the Brundtland Commission's influential 1987 report (WCED 1987; Brundtland 1987). Given the disputed nature of 'development' and its varied impacts on different segments of the population, it is critical that we place more emphasis on the politics of sustainable development.

Building upon the idea of global differences, recognizing these diverse perspectives becomes even more pertinent in the context of fostering sustainable democracy. As we navigate the

intricate terrains of sustainable development and democracy, it is crucial to nurture an enhanced democratic awareness among both citizens and their representatives. This democratic awareness should enable every individual to have the power to influence their own life conditions, promoting the development of skills for conflict resolution in a democratic spirit (Banik 2022).

However, as citizens' political projects become more diverse and fragmented, the need for reinforcing a sense of unity and establishing democratic institutions capable of reliably resolving conflicts becomes critical. One fundamental principle that needs wide acceptance across diverse contexts is the affirmation of 'the equal value of all people'. This moral position holds the key to strengthening democratic awareness. It's a responsibility that should be shouldered collectively, but some stakeholders may bear a larger portion of this duty.

From Sustainable Development Goals to Green Deal: a comprehensive examination of European Commission's sustainability initiatives

We will provide a brief overview of various initiatives and plans launched by the EC and the UN, that address the issues of sustainable development and circular economy, two critical aspects within the scope of sustainability governance. Especially here we emphasize initiatives, such as the 'Closing the Loop: Commission Delivers on Circular Economy Action Plan' (European Commission 2015a), the 'Agenda 2030 for sustainable development' (European Commission 2015b), and 'The European Green Deal' (European Commission 2022), share the common objective of promoting sustainable consumption, reducing waste, and mitigating environmental degradation while promoting economic growth.

These initiatives directly align with the discussions in the previous sections, such as the interplay between sustainability and democracy, the role of transparency in global sustainability governance, and the overarching concept of sustainability as a complex, systemic, and emergent property of social-ecological systems. The strategic actions outlined in these plans require effective governance, inclusivity, and transparency, underscoring the complexity of sustainability as it permeates all sectors of society.

With this overview, we help to illuminate the role of large-scale, institutional initiatives in guiding sustainability governance and the challenges and opportunities they present. This offers a complementary perspective to the earlier discussions that primarily focused on conceptual and theoretical aspects of sustainability governance.

In 2015, the European Commission introduced a proposal named ‘Closing the Loop: Commission Delivers on Circular Economy Action Plan’, aiming to reduce waste through landfilling and amplify the reuse and recycling processes for major waste streams like municipal and packaging waste (Organization 2016). This action plan outlined targets for EU member states to progressively achieve performance benchmarks and stimulate necessary investments in waste management. The plan also encompassed additional measures to streamline the policy’s implementation and fortify economic incentives, while enhancing extended producer responsibility schemes (European Commission 2015a).

In the same year, the United Nations launched the ‘Agenda 2030 for sustainable development’, comprising 17 Sustainability Goals spanning three areas - economic, social, and environmental. Among these goals, the 12th one emphasizes adopting sustainable practices in the production and consumption (World Health Organization 2016). While the Agenda sets the timeline for achieving all these goals by 2030, its most distinguishing aspect is its universal applicability. Despite variations in national contexts, these goals are designed to be achievable for every country, irrespective of their current development status (World Health Organization 2016)

The so-important United Nations’ 2030 Agenda, put in place in 2015, serves as an updated version of the Sustainable Development Goals initially proposed by the Brundtland report (Holdgate 1987). The agenda also specifies targets that enable a tangible roadmap to achieve the 17 broad goals that represent different facets of sustainability. This includes a wide variety of actions, from poverty alleviation to ecosystem preservation, and climate change combat to technological advancements fostering industrial change.

The 2030 Agenda emphasizes that accomplishing these varied goals requires a solid political and institutional structure that promotes coordination, coherence, competence, capacity, partnership, data-driven decisions, monitoring, and accountability. While these elements have been debated thoroughly in academic circles, existing governance systems often lack them. The concept of coordination stresses the importance of communication and collaboration within and

between institutions to align objectives across different government levels and involved sectors. This cooperation must extend to public institutions and other actors, like private enterprises, NGOs, and local communities, who play a crucial role in realizing these objectives (European Commission 2015b).

In a communication and working document issued two years later, the EC called ‘Strengthening Innovation in Europe’s Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth of the Commission’s committees’, the focus was on the advancement of smart specialization. This was aimed at overcoming primary challenges including bolstering innovation and competitiveness within European regions for sustainable growth; enhancing interregional collaboration, a critical factor in global economies; concentrating efforts on less developed and transitioning industrial regions; and optimizing joint efforts across EU policies and initiatives promoting innovation (European Commission 2017)

The communication considered various factors – environmental concerns, energy, sustainable development, and efficient resource utilization – that could be assimilated into a country’s industrial policy. An example of this is Slovenia, where a strategic document outlines the smart specialization strategy, aimed at boosting investment in research, development, and innovation in sectors with the highest potential for economic acceleration (Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development 2014).

In 2018, the EC introduced the ‘Circular Economy Action Plan’, which proposed several novel strategies, actions, and recommendations related to the lifecycle of plastics, the interconnection of legislation on chemicals, products, and waste, and a framework for tracking the progress of individual countries and the EU as a whole. The plan also included provisions for the management of critical materials within the circular economy (European Commission 2019). The same year, the EC put forward additional, ambitious initiatives. These included proposals for legislation to reduce the environmental impact of certain plastic products and to set minimum requirements for water reuse for irrigation (European Commission 2019).

Several other EC communications play a significant role due to their robust ties with EU sustainable development. An excellent example of this is The European Green Deal (EGD) launched on 10th December 2019. This bold plan strives to position Europe as the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. EC President Ursula von der Leyen likened the Green Deal to

Europe's 'moon landing moment', saying, it offers a comprehensive vision along with 50 specific actions for a new growth strategy that "gives more back than it takes away. " (Domorenok 2021)

The Green Deal roadmap aims to instigate a series of 'profoundly transformative policies' at the regional and national level in eight critical areas: elevating climate ambition for 2030 and 2050; establishing clean, affordable, and secure energy; promoting a clean and circular economy; endorsing energy and resource-efficient buildings; encouraging sustainable and smart mobility; ensuring a fair, healthy, and eco-friendly 'farm to fork' food system; preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity; and achieving zero pollution for a toxic-free environment (Domorenok 2021).

The European Green Deal forms the core of the Commission's strategy to enact the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and related policy priorities. These include reshaping the European Semester process of macroeconomic coordination to incorporate the SDGs and positioning sustainability and citizens' well-being at the centre of the EU's policy-making and action. The European Commission is set to present related policies and legislative tools in 2020, including the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the new Industrial Strategy and Circular Economy Action Plan, the Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food, and proposals for a pollution-free Europe (European Commission 2020).

Transparency and multidimensional governance: opportunities to unveiling Sustainable Development Goals

The existing literature on governance pertaining to sustainability delineates four distinct approaches, namely, integrative, inclusive, adaptive, and pluralist governance. Each of these approaches has been widely studied in isolation, and several authors have explored various amalgamations of these approaches (see Glass and Newig 2019; Patterson et al. 2017; Meadowcroft 2009; Armitage et al. 2020; Bowen et al. 2017; Linnér and Wibeck 2019; Bowen et al. 2017; Armitage et al. 2020; Meadowcroft 2009; Patterson et al. 2017; Glass and Newig 2019). However, no consideration has been given to how these approaches need to be

synergized and operationalized to facilitate transformative change (Visseren-Hamakers et al. 2021).

Visseren-Hamakers et al. (2021) hypothesize that governance will only become transformative when it addresses the indirect drivers underlying sustainability issues and is coinciding:

(1) Integrative governance necessitates the operationalization of governance in ways that guarantee that local solutions also have sustainable impacts at other scales, on other issues, and in other places and sectors. This ensures a holistic and comprehensive application of governance strategies that have ripple effects across different areas (Wagner and Wilhelmer 2017; Castán Broto et al. 2019; Chaffin et al. 2016); (2) Inclusive governance: this form of governance empowers those whose interests are currently not being met and embodies values that embody transformative change for sustainability. Inclusion in governance helps to ensure that the interests and needs of all stakeholders are considered and addressed (see the authors as Li and Kampmann 2017; Otsuki 2014; Blythe et al. 2018; Chaffin et al. 2016); (3) Adaptive Governance recognizes that transformative change and governance, as well as our understanding of them, evolve over time. Thus, governance needs to facilitate learning, experimentation, reflexivity, monitoring, and feedback. This adaptability ensures that governance strategies remain effective and relevant over time (see authors as (Chaffin et al. 2016; Van den Bergh, Truffer, and Kallis 2011; Wolfram 2016; Blythe et al. 2018; Wagner and Wilhelmer 2017) and (4) Pluralist governance is a kind of form of governance that acknowledges and integrates different scientific and societal knowledge systems. It respects and utilizes the diversity of knowledge, ensuring a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to the governance (Chaffin et al. 2016; Moser 2016; Keitsch and Vermeulen 2020; Colloff et al. 2017).

Respectively, effective governance embodies eight primary qualities. It involves participation, seeks consensus, maintains accountability, and transparency, ensures responsiveness, demonstrates effectiveness and efficiency, promotes equity and inclusivity, and upholds the rule of law (Visseren-Hamakers et al. 2021). This framework helps keep corruption at bay, takes into account the perspectives of minority groups, and ensures that the most vulnerable individuals in society have a say in decision-making processes. Moreover, it remains adaptable, catering to both the current and future requirements of society (Sheng 2018). Later, below we highlight the transparency of sustainable governance as in our consideration the most effective. Despite longstanding academic discussions, the definition of governance relevant to sustainability issues remains disputed, without a globally agreed upon meaning (Glass and

Newig 2019). A shared thread among various interpretations is the clear separation between the concepts of government and governance, moving away from the idea of the state as a single, rigid entity, and the government as the primary, standalone actor responsible for policy formulation and execution (Peters and Pierre 1998; Meadowcroft 2004; Kooiman 1999; Bevir 2011; Sheng 2018).

The government, in this context, can be seen as an integral part of the wider governance system (Meadowcroft 2004). Contemporary interpretations of governance highlight the participation of several public and private actors, blended practices (administrative structures and semi-market strategies), and acknowledge its multijurisdictional nature, encompassing various institutions, sectors, and governmental levels (Bevir 2011). As such, we view governance as a comprehensive concept that encompasses a diverse range of actors, processes, structures, and institutions involved in political decision-making and fields (Driessen et al. 2012; Treib, Bähr, and Falkner 2007). Similarly, sustainable development is also often viewed as an ill-defined and normative concept (Newig and Fritsch 2009; Meadowcroft 2004).

The term gained traction in 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) released its report, *Our Common Future*, also known as the *Brundtland Report*. Here, sustainable development was described as a model that fulfills the needs of the present without jeopardizing the capacity of future generations to fulfill their needs (United Nations 2023a) Since then, an array of definitions of sustainable development has emerged, all parts of a "constant process of redefinition and interpretation" (Jordan 2008, 20).

but none have gained undisputed acceptance. Over time, it became evident, particularly due to the Brundtland Report, that sustainable development necessitates simultaneous consideration of social, economic, and environmental aspects (Meadowcroft 2004). However, it was often mistaken as mere environmental protection or long-term strategies (Newig and Fritsch 2009). The ambiguity in defining, operationalizing, and measuring sustainable development is due to its inherently complex nature: it is often referred to as a 'wicked problem' (Zeijl-Rozema et al. 2008) in academic circles, with heated debates over cause-and-effect relationships and potential solutions.

The ambivalence of sustainability goals, the involvement of many actors, and the intricate interactions among technology, society, and nature all contribute to its complexity (Hammond and Smith 2017). For the first time, with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the global community

has agreed upon a concept of sustainable development, defined through its 17 goals, 169 targets, and 232 indicators, prompting new research methodologies that could be instrumental for the political and societal implementation of the Agenda.

Within the realm of sustainable development, governance is perceived as a crucial and irreplaceable guiding instrument Zeijl-Rozema et al. (2008) suggest that governance for sustainability arises when policymaking and implementation involve intricate state-society interactions aimed at a more sustainable future. Scholars of environmental governance, significantly contributing to the broader sustainability governance discourse, also emphasize its multidimensional nature (Driessen et al. 2012). Nonetheless, it is unclear which specific dimensions or modes of governance most effectively promote the sustainable development (Bäckstrand 2006) or policy execution (O'Toole 2004; Bressers, van Twist, and ten Heuvelhof 2013)

An increasing trend in global sustainability governance is the enhancement of transparency (Mason and Gupta 2015; Gardner et al. 2019). This move towards transparency, or 'illumination', can be seen as promoting openness, opposing concealment, and actively disclosing information, though the exact definition is widely debated (Michener and Bersch 2013; Ball 2009). In the context of global sustainability, openness, and data disclosure are growing expectations, put forth by both state and private entities, to highlight and address the environmental damage that spans national boundaries and necessitates global governance (Gupta, Boas, and Oosterveer 2020).

The drive for transparency within global sustainability governance is predicated on its assumed potential for transformation, though this assumption often lacks critical examination. It is believed that increased transparency can enable more accountable, democratic, and effective decision-making and actions for sustainability across both public and private sectors (Gheyle and De Ville 2017; Skladzien 2007; Lord 2007; Mitchell 2011; Weil, Graham, and Fung 2013; Wognum et al. 2011).

