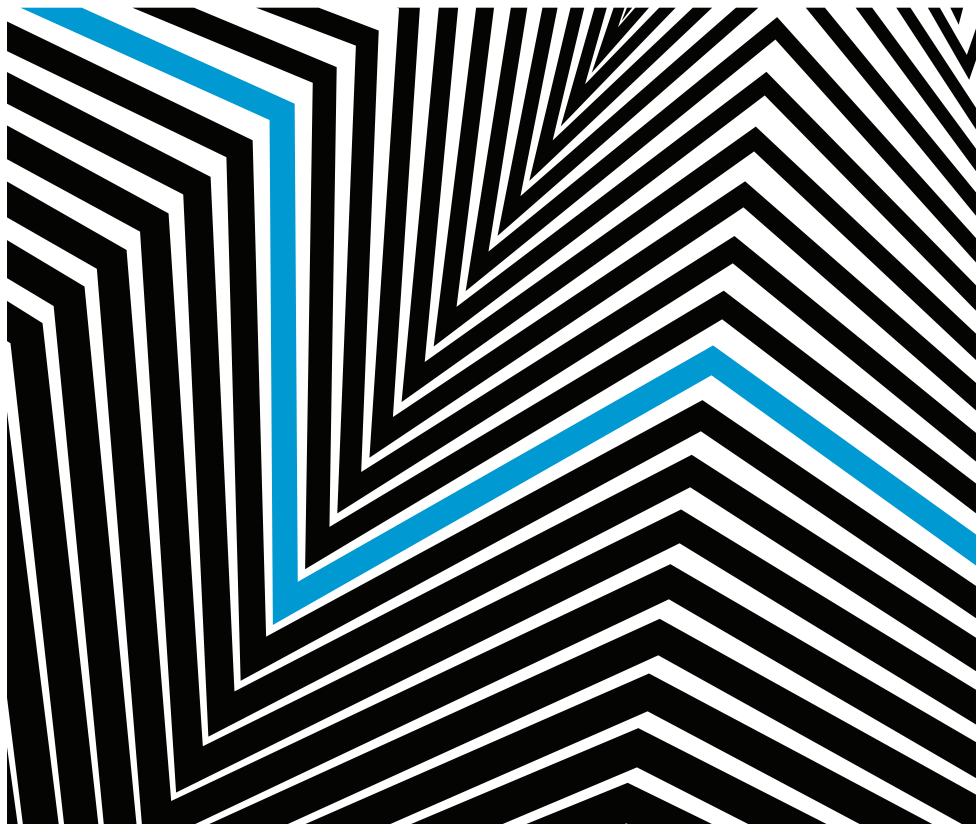


# **Abusing the People:**

## Global Challenges of Authoritarian Populism

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Denmark  
Macedonia  
Italy  
Venezuela  
United Kingdom  
Spain  
United States of America  
Ukraine  
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Libertarian Club – Libek is an organization promoting the values of individual liberty and economic freedom in Serbia and the Western Balkans. Established in 2008 the organization works to create a prosperous society of free and responsible individuals based in individual initiative, entrepreneurship, and the rule of law.

The main pillars of the work of the organizations are: education, economic and social research, public policy advocacy and publishing and media production.

Over the past ten years, Libek has trained over 400 young leaders in Serbia and the region, providing them with deep understanding of the ideas of liberty, and skills necessary to advance their careers in their fields of interest. Today, Libek alumni are already taking leading roles in academia, private sector, government institutions, civil society, and culture. Events organized by Libek and its partners have been attended by around 15000 attendees.

Economic research of the Libertarian Club - Libek provides the key policy stakeholders in Serbia and wider audiences with insights and solutions regarding the most important economic topics: employment, tax policy, regulation, privatization, and the efficiency of the public sector. Libek is recognized for its work on analysis of government owned companies, its policy proposals for tax reform and the education reform, along with the public opinion polls the organization has done over the past several years.

## About the publication

„Abusing the People: Global Challenges of Authoritarian Populism“ is a part of the effort to counter authoritarian populism in Serbia, Western Balkans and around the world. The articles for this publication have been written by the leading scholars, activists and professionals in the international freedom movement and represent their personal views and reflections on relevant trends in their countries and globally.

Following the premise that deep and thorough understanding of the driving forces behind the rise of authoritarian populism is necessary for an effective strategy to counter it, this publication aims to bring experiences and insights from different parts of the world closer to anyone interested in the field. In Serbia the publication complements other projects of Libek that work to debunk populist economic myths, analyze the history of authoritarian populism in the country and present its consequences to the people and create high quality content and messages that counter the populist narrative.

Libertarian Club – Libek would like to thank the authors from 12 countries for their contributions to the publication, our partner organizations, and everyone else who made this project possible. We would also like to thank the Atlas Network for the financial support to this project.

*Bican Şahin*

## Introduction

According to **the Freedom in the World 2017 Report**, Turkey is a partly free country with a score of 4/7 in the realm of political rights and a score of 5/7 in the realm of civil rights, averaging 4,5/7. According to **the Rule of Law Index 2016**, with an overall score of 0.43 out of 1, Turkey ranks 99<sup>th</sup> among 113 countries globally.

Now, on the basis of these scores, one has reasons to think that Turkey's record of liberal democracy is not very bright. To the extent that this dismal record has been the result of a historical process, we need to familiarize ourselves with the relevant historical past in order to fully understand how Turkey arrived at this point.

## The Historical Background

The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 in the aftermath of the First World War. Almost from the beginning, it was organized as a modernizing single-party-regime. The founders of the new republic, led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who was the leader of the Turkish Independence War (1919-1922), had been educated in the positivist paradigm and believed in the possibility of reinventing the social, political and economic institutions of a society. With their belief in science and progress the political elite developed an official ideology that aimed at transforming state and society. This official ideology is known as Kemalism, named after Mustafa Kemal who later on received the surname Atatürk. The basic tenets of this official ideology was formulated during the 1930s when liberal democracies were losing ground against fascist and communist totalitarian regimes around the world. Kemalism was based on Turkish nationalism, secularism (in the continental European sense) and statism in the economic sense. It was, at best, an authoritarian ideology. During the single-party rule that lasted until 1950, this ideology was implemented and consolidated through civilian and military bureaucracies.

In 1950, Turkey changed its government through free and fair elections for the first time. The Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti, DP) which was led by Adnan Menderes, came to power on May 14th. In the new era, there was some liberalization with respect to harsh secular and statist economic policies. However, ten years later,

in 1960, a junta within the Turkish military