Several assessments, including a comprehensive evaluation of 'governance-by-disclosure' in the global environmental governance (Gupta, Boas, and Oosterveer 2020), indicate that transparency does not always lead to the expected empowerment, accountability, and environmental effectiveness. Some critics attribute this to the flawed design of transparency

systems, while others suggest that transparency itself can be a locus of political and normative contention, rather than a neutral tool to overcome such conflicts (Gupta, Boas, and Oosterveer 2020).

Another important facet of the growing trend towards transparency in sustainability governance is the increased dependence on monitoring, reporting, and verification systems to boost accountability for environmentally impactful actions and enhance sustainability performance. However, enhanced transparency could lead to complex reporting and auditing processes that may not necessarily advance desired governance goals (Gupta, Boas, and Oosterveer 2020; Haufler 2010) or it could result in surveillance by powerful entities, including those in non-authoritative positions, like consumers or local communities (Gupta, Boas, and Oosterveer 2020)

Challenges at the intersection of Sustainability and the Sustainability of the Democracy

If democracy is sustainable is questioned from two perspectives: initially, the durability of democracy itself, an ongoing debate ignited by the ‘crisis theories’ of the 1970s (Habermas 1973); secondly, the capability of democratic institutions to effectively address the sustainability crisis, which is often linked to the depletion of natural resources and climate change, but also encompasses various other aspects. The first dimension has gained significant attention recently. With globalization, political cynicism, and corroding trust in democratic establishments, there’s a growing dialogue around the dawn of a ‘post-democratic’ era (Crouch 2004). Despite these concerns, democracy has repeatedly demonstrated its remarkable resilience and adaptability to a myriad of societal changes and challenges (Blühdorn 2011).

Concerns about the capability of democratic processes to address the sustainability crisis have often been dismissed, accusing critics of leaning towards authoritarian methods. However, such a response overlooks two vital aspects. Firstly, there exists a third alternative beyond participatory democracy and expert-controlled authoritarian measures, which is the continued politics of the unsustainability (Blühdorn 2009; 2011) This approach strives to maintain the status quo while managing its inevitable repercussions as long as feasible.

Secondly, it's essential to recognize that democracy, depending upon its specific form, can both contribute to and complicate the crisis. There's an indication that within the confines of a modern consumer society, democracy might incline more towards sustaining the unsustainable status quo rather than inducing radical transformations (Blühdorn 2009, 2011).

The skepticism surrounding democracy's efficacy in handling environmental issues isn't entirely unprecedented. For instance, democracy's anthropocentric nature and its inherent limitations in advocating for entities without a political voice have been frequently highlighted. Particularly, electoral democracy tends to be present-focused, prioritizing immediate interests over future generations' needs. Furthermore, democracy's propensity for compromise often yields environmentally inadequate solutions (Blühdorn 2011).

Democratic processes are time and resource-intensive, making them unfit for situations demanding swift and decisive action. In complex modern societies, democracy is highly individualistic and therefore struggles to define, let alone enforce, common goods or shared sacrifices. Democracy tailors policies to the preferences of the electoral majority, which often contradict sustainability principles. For example, the popularity of car and air travel hardly aligns with sustainable practices (Blühdorn 2009; 2011).

Getting the majority support for policies that impose costs or limitations primarily for the benefit of distant communities or abstract concepts like global climate is a strenuous task in democratic systems. Importantly, democracy, being inherently emancipatory, focuses on enhancing rights and material living conditions. It's not naturally inclined to restrict rights or reduce material conditions for the majority, unless immediate benefits, such as traffic regulation, are evident (Blühdorn 2011).

Concluding remarks

Sustainability, at its core, is a matter of human behaviour and the constant negotiation for desirable futures amid significant uncertainty and unpredictability. It's an intrinsically prescriptive concept, deeply tied to real-world issues and a wide variety of value systems and moral decisions. Considering its dynamic nature and deep-rooted values, democracy plays a pivotal role in sustainability, as it provides the necessary structure to persistently navigate

towards preferred futures, rather than seeking instantaneous solutions or reverting to previous conditions (Hammond and Smith 2017).

In essence, sustainability is not a transient state but an unceasing process of societal learning (Arias-Maldonado 2000, 52). This transcends technical and scientific boundaries, calling for an engagement with the varying (and thus disputed) values, ethics, and visions of potential societal structures. To genuinely be inclusive, this engagement should involve all individuals who are affected by it.

A sustainably prosperous society, in any ethically meaningful context, can only emerge if it is 'discursively formed and socially agreed upon' (Arias-Maldonado 2000, 49). This calls for a socially inclusive governance model that involves all citizens in shaping outcomes that are perceived as legitimate, and maintained by civic participation and conversation, rather than coercion or manipulation (Brulle 2010).

Sustainability does not require enforcement, but rather, it necessitates "profound political dedication" to facilitate necessary adaptations (Niemeyer 2014, 16). It is not about 'marshaling compliance' for policies that might otherwise be rejected, but about generating an environment that fosters collective exploration of alternative lifestyles.

Democracy is not only instrumentally necessary for defining which futures are indeed 'preferred', but as a fundamental precondition for individuals' autonomy over their lives and thoughts, it becomes an integral part of any vision of human well-being.

In sum, sustainability and democracy are deeply interconnected, each shaping the other in various ways. Their synergy is vital for establishing sustainable development and achieving desirable futures. While the trend toward transparency in global sustainability governance has the potential for transformation, it is critical to recognize its limitations and complexities. Simultaneously, despite certain limitations of democratic systems in effectively addressing the sustainability crisis, their resilience, adaptability, and participatory nature make them indispensable. Sustainability is an ongoing process of societal learning that calls for a collective exploration of alternative lifestyles, transcending technical and scientific confines to embrace differing value systems and moral decisions. Democratic practices, therefore, are not merely instruments for policy-making; they are integral components of any vision of human well-

being. As such, a sustainably prosperous society can only emerge from an inclusive democratic governance model, which necessitates continuous negotiation, public participation, and accountability. Ultimately, the quest for sustainability is not about enforcing policies or restrictions but fostering a political environment that encourages societal adaptations and collective transformation towards sustainable practices.

Lastly, considering the preliminary question for the chapter “What are the key challenges and opportunities present in aligning principles of sustainability with democratic systems in the EU?”, we can answer as follows. The process of aligning principles of sustainability with democratic systems in the EU involves both unique challenges and opportunities.

Challenges include policy fragmentation, political resistance, and the inherent short-termism of democratic cycles. However, democratic systems provide key opportunities like citizen participation in policy-making, heightened accountability, and transparency that promote effective implementation of sustainability policies. Furthermore, the EU’s strides towards integrating sustainability across various policy areas and their innovative efforts in overcoming political barriers also pave the way towards achieving sustainability goals within democratic systems.

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Rok Bratina*

POPULISM IN NEW GUISES: THE PHENOMENON OF THE RESNI.CA PARTY

Introduction

In recent decades, populism has emerged all around the world as one of the key political forces (re)shaping the current social and political landscape. Populist movements have become a typical feature of different countries and regions. However, their definition and interpretation often seem unclear, even contradictory, which applies both to the perceptions of the public as well as the academic sphere. Dictionary of the Standard Slovene Language (SSKJ) defines populism as, among other things, "a policy that seeks to please the widest possible segments of society by offering attractive promises and statements". The very same definition was also taken into account by Zoran Stevanović, the main leader and president of the Resni.ca Party, a new civic movement formed during the Covid 19 epidemic, when setting up the foundations of his activities. In this context, Stevanović declares himself a populist, highlighting that populism actually means that people tend to like the truth. Given the growing number of followers on Facebook, the massive participation in protest rallies and the encouraging results in the 2022 parliamentary elections (2.86%) and the presidential elections in the very same year (Sabina Senčar won 5.96% of the vote), it can be established that a significant proportion of citizens indeed tend to like the truth, be it written with capital or small initials, and that in the future, the Resni.ca Party is likely to become an even more important player in the Slovenian political landscape. The Resni.ca Party therefore appears to be an interesting phenomenon which deserves a detailed scientific analysis.

With that in mind, the present paper aims to explore and strives to understand the phenomenon of the Resni.ca Party through the prism of the general characteristics of populist movements, focusing on the party's approach to tackling social, economic and political issues. The paper is

* Rok Bratina is Ph.D. candidate at the School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica.

divided into two parts. While the first part is theoretical in nature, the second part is entirely concerned with empirical work. More specifically, the paper first defines the notion of populism by identifying its characteristics through carefully selected examples of people's movements. The identification of the latter represents the basis of the empirical part which deals with the phenomenon of the Resni.ca Party in the form of a case study. In the light of the foregoing, the paper mainly seeks to explore the following research question: *How are the general characteristics of populist movements reflected in the political programme of the Resni.ca Party?*

This paper aims to examine the theory of populism, using the Resni.ca Party (English: Truth Party) as a case study in order to illustrate the general characteristics of the concept.

What is populism?

Defining populism

Dictionary of the Standard Slovene Language (SSKJ) defines populism as follows: 1) "*a policy that seeks to please the widest possible social strata, usually by making attractive promises and statements (...)*", 2) "*a trend in French literature in the first half of the 20th century, which addresses the life of the working class (...)*", and 3) "*a political movement that emphasises the importance of lower classes, especially the peasantry, for the development of society and the state*" (ibid.).

Although populism is a relatively recent concept which only came into existence in the mid-19th century (Allcock 1971; Fink-Hafner 2019), this by no means implies that the various traits or actions, which are considered populist' according to today's definition of the term, did not take place years, decades, or even centuries earlier. The question that naturally arises here is: "Which past events were the ones that affected the definition of populism to the greatest possible extent?" As regards the definition of populism itself, one definition has already been pointed out in the introduction to this paper, citing SSKJ as a relevant source. Before presenting the views put forward by some other researchers, it is first worth examining the word populism through the lens of etymology.

In this sense, populism comes across as a word that acquires its meaning when the Latin noun *populus*, meaning people, is combined with the suffix *-ismos*, which denotes an action, a state or a doctrine. From this viewpoint, populism can broadly be understood as 1) any activity that is associated with the masses, aiming to appeal to them, 2) any atmosphere that pervades the masses, and 3) any idea produced by the masses.

Taggart (2002) defines populism as one of the most vague political concepts of our time, with Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) adding that this vagueness is mainly the result of different interpretations of populism by the media, politicians and, perhaps most surprisingly, academics who failed to reach a consensus on the subject, not even being able to reach general agreement at the conference organised for this very purpose at the London School of Economics (2012). (Muller 2017).

The confusion regarding the definition of the concept of populism is best illustrated by the following description by Peri (2008): "(...) *an ideology, a doctrine, a mentality, a system of ideas and a political style, also a rhetoric, demagogy, and discourse, or a number of concrete historical movements*" (2008, 626).

With regard to the substantive definition of populism, Muller (2016) shares the same views as other scholars, claiming that populism can only be defined by analysing those historical movements that identified themselves as populist or people's movements. As regards the latter, the author points out that there are certain differences between them, which are, on the one hand, the result of different time frames and on the other hand, the result of different space frames. For example, he notes that modern populisms are mainly focused on promoting people's interests, while, by contrast, they in fact act in favour of social elites (ibid.).

Typology of examples of populism

In terms of interests, populism can be divided into three types, namely agrarian, economic and political populism (Mudde 2000) In short, populist movements establish their course of action by addressing various issues, mainly in the areas of agriculture and livestock, economy and social policies as well as political rights and freedoms. All three types of populism are described below (ibid.):

- 1) *Agrarian populism*: tends to unite the agrarian population, i.e. people who work or live in rural areas. Such populist movements aim to defend or promote the interests of that population, namely the protection of land property, preservation of rural traditions and values, promotion of prosperity and fight against urbanisation and capitalism.
- 2) *Economic populism*: tends to unite the population wanting to achieve more solidarity in terms of social wealth distribution (e.g. by means of higher corporate taxes) and more equality regarding access to the labour market, with such access being, among other factors, also conditioned by the preservation of public education and public healthcare system.
- 3) *Political populism*: tends to unite those populations who feel that they lack a representative in the current parliament (in the case of democratic countries) or in the current political establishment (in the case of authoritarian countries) to represent them and their interests. In other words, these are the people who perceive themselves as a deprived minority, i.e. those who are marginalised for one reason or another (e.g. racial, national, religious, political, sexual).

In order to facilitate the understanding of this tripartite typology, there are three concrete examples presented below, each in its own way summarising the three types of populism. As further demonstrated below, all three above-mentioned types of populism also provide an excellent basis for identifying the main characteristics of populism.

Populism in the USA

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Preamble to the Declaration of Independence)

In order to understand populism better, it is worth analysing the actions and demands of the Peoples' Party, a party founded in 1891, representing the successor to the Farmers' Union. The establishment of the Peoples' Party was the result of the unsuccessful attempts of farmers united in various agrarian movements (later merged into the Farmers' Union) to pursue their interests through the existing political parties. At a certain point, they discovered that the interests of

high politics were too much influenced by the interests of corporations, banks, industrialists and other similar players. The People's Party promoted itself as the bastion and promoter of the rights and interests of ordinary workers, particularly farmers who were in the majority. Their demands included, among other things, the nationalisation of the railways and telegraphs, the breaking up of natural monopolies, greater state investment in the economy, higher prices for agricultural produce, more money in circulation, the abolition of debt, higher income tax, the eight-hour work day and the direct election of US senators (Postel n.d.).

Based on the above requirements²⁸ Turner (1920, 148) defines populism as the manifestation of the old American ideals that shall be accomplished through concrete measures by the American government, with the support and approval provided by American people. As for the old American ideals, they mainly refer to freedom, equality, democracy, human rights, (Huntington 1982), i.e. the ideas that also became the foundation for the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution.

The presidential nomination of William Jennings Bryan by the Democratic Party and his defeat by William McKinley, the Republican Party candidate, brought about an internal rift in the People's Party, resulting in the formation of two factions. While the first faction sought to become united with the Democrats (Bryan's political programme was largely in line with the Omaha Platform), the second faction insisted that the populists shall remain an independent player, even at the cost of the votes that would go to the Democratic or Republican candidate due to similarities in the political programmes. In this connection, it is worth noting that, even if the People's Party was no longer on the scene, that did not mean that populist ideas were consequently also dead. On the contrary, in the following decades populist ideas served as promotion tools used by Democratic as well as Republican candidates. In this context, it is worth mentioning, for example, Roosevelt's *New Deal* of 1933 (see Leuchtenburg 2009) and Clinton's *Putting People First* book on economic strategy of 1992 (see Clinton and Al Gore 1992), with both of them being in many ways related to the populist agenda of the People's Party.

²⁸ Those demands were expressed in the Omaha Platform, a document adopted as a political programme at the founding convention of the People's Party on 4 July 1892 in Omaha, Nebraska. It broadly addressed demands for the return of power to the people, in a sense echoing Lincoln's call for "the government of the people, by the people, for the people" (in Massip 2019). In this sense, Posnel (n.d.) also perceived the Omaha Platform as a Second Declaration of Independence.

Populism in Russia

"*Truth is always spoken among the narod. The life of the narod cannot be false.*"²⁹ (Herzen in Ely 2021, 46)

The Nationalists' Movement, represented by individuals belonging to the Russian intelligentsia, is considered to be another 'typical' representative of populism. Indeed, in the very term 'Nationalists' one can see something that relates to, appeals to, or represents a larger group of people (in this case, the Russian nation). Relating to that, Pipes (1964) maintains that the word 'Nationalist' is a term derived from the noun 'nation' on the one hand, and from the adjective 'national' on the other, which in the imperial Russian time period, was a synonym for something popular or democratic. Herzen (in Frierson 1993), on the other hand, believes that this term represents an authentic Russia which was not yet subject to Western influence, again indirectly referring to the rural population.

In any case, the abolition of feudalism and the liberation of Russian farmers, whose situation, however, mostly remained unchanged, provided the basis for organised action by the educated. For if previously farmers worked on the feudal estates owned by the landlords, after the abolition of serfdom they served the landowners belonging to the bourgeoisie (wage slavery). This situation was not to the liking of the Russian intelligentsia which sought to prevent or skip the capitalist phase of the development of Russia and to move immediately to socialism. Moreover, the Nationalists considered the liberated farmers a critical mass of people that may have proved useful for carrying out a revolutionary upheaval, i.e. the abolition of the monarchy.

As regards the characteristics of the Russian-led populism, it seems reasonable to highlight two important events. The first one is concerned with the mass response of students who, in the spring of 1874, were leaving the universities in large numbers to join the people living in the countryside. The second event, which is (in)indirectly linked to the first one, dates back to 1879, when the Narodnaya Volya Party was established. It is worth noting that they aimed to achieve reforms by means of force, namely through terrorist actions (Elly 2022). The reforms the

²⁹ The author uses the word "narod" instead of "nation" in order to highlight the specifics of the Russian understanding of the word nation.

Narodnaya Volya Party sought to put into practice were generally related to farmers. At this point it shall be worth highlighting the demand of the Nationalists for the return of land to the agricultural working class and the transfer of all social functions to village communes (Venturi 1960, 573-574).

Populism in Germany

The American and Russian versions of populism can also be placed side by side with the German people's movement (*Völkische Bewegung*), which, just like the American and Russian populism, came into existence in the second half of the 19th century. In the search for a link between German people's movement and populism, it is worth pointing out the adjective 'völkische', which derives from the noun 'volk' and therefore means people. Webb (1976) adds at this point that this term has commonly been used as a synonym for nation, race or tribe.

The people's movement was formed on the one hand, as a reaction to modernity (Hroch and Hollan 1998), bearing in mind all the socio-economic changes brought about by the industrial revolution, the development of science, the rise of democracy and social policies, and on the other hand, as a tendency to create the German identity, namely on the basis of common history, language and, above all, blood. In that connection, it is worth mentioning the incident of 1817, when students gathered at the Wartburg Castle with the intention of burning all those books which they considered to be 'poisoning the culture' of the German people. Significantly, such a book-burning act (this time with the support of the political authorities) was repeated in 1933, with students from all over Germany taking part in the act. The content of the books that were burnt was broadly the same as in 1817, except that in 1933, a greater emphasis was placed on the authors of Jewish origin (Mosse 1964, Tourlamain 2014).

General characteristics of populism

Taking into account Muller (2017) and other researchers, some general characteristics of populist movements will be outlined on the basis of the above. At this point, it should be mentioned that there certainly are many other movements that may be added to the list, containing certain characteristics that point to populism of one kind or another. In any case, for the purpose of this article, it seems more than enough to mention the three examples of America,

Russian and German populism, which, when taken together, somehow summarise all the most general characteristics of populism:

1. *Addressing a large group of people*: populist movements are commonly associated with a large group of people, such as the Germans and the Russians, or American farmers or workers. In this context, the term 'majority' is particularly worth highlighting, as populist movements seek to emphasise that they represent the voice of the people. In this manner, the impression of legitimacy and justification of one's views (whether legitimate or not) is created.
2. *Criticism of the existing political parties and elites*: Populists often criticise the existing political parties and elites, accusing them that they do not represent the interests of the people, but rather act in favour of corporations, banks, industrialists, the bourgeoisie, landlords, etc. By sending critical messages to the public, they are letting the people (i.e. the majority) know that there are individuals (i.e. the minority) at the top of political power who are not acting in their favour and who therefore need to be replaced. In democratic societies, such 'replacement' usually takes place as a consequence of the parliamentary election results, whereas in authoritarian societies, the replacement comes about as a result of a coup d'état. The above viewpoints expressed under this very second point neatly sum up the dualistic aspect of populism characterised by a gap between virtuous people and an unethical elite (Mazzoleni 2008).
3. *Emphasis on social and economic issues*: populist movements often draw attention to the social and economic problems of the people they represent, thus stressing their concern for the people's well-being. With the emerging social networks and online media, the spread of such information seems to be particularly fast and consequently efficient. As observed by Pajnik, Berzelak and Šulc (2023), this is particularly evident in democratic societies, as reflected in the content published by tabloid media and party newsletters.
4. *Promoting concrete measures*: populist movements advocate concrete measures to improve or protect people's situation, such as nationalisation, the abolition of monopolies or the transfer of social functions to village communities (e.g. Russia and the USA). On the other hand, Vallacher and Fennel (2021) maintain that populist

movements are not so much concerned with a direct response to social changes, as they tend to be more concerned with an indirect response addressing the threat that those social changes pose to existing values, norms, customs, i.e. to all that is considered a tradition.

5. *Emphasis on national identity*: in some cases of populism, for instance the German case (and to some extent also the Russian case), stressing the importance of people or a nation often involves placing emphasis on national identity, language, culture and, in some extreme cases, even blood. Nationalist discourse is often pursued by elites, while populism is fundamentally an anti-elitist ideology, therefore populism is not to be mistaken for nationalism (Varshney 2021). In other words, nationalism shall be perceived as a convenient means to implement populism, not as populism per se.

Case study – The Resni.ca Party (The Trush Party)

"According to the SSKJ, populist statements appeal to a large mass of people. And if large crowds of people find the truth appealing, then I am a populist" (Stevanović in the video interview for the Resni.ca Party Facebook page: Zoran Stevanović 2020).

"(...) populism is about telling the truth in a way that is either rough or pleasing, while political correctness would be the opposite of that. Political correctness is a lie wrapped in cellophane" (ibid.).

Circumstances and motives for the formation of the origins of the Resni.ca Party movement

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared a public health emergency of international concern due to the increasing number of infections caused by the SARS-Cov-2 contagious disease. The virus is believed to have first emerged in China, more precisely in the city of Wuhan, where respiratory illnesses of unknown origin were on the rise over a certain period of time. On 11 March 2020, WHO declared the outbreak of the new coronavirus (the name given to the disease caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus) a global pandemic (WHO 2023).

The first confirmed case of coronavirus infection in Slovenia was reported on 4 March 2020. Just a week later, on 12 March 2020, the new government led by the Prime Minister Janez Janša

declared an epidemic, with such declaration being a prerequisite for launching the action plan for protection and rescue in the event of an infectious disease outbreak. The action plan stipulates that measures to prevent or limit the epidemic shall be proposed by professional bodies (in the case of Slovenia, it is the National Protection and Rescue Plan in the event of an epidemic or pandemic of an infectious disease in human beings 2016) (GOV.si 2020).

As regards the restrictive measures, Slovenia generally followed the practices adopted by other countries. In addition to the so-called 'stay-at-home' policy as well as the isolation for the infected and border quarantines, different countries also opted for various other measures to control and restrict the movement of people, including bans on public gatherings and some other restrictions that were mainly enforced by the police, and in some countries even by the military (Ozili and Arun 2020).

The invention of vaccines and their arrival in the country³⁰ required the Slovenian government to adopt an appropriate vaccination strategy. By 13 September 2021, 49% of the total population received at least one dose of vaccine, while 44% received two doses. Two days earlier, on 11 September 2021, the Government issued a Decree on how to comply with the RVT rule (Recovered - Vaccinated - Tested) to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2) (GOV 2021 Portal).

The importance of protest rallies

On 15 September, the day when the RVT rule was introduced, a public rally took place in Ljubljana, more specifically in the Square of the Republic (Slovene: Trg republike), where the protesters expressed their disagreement with what they considered to be unreasonable measures imposed by the government. The initiator and organiser of the protest rally was Zoran Stevanović, a politician who had run unsuccessfully for the position of the Mayor of Kranj twice before. Stevanović was one of the speakers at the initially peaceful protest rally that later turned into violent demonstrations, which in turn required the police to use tear gas and water cannon. Among other things, Stevanović justified the rally by saying: "*They are stealing our money under the pretext of protecting our health. Half of the citizens can no longer move around without carrying their RVT certificates,*" adding that they demanded the abolition of compulsory measures and restrictions" (MMC RTV 2021).

³⁰ The first vaccine arrived in Slovenia on 26 December 2020 (Portal GOV).

It is important to remember that Stevanovič was inviting people to participate in the rally via Facebook, more specifically through the Resni.ca Party Facebook page, which was created on 26 January 2019. Followers of that page were therefore the first to know about the very first as well as all subsequent rallies which were labelled ‘Wednesday protests’ by the mainstream Slovenian media.³¹ However, as the rallies were not limited only to those following the Resni.ca Party Facebook page, the Wednesday protests eventually became known as a *sui generis* citizens' movement.

As noted by the journalists Janez Markeš and Ali Žerdin (DELO 2021), Wednesday protesters were a heterogeneous group, covering both the left and the right side of the political spectrum. It can therefore be established that the ‘anti-vaccination’ movement in a way bridged the ideological gap between the left and the right or made those differences completely irrelevant. In short, it brought to light something that Stevanovič had already pointed out less than a year earlier, even before the political party was officially established, when expressing his views in the extensive, one hour video interview published on 20 December 2020 on the Resni.ca Facebook page. In that interview Stevanovič explained his motives for entering politics, giving reasons for the establishment of a new political party and describing the ideas it advocated. Among other things, he also touched upon the division between ‘the left and the right’, saying that such conflict was artificial and in the interest of all those involved. Moreover, in his opinion the polarisation of citizens on ideological grounds serves as a means of stabilising the political space that has been dominated for 30 years by the same network made up of different political, economic and media elites whose sole purpose is, according to Stevanovič, to continue the impoverishment of the state, mainly by means of corruption. In this sense, ideological divisions on irrelevant issues (e.g. attitudes towards semi-past history) come in handy for all those involved, as such conflicts tend to obscure what is really going on behind the scenes (Stevanovic in Intervju z resnico: Zoran Stevanovič 2020).

³¹ Even before Wednesday protests, various social initiatives organised Friday protests every Friday for several months. Friday protests were attended by some of the most prominent representatives of the political parties in the opposition. Although the content of the protests varied from week to week (climate, culture, media, democracy, etc.), their common denominator was one - the opposition to the policies pursued by the Prime Minister Janez Janša – the ‘anti-Janša sentiment’.

Forming a political party

"The Resni.ca Party was born out of the Resni.ca citizens' movement and is currently the most popular political entity among young people, having gained widespread popularity on social media networks. We enjoy much greater support than any other political party. The Resni.ca Party was founded exclusively by citizens who took the initiative to establish the party. During the unfavourable times of the corona crisis, citizens from all over Slovenia voluntarily sent in Party Founding Declarations, and we quickly managed to collect the necessary amount of declarations in question and register the party" (Stevanović in Hanc 2021).

It should be stressed that Zoran Stevanović can by no means be considered a newcomer to politics, since he used to be a member of the Slovenian National Party (SNS) in the past, while in 2014 and 2018, he also ran with his own list of candidates for the local elections of the Kranj Municipality. It is worth highlighting the 2018 local elections, when Stevanović and his Zoran for Kranj list of candidates managed to make it to the second round of elections, while the list itself received the highest number of votes, thus securing the majority of seats on the City Council. As explained by Stevanović, it was that very success that prompted the idea of promoting his viewpoints beyond the local area at some point in the future. In other words, as early as 2018, he started pondering the idea of running in the parliamentary elections (Stevanović in Intervju z resnico: Zoran Stevanović 2020).

As explained by Stevanović in the above-mentioned video interview (ibid.), the Resni.ca political party was formed out of the eponymous citizens' movement which was mainly active on Facebook prior to the protest rallies. It was the emergence of the government led by Janez Janša, the epidemic declaration, resistance to measures, and later in particular doubts about vaccines and the related RVT rules that created favourable conditions for the formation of a new political party.³² In this sense, the protest rally taking place on 15 September 2021 proved to be the turning point, as the wider public became aware of the existence of the Resni.ca Party as a political player. Due to the subsequent riots as well as the unjustified police intervention, the Resni.ca Party, and in particular Stevanović, its leader and the organizer of the rally, received (much needed) mainstream media attention. From that moment on, the number of followers on Facebook increased sharply, and at some point, the page administrators started collecting

³² The party was formally established on 14 January 2021.

signatures for the establishment of the party, the signatures being sent by followers on their own initiative.

The Resni.ca Party programme

1. Protecting freedom and privacy: the citizens' movement Resni.ca (Truth) is committed to protecting and preserving the privacy of individuals, which is increasingly threatened by the integration of modern technology into state and transnational surveillance measures (e.g. the introduction of electronic vignettes and ID cards), stressing the importance of safeguarding the principles of human rights and privacy. As a concrete example, it is worth mentioning the strategy that the party would introduce in the Covid crisis. The strategy in question was based on the assumption that the individual body shall remain inviolable, which is to say that vaccination is a matter of personal decision that shall by no means be imposed or subject to any conditions.

2. Sovereignty and stability: one of the key objectives of the movement is to urgently reduce public debt which leads Slovenia into bankruptcy and permanent dependence on international organisations, underlining the need for a genuine sovereign democracy and the establishment of policies that prioritise national interests over those of international financial and political entities. That also includes tackling the issue of foreign debt and its impact on the country's economic and political stability. At this point, it is worth highlighting the concept of sovereign democracy, which the Memorandum describes as a type of democracy where citizens shall remain the sovereign power in domestic politics (the inviolability and ultimacy of the individual will), while the Republic of Slovenia shall remain the sovereign power in foreign policy (the will and interests of the citizen are above the interests of international institutions). As regards the latter, the Resni.ca Party advocates, among other things, the reconsideration of Slovenia's membership in the EU and NATO.

3. Social justice and reforms: the Resni.ca Party strives to reorganise the labour market (simplification of labour laws) in order to create new jobs, reduce unemployment and stimulate investments. The party aims to achieve social justice by lowering taxes, which they believe would result in lower prices and, at the same time, increase consumer purchasing power. This would lead to increased consumption, and as a result, lower taxes would not have a noteworthy impact, so there would still be enough money in the state budget to increase pensions, social

transfers, abolish supplementary insurance and establish public healthcare system (the existing elites have a vested interest in preserving the so-called state-run healthcare system). In summary, the Resna.ca Party aims to establish a more balanced and fair socio-economic system addressing the needs of all citizens, especially the needs of workers, pensioners, and other vulnerable groups.

5. Fair distribution of power: the Resni.ca Party is concerned with the concentration of power in the hands of a few mega-corporations, the increase of the wealth of some billionaires during the COVID crisis and the need to fight corruption in Slovenia. They stress the importance of creating a political system that will truly represent the interests of people and strive for the well-being of society as a whole. More specifically, they advocate a political system based on transparency, accountability and inclusivity (involving citizens in decision-making processes). As regards the latter, the Memorandum proposes the introduction of referendums at the national level and a specific type of assembly at the local level, with citizens being able to take decisions on important local issues. The proposal in question particularly highlights the situation of rural populations who are considered to be all too often dependent on decisions taken in the city. As for the referendums, they shall be related to important social issues affecting all citizens. At this point it shall also be stressed that the Memorandum stipulates that the results of the referendum be binding on the government (and not merely of a consultative nature). In that manner, the power would truly be in the hands of the people, and not the other way around - the fate of the people being in the hands of each successive government.

5. Pragmatic and selective migration policy: the Resni.ca Party advocates a policy that aims to distinguish between good and bad migrations. In this sense, the Memorandum makes a distinction between good migrations (those that bring certain benefits to the country in terms of knowledge, labour or capital) and bad migrations (those representing a financial burden on the country in general, in the sense of the exploitation of social rights - social tourism, and serving as a threat to the Slovenian citizens in need, as they are deprived of resources which would otherwise be allocated to them). In order to avoid such exploitation of the system, the Resni.ca Party would limit the scope of social rights, granting them solely and exclusively to the individuals holding a Slovenian passport, i.e. Slovenian citizenship.

Conclusion

The analysis of the programme promoted by the Resni.ca Party points to certain general characteristics of populism, suggesting some similarities that are worth being highlighted. In order to clarify this matter, a link needs to be established between the final findings and the interview given by Zoran Stevanović, the party's leader and president, with the interview being intended for the followers of the Resni.ca Party Facebook group. If we begin with the first characteristic (addressing a large group of people), it can be established that the party has placed a Slovenian citizen at the forefront of its activities, considering a hard-working, fair and socially critical Slovenian citizen as a source of inspiration for the promotion of the party's interests. As pointed out by Stevanović in the interview, the party aims to address primarily those citizens who feel that their voices are not heard or taken into account, the citizens who are tired of ideological divisions and would like to see the government acting in their interests, being the voice of the people, rather than staying focused on ideological conflicts. As far as addressing a large group of people is concerned, it is worth pointing out the 60% proportion, which, according to Stevanović, represents the share of the Resni.ca Party voters. Since that percentage represents two-thirds of the entire population, it can be concluded that the Resni.ca Party is addressing the majority, which is a classic example of populist movements, since this gives rise to the impression that their views are perfectly legitimate. The anti-vaccination movement and the opposition to the RVT rule offer a striking example of such populism.

Another general feature observed in the Party Memorandum is its criticism of the existing political parties and elites. In this respect, the Resni.ca Party, headed by its President Stevanović, tends to express harsh criticism of the existing political parties and elites, accusing them of deliberately destroying the country, which is primarily manifested in their corrupt acts. The latter has resulted, among other things, in the deterioration of road and other infrastructure, destruction of public healthcare system, pay gaps and strikes in the public sector, lower pensions and deterioration in the quality of life. With such criticisms, the Resni.ca Party deliberately aims to distance itself from the existing elites, proclaiming itself the representative of the people while also claiming that the existing political power (including all parliamentary parties) is nothing but an unethical elite.

As regards social and economic issues, which is the third general feature of populist movements, the Resni.ca Party aims to tackle, among other things, unemployment, tax policy

and the related social injustice. In this sense, measures such as tax cuts, pension increases and the abolition of supplementary health insurance come across as populist *per se*. In fact, those are all measures that most people find appealing, with such measures particularly affecting the most vulnerable groups in society.

Although the Resni.ca Party programme does not explicitly underline the importance of national identity, there are some indications in that direction, particularly by questioning Slovenia's membership in the EU and NATO, which clearly illustrates that much emphasis is placed on the sovereignty and independence of the country. In this context, it is also worth stressing the exclusionary migration policies aiming to protect the interests of the Slovenian citizens at the expense of useless foreigners. This clearly signifies that the Resni.ca Party is more concerned with the cult of citizenship than with the cult of nationality.

To sum up, considering all the findings established on the basis of the theory as well as Stevanović's programme and explanations, it can be established that the Resni.ca Party in general appears to be a populist movement, which is reflected in the fact that it aims to promote itself as a people's spokesperson, distancing itself from the existing elites while also being critical of the current situation, suggesting certain solutions which may indeed appear to be simple, but are in fact difficult to perform.

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Alenka Pandiloska Jurak*

CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC INSTRUMENTS IN ENSURING STABLE ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY – CASE STUDY OF SLOVENIA

Introduction

Markets are institutions that do not appear spontaneously but are socially shaped. Each system is a configuration of various social structures (networks, institutions and states), and political and cultural influences on economic life (Bandelj 2007). Structural conditions encompass the influence of repeated patterns of social interaction in the form of social networks or social institutions. Due to the unequal distribution of resources, the role of power is visible, which stimulates the pursuit of political interests and the battle for power in the economic sphere. Social forces not only constrain economic agents seeking efficiency but also enable and empower social actors to construct and then execute economic strategies of economic action and conditions of uncertainty. This also determines economic behaviour (Bandelj 2007).

Countries are not isolated islands, so they all participate in the global economy and are linked by trade and finance (Samuelson and Nordhaus 1998). They pay a lot of attention to foreign trade flows. Here, one of the particularly important indicators is net export, i.e., the numerical difference between the value of imports and exports. International trade promotes efficiency and accelerates economic growth, so the goal of growing international trade is becoming increasingly important. International connections have become stronger due to the reduction of transport and communication costs. "International trade has replaced the expansion of empires and military victory as the surest path to a nation's wealth and influence" (ibid.). As economies

* Alenka Pandiloska Jurak is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Information Studies in Novo mesto and a researcher at Rudolfovo – Scientific and Technological Centre Novo Mesto.

become more closely linked, economic policymakers are paying more and more attention to international economic policy. The main concerns of countries are both trade policy and international financial management. When the international economic system works smoothly, it contributes to rapid economic growth. If trading ceases, production and incomes around the world suffer (ibid.). Economic growth represents an increase in a nation's potential GDP (Samuelson and Nordhaus 1998). Growth is the most important determinant of change and living standards over time. The most important benefit of growth lies in the contribution of the long-term effort to raise living standards and escape poverty. Small differences in national growth rates can lead to large national differences in living standards in a few decades (Lipsey and Chrystal 2011).

The role of the state institutions in the economic exchange

Searching for opportunities in other markets is not only important for the companies themselves but also for the country. Export or export demand (Lah and Ilić 2007) can be an important generator of economic growth, which is especially true for smaller economies. In the case of Slovenia, exports represent more than 83.6% of the value of the Slovenian gross domestic product (from here on GDP) (Ministrstvo za gospodarski razvoj in tehnologijo 2023). Due to their interest on the one hand and the needs and requirements of the economy on the other, countries formulate economic policies and within their framework legal and other resources, with which they set the framework for action plans. In this way, they set rules for the work of domestic producers and service providers and restrictions for foreign ones, thus trying to protect their economy. The economic policy should also contain instruments to help companies with internationalization, namely both the sale of products or articles and the establishment of subsidiary companies in another market (Morrison 2006; Samuelson and Nordhaus 1998).

Countries, their economic development (Kumar 2007) and the related standard of living of citizens increasingly depend on the success achieved in the development of economic unions and flows across national borders. Modern companies increasingly do business in international markets. Their entire activity, together with state guidance, shapes international economic relations for each country (ibid.). Due to the different distribution (Kumar 2007; Morrison 2006) among economic entities, the international exchange of an individual economic area is, as a rule, always directed. International exchange, both in the past and today, has never taken place

under conditions of complete external economic liberalism (ibid.). A more correct term would be market liberalization (Morrison 2006). The state's external economic orientation (Kumar 2007), while oscillating between the desire for liberalism and the practice of restrictions, primarily enforces this protective orientation of international exchange. The reasons for the deviation of economic practice from the ideal of external economic liberalism are (i) domestic pressure and protection requirements exerted by economic entities affected by free international trade, and (ii) responses to possible foreign restrictions on exports from the observed economic area (Kumar 2007); or as reasons for and against, defined by Morrison (Morrison 2006).

Free trade (Morrison 2006) benefits all countries. Capitalism is driven by competition, and the cost of protecting the industry can be high. On the other hand, the protection of national industry promotes independence and security. The level of employment can only be maintained with the help of protective measures. National industry, aided by the state, can compete globally, and increase national wealth. States intervene in international trade for several reasons: nurturing young industries and promoting industrialization, protecting domestic employment, especially low-skilled, low-income cities, protecting the consumer from dangerous products, and protecting the national interest through state purchases in strategic industries, strategic trade policy, *globally competitive industry, the pursuit of international politics and the maintenance of national culture and identity* (Coughlin, Chrystal, and Wood 1995; Morrison 2006). The use of state measures to guide international exchange is often regulated by special international criteria and agreements, and implementation is monitored through joint institutions, i.e. international economic organizations and agreements (Kumar 2007).

State measures and direction (Kumar 2007) of international exchange can be classified into two groups, namely measures of active and measures of passive external economic protection policy. The direct measures of steering the flow of goods or protectionism are: (i) customs, (ii) non-tariff measures: self-limiting export measures, subsidies and countervailing duties, quantitative restrictions, import/export permits and prohibitions, anti-dumping measures, levies (the owner of the goods must pay special, additional duty in the national currency when crossing the economic space), technical barriers in international trade, special provisions on import and export (Kumar 2007; Coughlin, Chrystal, and Wood 1995; Morrison 2006), quotas, embargoes, etc. (Benko 1997).

From an institutional point of view, the state uses diplomacy to regulate this area, using its specialized branch - economic diplomacy (Jazbec 2009). It operates from the perspective of four institutionalized paths: (i) It takes place through the activities of foreign ministries, which coordinate these processes to a certain extent and have a considerable influence on their content. (ii) This form of diplomacy is also carried out by the competent ministries of economy and trade, as these ministries are the basic creators and promoters of economic policy. Some countries have special economic missions abroad, which are established by the ministries of economy themselves and are not part of diplomatic missions. (iii) An increasingly important and noticeable place in the implementation of economic diplomacy is occupied by chambers, interest associations and promotional non-governmental institutions, which on the one hand cooperate with partner organizations in various countries, and on the other hand establish their own representative offices in interested countries and international organizations. (iv) Many companies also participate in the implementation of this diplomacy. economic subjects. Diplomacy opens the door to foreign markets for the economy and helps it to make strategic connections in the face of strong competition. During their visits abroad, the highest state representatives also include business delegations in their team. Government coordination of economic appearances abroad is also common, to achieve greater impact and ensure financial success (ibid.).

The foreign policy of small countries, such as Slovenia, is characterized by a series of peculiarities that those who decide on foreign policy and implement it are obliged to take into account (Petrič 2010). Particularities are evident in the selection of objectives and corresponding means, in the selection of strategy and in the organization and mode of operation of their foreign service. Small countries do not have much power to use as an instrument of foreign policy, so they need effective diplomacy more than other countries (ibid.).

In line with the above, we formulated the following research question: *How do companies as beneficiaries perceive the performance of state institutions in the field of internationalization?*

Methodology

The research covered the broader area of internationalization. In the following, we present the methodology relevant to answering our research question.

The first part of the research was carried out using a quantitative research methodology. The main reason for the selection is the possibility of generalizing the results to the population and the choice of objective measurement instruments. A survey was used to obtain key information. It allows us to collect data on entire populations, guaranteeing anonymity, and thus gain access to data that we would not otherwise have access to. In the first phase, a questionnaire was developed. In the second phase, a pilot survey was conducted on a sample of companies, which pointed out the possible shortcomings of the question posed. The entire population was surveyed. The data underwent statistical analysis and were subsequently interpreted with a focus on their content. In our study, we limited ourselves to considering HTC Slovenia as a player entering the markets of other countries. There are two reasons: First, technology is a key driver of the global economy (Morrison 2006); also for more on innovation and digitalization see (Besednjak Valič 2019; Besednjak Valič, Kolar, and Lamut 2020; 2021; Pandiloska, Jurak 2021). In the context of economic globalization, technology is a key factor in enhancing the growth and competitiveness of the business world. Technology-intensive companies have more innovation, are gaining new markets, are more productive in using the resources available, and generally provide more to the people they employ. HTCs are those whose products are the fastest-growing in international trade, and their dynamics help to improve efficiency in other sectors (Hatzichronoglou 1997). Second, given the facts mentioned in point 1, it is appropriate to identify the difficulties these companies face in the internationalization process and what opportunities exist to improve the situation from the perspective of HTC and the country.

A dedicated sampling method was used. The population is represented by HTCs in Slovenia. The designation of units in a population is based on the classification established by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (henceforth OECD). The OECD Secretariat identified the methods used to classify sectors and products by technology level and introduced two lists: one for activities (sector approach) and the other for products (product approach). The data used to compile the activity list are based on the International Standard Classification of Industrial Activities, ISIC Rev 2. The new classification covers only the manufacturing industry. We categorized R&D intensity based on a single criterion, resulting in the identification of four distinct groups: high-tech, medium-high-tech, medium-low-tech, and low-tech. To enhance the analytical capabilities for international trade analysis, we introduced the product-by-product approach (Hatzichronoglou 1997). This approach is rooted in the Standard International Trade Classification, specifically SITC Rev 3. (Hatzichronoglou 1997).

Utilizing the OECD classification system and adapting it to the Slovenian Standard classification of activities (Standarsna klasifikacija dejavnosti – SKD), we gathered data from The Slovenian Business Register (Javna baza podatkov o vseh poslovnih subjektih s sedežem na območju Republike Slovenije - AJPES). As of March 25, 2011, our study encompassed a population of 364 companies. The pilot survey was initiated in May 2011 and continued into April 2013. Notably, this comprehensive survey covered the entirety of Slovenian High-Tech Companies (HTCs). There were 12.1% of questionnaires returned. The obtained data were processed in the SPSS program. Due to the small sample and missing answers to some questions, it was not possible to perform some comparative and sample statistical calculations. Due to the low number of responses, some answers were merged. In this way, a better picture of the respondents' opinions was shown. Due to the questionability of the representativeness of the sample, the two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was calculated based on the distribution of returned business questionnaires and the distribution of the population by region. The results showed that we could not claim that there was a difference between the sample and the population.

Since the survey can have many disadvantages (Kumar 2007), such as low responsiveness, and a lack of additional explanation, the survey was followed by individual, structured interviews. These provided a more in-depth and substantive look at the topic. The survey results raised some new questions that anonymous interviews would not answer. During the interviews, we cross-validated the findings from the survey.

In the latter phase of our research, we employed a qualitative research approach with the following objectives: (i) to validate the survey findings. (ii) to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons behind the survey results. (iii) to obtain personal interpretations from key stakeholders regarding the survey results. (iv) to assess the alignment or disparity in perspectives among stakeholders, encompassing not only companies but also those from the public domain and economic associations. An interview can be a very rich source of data and allow an in-depth study of the phenomenon (Tratnik 2002; Vogrinc, Zuljan, and Kožuh 2008). Conducting interviews offers enhanced flexibility and the opportunity to gather diverse, occasionally unanticipated information, complementing the survey data. (Lamut et al. 2012). The sample size and the identification of relevant interviewees were determined based on the results of the survey analysis. After the interviews, qualitative content analysis was made.

A dedicated sampling method was used. The interviewees were divided into three relevant spheres: public institutions, economic associations, and businesses. We identified two institutions/companies in each sphere. The selection of interviewees was predicated on their professional background and expertise in the specific subject matter under consideration. In total, six interviews were conducted in July 2015. The questionnaire consists of four thematic sections, namely, (i) institutional assistance, (ii) non-institutional assistance, (iii) involvement in public policy networks and planning of strategic documents, and (iv) networking. It consists of eight questions. The qualitative content analysis of the interviews conducted in the research can be roughly divided into six steps (Mesec 1998): (1) editing material, (2) identifying coding units, (3) open coding, (4) selecting and defining relevant concepts and categories, (5) respectively, coding and (6) designing the final theoretical formulation (Mesec 1998).

Data presentation and interpretation

In the following paragraphs, we present findings that are relevant to answering our research question.

Findings from the questionnaire

Most HTC's employ a person or a group of persons for sales on the EU, EFTA and third-country markets, or for establishing contacts with foreign countries. The results are expected. It is interesting, however, that in 21 of the 24 companies where these persons are employed, this area is covered by the director or owner of the company. It is true that the answers to this question are few, but these answers are nevertheless clear. We can assume that the questionnaire was answered by companies that have a smaller number of employees and thus do not have a special department for establishing contacts with foreign countries. On the other hand, the data also speaks of the company's understanding of the importance and strategy of market penetration, as the responsibility for this part of the business and concern for performance is assumed by people in leading positions.

We found that personal acquaintances are one of the key mechanisms for penetrating the EU and EFTA markets as well as the markets of third countries. HTC mostly believe that employees form their network of relevant acquaintances during employment in their company. They also

more or less agree that employees form their network of relevant acquaintances during employment in other companies, while opinions about acquaintances formed independently of employment are relatively evenly divided. Almost half of the respondents believe that a person who has relevant personal acquaintances also has an employment advantage.

HTC agree and disagree on whether Slovenian companies help Slovenian state institutions in establishing international contacts with third countries. On the other hand, more than half of them think that Slovenian companies contributed to Slovenia's entry into the EU. Half of the respondents agree and disagree that Slovenian companies participate in public debates on proposed laws that interfere with the economic sphere in Slovenia. Only 10% of respondents agree and as many as 40% disagree with this statement. More than half (57.5%) of them believe that the proposals of Slovenian companies are not considered in public debates on proposed laws that interfere with the economic sphere in Slovenia.

Slovenia's entry into the EU contributed to the entry of Slovenian companies into the markets of EU and EFTA member states (71.4%), but it was not of significant importance for penetration into the markets of third countries. Regarding the prevention of entry of Slovenian companies into the markets by domestic companies, our HTC has very divided opinions, both in the case of the EU and EFTA markets, as well as the markets of third countries. They also think similarly about the obstruction of state policies, with a larger share of disagreement on the side of the EU and EFTA markets. For the EU and EFTA markets, the majority believe that intercultural differences do not hinder market penetration (52.5%). Opinion on third-country markets is roughly evenly split. The biggest barrier to market penetration is a lack of knowledge of the market, namely 61% in the case of EU and EFTA member states and 42.9%, i.e. lower, in the case of third-country markets.

Slovenia's entry into the EU network is therefore relevant from the point of view of enabling penetration into the markets of member states because administrative obstacles have been eliminated with membership. Obstacles, such as intercultural differences, do not present problems, it is more problematic that companies do not do their homework and do not prepare sufficiently thoroughly for entering the market, do not think enough about the characteristics of the market they are entering, but 'just' believe into your product.

Findings from the qualitative research

In the following paragraphs we present the findings from the interviews. The questions for the interviewees were linked to the findings of the questionnaire.

Correction of institutional support mechanisms for the internationalization of companies

All interviewees estimate that systemic correction of national support mechanisms in the process of internationalization of Slovenian companies would be expedient. The interviewees highlight the following as key national actors in the internationalization of companies: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under whose auspices economic diplomacy operates, the Ministry of the Economy and SPIRIT. According to the interviewees, changes to the national system are necessary due to the rigidity and too too-slow responsiveness and poor productivity of national actors in the processes of internationalization of companies.

The ineffectiveness of institutional mechanisms is linked to several obstacles or shortcomings identified by the interviewees. The interviewees drew attention to the difficult-to-access financial mechanisms available to national actors in promoting the internationalization of companies. In this context, it is mainly about the possibility of (1) insurance of international transactions by SID Bank and (2) the drawing of non-refundable financial resources for the penetration of companies into foreign markets. Here, the interviewees note that the financial mechanisms at the national level are weak, difficult to access and "*may concentrate on certain spheres*" (interviewee D) or do not contain adequate regulations for SMEs.

The interviewees confirm the fact that international business insurance is (maybe) of vital importance for companies, especially in cases where business agreements/collaborations related to larger financial resources are concluded. In these cases, it is essential that the insurance of international transactions is reliable and concrete. Interviewee C, who has experience in obtaining insurance for international business and regularly monitors SID Bank's information materials, notes that in their operation there is a gap "*between what they represent and reality*" (interviewee c). The perceived gap refers to the finding that a large number of companies want to use such tools, but they are inaccessible to them, as they do not meet the criteria or conditions for obtaining insurance for international business/non-refundable financial assets. Most of the interviewees confirm the conclusion that the conditions for drawing financial

aid mechanisms at the national level are very strict and only a few companies meet them. The interviewee - a representative of the economic sphere - says that they have bad experiences with obtaining insurance for international business. In doing so, he cites the example of an attempt to penetrate the African market, for which the bank did not want to issue insurance. According to the experience of an interviewee employed at a national institution, the availability of obtaining financial assistance is conditioned by an assessment of the (potential) success of the company's operations or by the "*issue of the company's health*" (interviewee A). Financial mechanisms are inaccessible, as they are said to be 'unhealthy' based on (own) analyzes and several years of monitoring of business operations by interviewee A. As a result, interviewee A understands the skepticism of banks when they do not want to issue insurance for international business and thereby financially support (in their opinion) risky business activities of companies. Judging by the testimonies of the interviewees, this kind of relationship dynamic introduces mistrust between companies and national actors. Above all, the mistrust of companies in the operation of institutional mechanisms is growing, and as a result, companies use alternative or non-institutional mechanisms to overcome obstacles to penetration into foreign markets.

Another shortcoming or reason for the ineffective functioning of institutional mechanisms was the high turnover of staff at embassies and in economic diplomacy. The direct consequence of (too) frequent personnel changes at the national level in (the most frequent) time spans of four years (e.g., the duration of the mandate of ambassadors) is the loss of networks and the intensity of connections that the representative of the national authority establishes during his activity in the foreign market that the company wants to enter penetrate. The interviewees repeatedly point out that building a high-quality network of connections with relevant actors is a long-term or multi-year process, but it is crucial for the internationalization of the company. The relevance of the existence of networks in the process of internationalization of a company refers to the possibility of obtaining direct information about the characteristics of a foreign market or the references of a potential business partner operating in the market that the company wants to enter. It is about the acquisition of implicit knowledge by various actors in the internationalization process.

According to interviewee B, the question of the professional qualifications of employees in national institutions, or in embassies and in economic diplomacy, also relates to the personnel problem of institutional mechanisms. The interviewees noted that (mainly) ambassadors and

economic advisors lack knowledge and experience in the field of economics and entrepreneurship. As a result, it is more difficult for them to understand the needs and problems of companies in internationalization. There are exceptions to this, such as the ambassador in Berlin and the ambassador in Copenhagen. The lack of competence of ambassadors and economic advisers is (also) a consequence of the state's non-commitment to better professional training of national representatives abroad.

The fourth recognized problem of institutional mechanisms in the process of internationalization of companies is the mismatch between the offer of companies and the needs of (foreign) markets and the presence of Slovenian diplomatic missions/embassies in these markets. According to the experience of interviewee B, Slovenian companies are moving towards fast-growing and geographically distant markets, such as Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Russia. These markets are characterized by a close correlation between the political and economic spheres, and as a result, the intervention of national institutions/Slovenian embassies in the internationalization processes of Slovenian companies is crucial. It was found that the presence of Slovenian diplomacy in fast-growing and desired foreign markets is scanty. The interviewees point out that the network of Slovenian representative offices is very well formed in Europe, but Slovenian companies do not need the same degree of institutional assistance when penetrating the markets of European countries as they do in fast-growing and distant markets.

The institutional support mechanisms for the internationalization of companies have a wrong lever concept since the activities carried out by national actors are often 'one-off episodes'. Through its institutions that work in the field of internationalization, the state pays the most attention to (one or several days) events/delegations. Interviewee C describes their ineffectiveness: "*The state makes a plan, a table of events. We will go to Japan, America, Chile, Kurdistan. He carries out the events, ticks the folder and the matter is finished*" (Interviewee C). The disadvantage of the organization of one-off episodes is that the national actors do not collect feedback or carry out a continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of the event by the participants.

By considering the perceived shortcomings, changes in institutional mechanisms in the internationalization of companies should be aimed at a personalized concept of providing support to companies. The personalization of institutional mechanisms is supposed to be based

on the individual treatment of the company's internationalization, which interviewee C describes as: "*One-on-one work.*" *You have to invite this company, listen to it, empathize with it in order to even know what you can offer it. Then you have to analyze yourself, whether you even have what you can offer him. From this stage onwards, you offer support.../you prepare the ground for him, you tell him everything about what is allowed and what is not allowed, how it is allowed. He goes to the market, goes according to the program you prepare and comes back/.../and we talk and make a plan for the future/.../until you find him a company or an individual on the market. In this case, you give him some added value "* (interviewee C). An individual and holistic approach to support the company in the process of internationalization would be easier if (i) there was a quality platform or network of (national) support institutions and (ii) the ability to utilize already existing (infrastructural/personnel) resources. Interviewee B cites as an example of underutilization of the existing infrastructure: "*Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, which is one of the better markets/.../in Africa. We even have premises inherited from the former Yugoslavia/...now they are neglected because they were not maintained, but.../Yugoslavia had prestigious locations in Africa*" (interviewee B). The interviewees recognize a high-quality national platform in the systemically organized way of internationalizing companies, with which the state monitors the dynamics of key economic sectors and operations. Monitoring is carried out with the help of an integrated platform, which includes universities, business and professional centres, educational centres for companies, non-governmental organizations, etc.

Involvement of companies in public political networks/planning of strategic documents

In the context of public political/national networks, two inhibiting factors in the internationalization processes of Slovenian companies are detected through the testimony of the interviewees. The first one refers to the finding that the actors at the national level are not connected with each other, or that a low level of cooperation can be detected between them. Another inhibiting factor is recognized in the indirect involvement of companies in public political /national networks in the planning of strategic internationalization documents. According to the interviewees, companies are invited to draft strategic documents through 'intermediaries': Chamber of Commerce of Slovenia or Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia, Regional Development Agency, Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for the Promotion of Investment, Entrepreneurship and Internationalisation (SPIRIT) and various associations aimed at entrepreneurs. Rarely do national actors approach companies directly

when collecting feedback/performing an analysis or snapshot of the situation regarding the (failure) of internationalization. A representative of the national authority (interviewee B) explains this behaviour in terms of: "*We have some companies that are very powerful, influential, have political connections and can quickly influence the whole policy to focus on their direction.*" Wrong. *We must not allow this. It is necessary to look at this matter holistically.../...on the one hand, which markets are strategic, important, what they want from activities, which activities they miss the most, in what way, where they want help. We tried to listen to them because this is the basis of one such document/.../You have to look at the whole picture*" (interviewee B). Interviewees E and F, who are owners of high-tech companies with international business experience, mentioned that mainly large companies are invited directly (by state institutions) to draft strategic documents and that specialized companies or individuals are invited to participate in writing strategic documents: "*Law firms are hired for regulations and laws, economists for strategies. So they collect some experts rather than getting a broader opinion,*" says interviewee F.

A comprehensive understanding and proactive action of national actors in internationalization processes should also include feedback on the international operation of companies if it wants to create effective documents. Among the national actors, it is possible to detect indications/desire to obtain this kind of feedback from companies, but they estimate that this is lacking. Recognized problems in the context of public policy /national networks result in the appearance of scepticism among economic and national actors regarding the expediency or effectiveness of published national documents/strategies (e.g., Internationalization Program 2015-2012). Interviewee C expresses his doubts about national documents: "*We did something as a country, put a document out, tied budget money to it, but basically we are still not sure if this document is this, that.*" *Will it actually help companies or not*" (Interviewee C). Interviewee C also perceives the problematic nature of national strategies in the fact that they are created by ministries but are implemented by their agencies or branch offices. As a result, interviewee C calls for enhanced interdepartmental cooperation in the coordination of documents of national importance.

Relevance of non-institutional mechanisms and search for alternative forms of assistance

Interviewee B recognizes the negative experiences of companies in the poor responsiveness of national actors in offering support or solving (usually very complex and difficult to solve)

problems of companies. The exaggerated expectations of companies from institutional aid mechanisms are presented by interviewee B on the concrete example of the penetration of a Slovenian company into Turkmenistan and says: "*There is a vertical democracy there, you can't get there without political help anyway, diplomacy has established contacts through diplomacy, but now I would like to the minister would go to a meeting with him, where he would introduce himself and sign at least some letter of intent, but the state cannot go that far*" (interviewee B). Interviewees E and F also perceive the inactivity of national actors. "*The institutions of the Republic of Slovenia do little to support companies and their exports. That is why companies are also looking for other ways*", says interviewee E. "*This is due to the inefficiency of the state apparatus. It is the state apparatus that inhibits companies and does not help them. So the state apparatus would have already done a lot, if it did nothing, it would be better than working, because when it works, it creates confusion. So, the state apparatus in terms of supporting companies in overcoming obstacles is not in order,*" notes interviewee F. However, negative experiences affect/reduce the confidence of companies in national mechanisms for internationalization assistance.

Discussion

The complexity of the field does not allow for a single answer to the research question. In this chapter we address the research findings in the light of answering the research question. We sketch a broader picture of business opinion that provides several possibilities for further research in the areas of internationalization policy implementation, the functioning of diplomacy, social capital, financial mechanisms in the context of internationalization, the role of the 'support environment' in internationalization, and so on.

Even though the restrictions faced by companies are often administrative and should be solved at the state -state-level, companies are looking for other possible solutions due to a lack of trust in the institutions of their own country. Institutional mechanisms are generally less crucial to aid penetration than non-institutional ones. According to the interviewees, these types of impulses are wrong and are the result of (1) poor self-awareness of the company, (2) past negative experiences of companies with national institutions and (3) lack of confidence in effective, proactive action when companies penetrate foreign markets. Negative experiences are the result of the poor responsiveness of national actors in offering support or solving (usually

very complex and difficult to solve) problems, which affect and reduce companies' trust in national internationalization assistance mechanisms. Based on the established evaluation criteria and collected data, we can conclude that the implementation of the economic policy in the area of the mechanism for helping companies in institutionalization was not successful and effective, even though there were no legal or other obstacles. The instructions and expected results were clear. The functioning of the institutions and the work of the employees in these institutions are proving to be a problem. Actors at the national level are not connected with each other, or there is a low level of cooperation between them indirect involvement of companies in public political /national networks in the planning of strategic internationalization documents.

However, changes to the national system are necessary due to the rigidity, too slow responsiveness, and poor productivity of national actors in the processes of internationalization of companies. Financial mechanisms are difficult to access. The high turnover of staff at embassies and in economic diplomacy also proved to be a major drawback or reason for the inefficient functioning of institutional mechanisms. The direct consequence of (too) frequent personnel changes at the national level in (the most frequent) time spans of four years (e.g., the duration of the mandate of ambassadors) is the loss of networks and the intensity of connections that the representative of the national authority establishes during his activity in the foreign market that the company wants to enter penetrate. The interviewees repeatedly pointed out that building a quality network of connections with relevant actors is a long-term or multi-year process, but it is crucial for the internationalization of the company. The relevance of the existence of networks in the process of internationalization of a company refers above all to the possibility of obtaining direct information about the characteristics of a foreign market or the references of a potential business partner operating in the market that the company wants to enter. It is about the acquisition of implicit knowledge by various actors in the internationalization process.

The issue of the professional qualifications of employees in national institutions or embassies and in economic diplomacy arose, which the result of the state's non-commitment to better professional training of national representatives abroad. The problem is the mismatch between the offer of companies and the needs of (foreign) markets and the presence of Slovenian diplomatic missions/embassies in these markets. Activities carried out by national actors are

often 'one-off episodes'. National actors do not collect feedback or carry out continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of the event by the participants.

Slovenia's entry into the EU proved to be an important network from several points of view. With the membership of the Republic of Slovenia in the EU, we have become an actor in the EU network, which (as a rule) does not know administrative and customs barriers ('gatekeeper' does not exist), which makes the work of companies much easier. This form of network can be depicted as these small worlds where random connections between actors occur. Membership in the EU is one of the important mechanisms for penetrating the EU and EFTA markets as well as the markets of other countries. In the first case, we can talk about membership in the EU as a brand - made in the EU (made in EU), which raises the visibility and expectations of customers about the standards and quality of the product's manufacture. In the second case, in addition to the aforementioned, we could also talk about this mechanism as membership in the EU network.

Social capital (as a network of personal acquaintances) in connection with the company's own cultural and economic capital, namely as an opportunity to compete with other, more recognizable companies, proved to be extremely important for helping with internationalization. We found that personal acquaintances are one of the key mechanisms for penetrating the EU and EFTA markets as well as the markets of third countries. The basic condition of a successful business is the quality of the product, so that you can offer it to a potential client/partner, and the skills of establishing and maintaining personal acquaintances are of key importance. In this context, knowledge of foreign languages, knowledge of the rules of a foreign business culture, mastery of business etiquette, possession of communication skills and the ability to empathize with the needs/expectations of a potential partner are also important. We speak of social capital from two different perspectives. The first was evident in the results of the survey, and it was additionally confirmed by the results of the interviews. It is about personal contacts and acquaintances of company employees. In the case of the EU and EFTA, according to companies, they are as important as brand strength. A more important mechanism is only the quality of the product. In the case of penetration into the markets of other countries, they even exceed the importance of the brand and are equated with the quality of the products. Another source of personal acquaintances comes from the acquaintances of employees in the institutions of the Republic of Slovenia. The results of the interviews showed the greater importance of these acquaintances or the lack of these, which surprised us. The high turnover of personnel at embassies and in the economic delegation was pointed out as one of

the shortcomings or the reason for the ineffective functioning of institutional mechanisms, which results in the loss of the intensity of the connections that the representative of the national authority establishes during his activity in the foreign market, which the SME wants to penetrate. Building a quality network of connections with relevant actors is a long-term or multi-year process, but it is crucial for internationalization. The relevance of the existence of networks in the process of internationalization of companies refers above all to the possibility of obtaining direct information about the characteristics of a foreign market or the references of a potential business partner operating in the market that the company wants to enter. It is about the acquisition of implicit knowledge by various actors in the internationalization process. The importance of the institutions of the Republic of Slovenia is thus not only important in arranging matters through official channels but also in the personal ties of employees and individuals. Acquaintances are not necessarily limited only to the institutions of another country, but can also interfere with customers. Considering the proven importance of this form of network, it would make sense to consider and act in the direction of consolidating existing ones and enabling the establishment of new such connections.

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Tamara Besednjak Valič*

THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO DEMOCRACY

Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has ushered in an era of unprecedented transformation across industries, economies, and societies worldwide. AI, with its ability to process vast amounts of data, make complex decisions, and learn from experience, stands as a technological marvel that promises to reshape our world in profound ways. However, this transformative force is not without its complexities, particularly when it comes to the fundamental principles of democracy.

As AI continues its exponential growth, several global trends emerge, shaping the landscape of technology and society. These trends encompass breakthroughs in AI research, innovations in applications, and critical discussions about the ethical, social, and political implications of AI. Understanding these trends is essential for grasping the opportunities and challenges AI presents to democratic systems.

AI is entering all aspects of daily lives of people in the following manner. Through AI advancements, especially in Machine learning techniques (Schippers 2020), particularly deep learning and neural networks, have led to remarkable breakthroughs in natural language processing, computer vision, and decision-making. These developments drive the widespread integration of AI into various aspects of our lives. On the other hand the AI is opening questions in the fields of ethics and governance (Schiff et al. 2020). The discourse around fairness, transparency, and accountability in AI systems has gained prominence. Governments and organizations worldwide are grappling with the need for regulatory frameworks to ensure responsible AI development and deployment. Lastly, the AI is entering daily lives (Elliott 2019).

* Tamara Besednjak Valič is Senior research Associate at Rudolfovo – Science and Technology Centre Novo mesto, Associate Professor at the School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica and Assistant professor at Faculty of Information Studies in Novo mesto.

This occurs through personalized recommendations on streaming platforms to chatbots providing customer service, AI systems are becoming integral to our routines. Moreover, AI underpins crucial systems, such as healthcare, finance, and transportation, raising questions about privacy, security, and societal impacts.

This below discussion explores the intersection of AI and democracy within the context of these global trends. It outlines the top three challenges and opportunities that emerge from the evolving relationship between AI and democratic principles, including manipulation of Information and Disinformation. AI-powered algorithms can manipulate information dissemination (Hajli et al. 2022), potentially undermining the informed decision-making essential to democracy. Jointly with ethical questions we address the questions of privacy and surveillance. As AI's data-driven capabilities have led to concerns about mass surveillance, privacy infringements, and the potential for microtargeted political advertising. The question of bias and discrimination is also discussed. As the inherent biases in AI systems can perpetuate inequality and discrimination (Daneshjou et al. 2021) in various domains, posing a threat to the democratic ideals of fairness and equal participation.

On the other hand, AI offers opportunities to enhance democratic processes, from improving accessibility to information and engagement to addressing complex societal challenges through data-driven insights (König and Wenzelburger 2020).

This paper goes into these complex processes, offering a thorough examination of the emerging link between AI and democracy. It strives to illustrate the route forward, where responsible AI deployment coincides with democratic principles and strengthens democratic systems' resilience in an age of technological transition.

Technological advancements of Artificial Intelligence (AI) era

Significant technological developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have occurred since 2015. These advancements have resulted in the development and deployment of upgraded AI systems. Among the most important advancements we mention the Deep learning, as subset of machine learning (Shinde and Shah 2018). Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs) have been refined and applied to a wide range of

applications, including image and speech recognition, as well as natural language processing (NLP). Furthermore, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) have gained prominence as a framework for training neural networks (Creswell et al. 2018). They enable the generation of highly realistic images, videos, and other content. GANs have applications in art, entertainment, and data augmentation. The revolution occurred in Transformer-based models, such as BERT and GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) (Gillioz et al. 2020). Those models have revolutionized natural language processing. These models excel in tasks like language translation, sentiment analysis, and question-answering. Chat GPT-3 and GPT-4, in particular, have garnered attention for its human-like text generation capabilities. GPT-3 and GPT-4 exhibit the ability to generate coherent and contextually appropriate language, hence opening up new opportunities in content generation, chatbots, and automated writing. On the other hand, Reinforcement learning techniques such as Deep Q-Networks (DQN) and Proximal Policy Optimisation (PPO) have achieved amazing results in complicated tasks such as game playing, robotics, and autonomous systems (Alagha et al. 2022; Huang 2020; Melo, Melo, and Maximo 2021).

AI has reached progress in applications to fields of healthcare like medical image analysis, disease diagnosis, drug discovery, and personalized medicine (Yu, Beam, and Kohane 2018), self-driving cars like Tesla and Waymo deploying self-driving cars on public roads for testing (Millar 2016), and in finance like fraud detection, algorithmic trading, credit risk assessment, and customer service (Cao 2022). In healthcare AI models help doctors making accurate diagnosis and treatment decisions. With self-driving cars, the AI, based on machine-learning plays a critical role in enabling safe navigation of those vehicles. Also, in finance machine learning is used to help analyse vast datasets.

In the field of research, the AI is being explored in natural sciences (Xie et al. 2023) (physics, chemistry, and biology). AI aids to simulating complex systems, aids in drug discovery and thus contributing towards scientific discoveries and processes. In the field of applicative science, AI aids in robotics, as AI driven autonomy (Millar 2016) conducts tasks in unstructured environments, but also in industry – in structured environments. The adoption of robots in work processes is nearly inevitable in manufacturing, logistics and also in healthcare. Running the AI driven processes is energetically demanding, so computer scientists are exploring the potentials of quantum computing. The promise of quantum computing is that it will

exponentially increase the processing power available for AI activities. The study of how quantum algorithms can speed up AI processes is still underway.

However, despite all advancement, there is also a raising concern for AI ethics and bias mitigation along with fairness (Schiff et al. 2020). To ensure egalitarian outcomes, researchers and organisations are working on creating tools to detect and remove biases in AI systems.

Key terms defining intersection between Artificial intelligence and democracy

To properly understand the main terminology of this discussion, we need to get acquainted with some most specific characteristics of what we understand under terms of artificial intelligence in relation to democracy and democratic processes. In this context, the development of computer systems capable of doing tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as learning, problem-solving, and decision-making, is referred to as artificial intelligence (AI) (Samoili et al. 2020). Inevitably related to AI is Machine learning (ML). ML (Rebala, Ravi, and Churiwala 2019) is understood as a subset of artificial intelligence that entails the use of algorithms and statistical models to enable computers to improve their performance on a specific task through experience or data. Deep learning is a branch of machine learning which processes and analyses complex data by employing artificial neural networks inspired by the structure of the human brain. As algorithms are man-made, the recent debates problematise the bias arising from the creation and training of the algorithms. The methods and tactics used to decrease or eliminate biases in AI systems, ensuring fairness and equitable treatment, are referred to as bias mitigation techniques and strategies (Mittermaier, Raza, and Kvedar 2023). When AI systems create unfair or discriminatory conclusions due to biased training data or defective algorithms, it can lead to uneven treatment in a variety of circumstances, including democracy. Jointly with bias related to AI, also transparency (Kim, Park, and Suh 2020) can result as problematic, since transparency in AI refers to the clarity and transparency with which AI systems make decisions. Transparent AI systems are easier to comprehend, accountable, and audit. One issue leading to another, in cases there is lack of transparency, the accountability is not available. Accountability in AI (Doshi-Velez et al. 2019) entails making individuals, organisations, or systems accountable for the outcomes of AI-driven decisions or activities, especially when there is evidence of harm or wrongdoing.

Potentially dangerous aspect of technological development in relation to democracy and democratic process is often times include fields as data privacy. Data privacy (Tom et al. 2020) refers to the guarding of individuals' rights and privacy through the protection of personal information and the regulation of data collection, storage, and utilisation by AI systems. Related to data privacy is the potential of systematic surveillance. Systematic surveillance of persons or organisations can be exercised for many useful purposes (Fontes et al. 2022), including security and law enforcement but in relation to development of authoritarian regimes can be especially problematic. In any way, the calls for ethical AI that supports creation and application of artificial intelligence systems that follow ethical principles (Schiff et al. 2020) and rules are necessary. Ethical AI can ensure that AI technologies are consistent with human values and society norms.

The development of AI was studied most in relation to social media platforms and there are some concepts detected as dominating the discussion on threats to democracy and democratic processes. Among those, the most vastly used are: filter bubble and echo chamber. A filter bubble (Rhodes 2022) emerges when people are exposed to personalised internet content and information that corresponds with their previous opinions and tastes, potentially limiting their exposure to alternative viewpoints. An echo chamber is a closed (Rhodes 2022; Spohr 2017), self-reinforcing setting in which people are only exposed to information, opinions, or ideas that mirror and magnify their previous beliefs, resulting in polarisation and fewer opportunities for dialogue. In both contexts disinformation (Bruns 2019) can appear as inaccurate or deceptive data spread with the goal of deceiving or manipulating public opinion, most commonly through digital platforms and social media.

In terms of threats to democratic processes main focus is dedicated to voter engagement and electoral integrity that might get jeopardised due to actions conducted through social media and social media platforms. As voter engagement includes activities such as voter registration, education, and turnout measures (LeRoux and Krawczyk 2014) that aim to encourage and improve citizen participation in the democratic process, the filter bubbles and echo chambers can benefit the levels of engagement, but combined with misinformation, the electoral integrity is jeopardised. In such environments the voters cannot independently decide on the basis of true information. Namely, electoral integrity (Norris 2013; van Ham 2015) relates to the equitable treatment, trustworthiness, and legitimacy of electoral processes and the absence of fraud, manipulation, and outside involvement.

Technologies and democracy: the framework of the background discussions

Internet, and with it the all types of new media have led to pluralisation of opinions on one hand, but also, have led to reinforcement of echo chambers and filter bubbles (Sunstein 2007). These online environments have the potential to limit people's exposure to opposing perspectives while also reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs. Namely, Sunstein (2007) warns about the perils of personalised news feeds and customised content according to individual preferences. He contends that this phenomenon can result in a fractured society in which people are less likely to engage in fruitful political conversation and compromise. The need of a shared public space where citizens can encounter varied ideas and engage in meaningful discourse is emphasised. The author also analyses the ramifications for democracy, arguing that the internet's ability to segment and personalise information can undermine democratic governance's underpinnings. He advocates for policies that support a healthy exchange of ideas and civic engagement on online platforms.

On the other hand, Floridi (2014) introduces the concept of 'infosphere'. It defines the massive, interconnected information network that surrounds our modern environment. Everything from the internet and digital databases to the flow of information in our daily lives is included in this infosphere. Floridi contends that the infosphere is a new ontological layer of reality that is transforming how we comprehend the world and ourselves. In the 'infosphere', information has become the primary currency of our time as the currency, it drives, economic, social and cultural exchange people. People no longer interact in the physical world, but rather navigate and create content within the Infosphere (Floridi 2014). Living in Infosphere holds ethical and philosophical implications. Preserving the privacy autonomy in the 'infosphere' is challenging as the technology enables collection analysis and sharing of virtually any kind of information. Such sharing of information is also reshaping democracy, according to Floridi (2014), as digital technologies do influence political processes, through social media and artificial intelligence as Sunstein (2007) wrote. Moreover, Floridi also shows how rapid dissemination of information through filter bubbles and algorithmic manipulation can infect public opinion. Infecting public opinion can lead to impact on political discourse and electoral outcomes. Similarly, Margetts et al. (2015) explore the downsides of social media algorithm-driven content distribution. The authors mention filter bubbles and echo chambers where only information reinforcing the

beliefs of individuals are distributed. This inevitably contributes to political polarization and disable the possibilities for diverse perspectives to be heard. Such evolution of the usage of social media can pose a threat to democracy, as it contributes to polarisation of political opinions and beliefs (Margetts et al. 2015).

On the other hand, Floridi seems more optimistic when discussing the potential for increase in civic engagement and see the participation through digital platforms. It is not only civic engagement and civic participation being seen as positive outcomes of the 'infosphere'. The digital technologies have contributed to localising the world by braking breaking down geographical barriers. The digital technologies have connected individuals and societies worldwide and this had impact on three culture and international relations (Floridi 2014). Nevertheless, the emerging challenges remain in misinformation and disinformation, along with cyber-security threats, and potential for digital surveillance. All listed can erode civil liberties, and (Floridi 2014) calls for responsible and ethical behaviour in the digital world. On the other hand, (Margetts et al. 2015) emphasize the power of virality in social media. A single tweet, video, or hashtag can spread rapidly across the platform(s), reaching readers far beyond what traditional forms of information. In this context the concept of 'clicktivism' is mentioned by Margetts et al. (2015), where online actions like signing an e-petition or sharing a post can have real-world consequences.

Apart from challenges for democracy, in terms outlined above, the technological development opens up the areas which are rapidly evolving where governments lack specialised knowledge and skills to addressed. Those areas include environmental issues, healthcare and technology regulation (Noveck 2015). Even if new technological advancements enhance or can enhance civic engagement and civic participation on one hand, the traditional government decision-making tends to be top-down and exclusive with limited citizen engagement. Developing policies with less citizens involved can lead to policies being less responsive to the needs of the population (Noveck 2015). Effective decision-making in times of great technological advances can be hindered by inefficient and bureaucratic demands of the government institutions. Noveck (2015) recognises the information about government activities are often limited and citizens are in a lack of transparency mistrustful towards the government. Mistrust towards governing institutions can hinder citizen participation. Taking in consideration, the reality where citizens have access to all kinds of information within the 'infosphere' (Floridi 2014) the given situation is frustrating for citizens and yet again contributing towards limited citizen engagement. The

solutions to the given situation are seen by Noveck (2015) in open government initiatives, crowdsourcing policy solutions, collaborative platforms, and data driven decision-making. Open data can empower citizens to be more active in governance procedures. Government data and decision-making processes should be transparent and accessible to public. Crowdsourcing policy solutions should bring policy-making closer to the citizens, relying to their knowledge and skills of diverse individuals. Different collaborative platforms are seen as spaces for creation of policies and public services enhancing the communication between government officials and citizens. Lastly, in decision-making is seen as a help to identify emerging trends and priorities, enabling governing bodies to respond proactively to the challenges of the societies (Noveck 2015).

It is not only crowdsourcing policy solutions that contribute towards change the way government officials should run the policy-making, but it is also the social media platforms that have transformed the way political action occurs. Social media, unlike traditional hierarchical organisations, enables decentralised, grassroots movements to emerge quickly and without a formal structure. This is demonstrated by situations such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, where social media played a critical role in rapidly mobilising large numbers of people (Margetts et al. 2015). in this context, the authors introduce the concept of ‘networked politics’. The concept revolves on how individuals and entities utilise social media networks to participate in politics. These networks can arise around a wide range of subjects, from social justice movements to political campaigns, and they are frequently distinguished by their ability to self-organize and adapt (Margetts et al. 2015). Apart from this, similarly as authors prior, Margetts et al. (2015) touch upon the importance of data and algorithms, but this time in the context of political campaigns, they explore how political campaigns use data analytics for targeting specific demographics. This way they can tailor their messages and making the political outreach, personalised and efficient. Such approaches, raise questions about ethics and transparency. Case studies from real world examples are used elaborating examples of Twitter usage in mobilising protesters during the Gezi Park protests in Turkey. Also a case of social media usage in 2012 US presidential elections is elaborated (Margetts et al. 2015; Schippers 2020).

Challenges the democracy is facing with respect to technological progress

As noted above, democracy and democratic processes can face several challenges due to the rise of technology, specifically Artificial Intelligence. Among several, the three most written and discussed seem the following: manipulation of information and disinformation; erosion of privacy and surveillance; and bias and discrimination. Addressing these issues would necessitate a collaboration of technological, regulatory, and societal endeavours. Finding the appropriate balance between leveraging the benefits of AI for democracy and limiting the adverse effects is a complex undertaking that requires policymakers, engineers, and knowledgeable citizens to collaborate to ensure that AI supports rather than threatens democratic norms and processes.

When it comes to manipulation of information and disinformation, we note the possibility of algorithms being exploited to false or misleading information (Wang et al. 2019). Such exploitation can result in impacts on public opinion and thus democratic processes. Bots and automated accounts on social media sites can amplify disinformation by forming filter bubbles and echo chambers in which people are exposed to distorted or incorrect narratives. This has the potential to disrupt the educated decision-making process that is vital to a healthy democracy.

AI technologies offer advanced data collecting and analysis, which governments, companies, and bad actors can employ for surveillance (see also Park and Jones-Jang 2022). Individual privacy rights are violated by mass surveillance, which can chill free speech and political activism. Personal data gathering and analysis can also enable microtargeted political advertising, raising worries about voter manipulation and profiling.

Finally, biases existing in training data (Ntoutsi et al. 2020) can be inherited and even reinforced by AI systems, potentially leading to unjust or discriminatory outcomes in domains such as criminal justice, employment, and resource access. Biased AI can have an impact on political campaigns, voter registration, and the equitable representation of varied communities in the framework of democracy, weakening democratic norms of fairness and equal participation.

The outlined topics are, through different nuances covered by several authors. Zeynep Tufekci explores the impact of digital technology, particularly social media platforms like Twitter, on

modern activism and political protests. Tufekci examines how these technologies have both empowered and complicated the dynamics of social and political movements (Tufekci 2017). She is interested in empowerment through connectivity, as social media and other digital tools have enabled active citizens to connect, and mobilize. The scales of potential mobilizations are larger than ever in history. Grassroots movements have flourished and many marginalised voices were heard due to social media and other digital tools (Tufekci 2017). But, as social media and digital tools bring potential empowerment, their speed and size of networks they stem, result in fragile networks. Weak ties of relationships that are formed among members of such groups can stem the leadership and organisation issues. On the other hand, Tufekci (2017) stresses that while digital tools provide new avenues for action, authoritarian regimes can also make use of them for control and surveillance. Along with wide and speedy reach, also disinformation can be disseminated equally quickly, reaching numbers of people like never before. Interestingly, at the same time, filter bubbles are formed on social media platforms, where the disinformation gets reinforced. Those processes can undermine the accuracy of distributed true information, while filter bubbles can polarize the public opinion. All processes combined weaken the potential and make it difficult for the online movement to achieve their goals (Tufekci 2017). especially the formation of filter bubbles is closely linked to the role of algorithms shaping the visibility of the content the users get to see on their social media. The content they get to see can influence the dynamics of protests and/or political discourse (Tufekci 2017). All the above is analysed through cases of real live events, especially the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements. The complexities and potentials of online-stemmed activism are presented.

As the protests and their potentials and real impact have transformed in the age of social media, so has a profound transformation of our society happened through the emergence of so called 'surveillance capitalism'. The concept developed by Zuboff (2019) refers to the type of economic system developed in the digital era. Personal data is the main commodity the private companies extract and collect for profit. Personal data is valuable in such contexts, and Zuboff (2019) demonstrated how data is harvested and stored, while most problematic is the fact the data is being used to influence behaviour of individuals with final goal of maximizing corporate profits. In the contexts where individuals voluntarily share personal data, the privacy erodes. In this regard, the 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff 2019) claims, the individual privacy and autonomy erodes as people are subjected to constant surveillance. The surveillance is oftentimes exercised without individual's knowledge and consent. In this context such

situations are a constant threat to democratic values and personal freedoms. With individual users of social media platform being constantly monitored and with their personal data collected, the algorithms can make behavioural predictions and after those modifications. Companies use the personal data to make prediction about behaviours and preferences of the individuals. As this enables personalised advertising and, more problematic, personalised content is understood as more problematic, as it reinforces the filter bubbles.

All this mentioned has inevitable economic and social implications. The consequences of 'surveillance capitalism' Zuboff (2019) include the concentration of power in tech companies. Such concentration of power is undermining the competition leading to distortions of the public sphere. With so many negative implications, what can individuals or governments do? Zuboff (2019) suggests that individuals, governments, and society as a whole must become aware of the consequences of 'surveillance capitalism' and work collectively to find solutions that maintain privacy, data rights, and the values of democracy. Zuboff (2019) advocates for more transparency, responsibility, and regulation in the technology business. Ultimately the authors argue for the re-evaluation of technology's role in society and a commitment to ensuring that the digital age respects human rights, individual dignity, and the foundations of democracy. Similarly Angwin (2015) for example, highlights concerns about the chilling effect on free expression, the possibility for power abuse, and the necessity for transparency and accountability in surveillance practises.

Angwin (2015) additionally, deals with questions of data privacy, data collection and surveillance, and she introduces the concept of 'dragnets'. The 'dragnets' are broad surveillance systems that cast wide nets in order to collect enormous volumes of data. Angwin (2015) investigates how dragnets operate in a variety of contexts, from government monitoring programmes to business data mining. To be able to establish such systems, vast amounts of data need to be gathered and Angwin investigates the extensive data gathering practises used by governments, corporations, and data brokers. She shows how personal information is continually gathered, analysed, and frequently transferred without the knowledge or agreement of individuals (Angwin 2015). with such vast quantity of collected personal data, individual's privacy erodes and this can have an impact to individual's daily lives. Most explicit example is targeted advertising, however there are also dangers of potential government intrusions. Angwin (2015) concludes, the personal data do not seem personal anymore.

On the other hand, Cathy O’Neil focuses on the potentially harmful consequences of usage of algorithms and their impact on society (O’Neil 2017). Algorithms are being used in a growing number of areas of life, from finance and education to criminal justice and labour. They are often utilised to make important choices which impact individuals and society (O’Neil 2017). Many algorithms are opaque, and their inner workings are not accessible to the public. According to O’Neil, this lack of transparency and accountability can lead to unjust and biased outcomes since individuals may not comprehend how judgements regarding them are made (2017). Apart from this, O’Neil unveils the concept of ‘feedback loops’ and ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’, which are situations whereby algorithms could perpetuate and amplify particular trends or biases. The example is given how a credit score algorithm that penalises people from low-income neighbourhoods, can lock them in a cycle of financial adversity (O’Neil 2017). The ‘feedback loops’ and some other algorithms reinforce and even exacerbate existing inequalities. Another set of examples demonstrate how predictive law enforcement algorithms can end up in over-policing in disadvantaged areas, while automated employment algorithms may prejudice against particular demographic groups. Pasquale (2015) also highlights the potential for algorithms to reinforce bias and discrimination, as they may incorporate biased data or criteria that perpetuate inequalities. Additionally, when important decisions are made by hidden algorithms, it becomes challenging to hold institutions accountable for their actions (Pasquale 2015).

A particular threat to democracy is posed when algorithms are used to make decision about voting access, especially in terms of shaping the electoral areas, redistricting voter registration. Even more problematic is the process of gerrymandering. Namely, biased algorithms can be used to gerrymander election districts, creating boundaries to dilute the voting power of particular demographic groupings (O’Neil 2017). By altering the political landscape, this practice undermines the objectiveness of elections. Furthermore, algorithms can be abused to identify and suppress voters, limiting their ability to participate in the democratic process. In any case, when employing algorithms in decision-making the fairness, transparency and ethical considerations should be first in place (O’Neil 2017)

Apart from the threat the algorithms are imposing upon gerrymandering election districts. There are also issues in terms of algorithms, impacting other sectors of society, particularly finance (Pasquale 2015). Pasquale argues that these algorithms’ lack of transparency and responsibility endangers democracy and individual rights. Many crucial choices in banking, insurance,

employment, and other fields, according to Pasquale (2015), are determined by algorithms that are hidden from public observation. Because these algorithms can be highly complex, it could be difficult for individuals to comprehend why certain decisions have been taken about them. Pasquale (2015) further delves into the power disparities created by these algorithms, in which companies and institutions access massive amounts of personal data and utilise it to make decisions that influence people's lives. Individuals often have no understanding of how these decisions are made. (Pasquale 2015) advocates for more robust regulation and control of algorithms, particularly in financial and health care sectors. He believes that transparency and fairness should be prioritised to safeguard individuals' rights and prevent power abuses.

Opportunities AI brings for efficient and effective democracy

The opportunities artificial intelligence brings for efficient and effective democracy. Many authors agree that enhanced civic participation is on the top of the list. Among them Lathrop and Ruma (2010) focus on how open government practises, which are frequently enabled by digital platforms and AI-powered tools, may empower citizens to actively participate in the democratic process. Citizens can participate in meaningful dialogues, provide feedback on policy decisions, and hold public officials accountable through gaining access to government data, online forums, and collaborative platforms. But in this context the open government must be built on transparency as its cornerstone. Technology nowadays enables governments to share data and information with the public. By sharing the data with the public, they simultaneously build trust and accountability. Citizens can have access to government documents, monitor government spending, and watch the progress of government initiatives, resulting in a more informed and engaged electorate (Lathrop and Ruma 2010). Following such principles, the collaborative governance is being established. Collaborative governance is established, when government agencies, citizens, and external stakeholders collaborate to solve complicated problems (Lathrop and Ruma 2010). Collaboration is facilitated through digital platforms, which allow diverse voices to participate to policy development and execution. This open approach boosts the democratic legitimacy of decision-making processes and the decision-making can be run by AI support. Governments might use AI to process and analyse enormous databases, thus enabling evidence-based policy decisions, but always in communication with citizens, further strengthening the information flow and trust. This data-driven strategy ensures that policies are more effective and responsive to population requirements, ultimately

improving democratic governance (Lathrop and Ruma 2010). Such models of collaboration can foster innovation in public service delivery. Governments may encourage creating innovative ideas that improve public services, making them more efficient and responsive to citizens' needs by making government data available to developers and entrepreneurs (Lathrop and Ruma 2010).

Conclusions

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the cultures we inhabit represents a major paradigm change. The subject of this chapter examined the complicated relationship between AI and democracy, exposing a rich tapestry of challenges and opportunities that define this new era. As we've seen, AI brings both challenges and opportunities to democratic systems and democratic processes. On one side, AI is capable to undermine and destroy the very principles AI was created to support. In this context the threat of biased algorithms, deceptive information manipulation, and the ever-looming spectre of surveillance can erode the foundations of democratic societies (O'Neil 2017; Pasquale 2015). These downsides call for careful consideration and robust safeguarding measures to ensure that AI remains a servant of democracy.

Apart from AI being a threat, AI can be an remarkable opportunity. As such it provides an opportunity for renewed democratic processes and engagement (Noveck 2015; Lathrop and Ruma 2010). AI has the ability to democratise information access, enhance civic participation, and offer governments data-driven decision-making tools. It is, in essence, an empowering instrument, capable of making democracy more inclusive and responsive to citizen's needs.

But to be able to embrace the opportunities, a careful balance with challenges must be established and maintained. The key actions and measures must be taken in terms of ensured ethics and transparency (Margetts et al. 2015; Schippers 2020). Fairness, accountability, and bias mitigation must be valued throughout AI design and regulation. To ensure that AI complies with democratic principles, regulatory structures and standards should be established.

There are two ways to properly address the challenges, one by evolution of democratic governance and democratic institutions. Democratic institutions should be, guided by principles

of fairness and transparency adapting to Ai and other new technologies but at the same time maintaining control over data collection and transparency of information. Within this, cybersecurity and data protection are two important aspects. As AI and new technologies have connected the world even stronger than all previous technologies, the global collaboration is paramount. Governments, technological companies and other stakeholders, jointly with civil society should unite in addressing the challenges. But to be able to properly address the issues of filter bubbles, echo chambers and disinformation along with other AI downsides mentioned above, the education and awareness of the users is equally critical. It is important to provide citizens with knowledge to navigate the digital landscape(s). The future research should go also in the directions of why types of digital literacy programmes and public awareness campaigns should be created and offered to public. At the first glance, issues of data privacy and treating misinformation seem the most important ones to protect the democratic processes against manipulation.

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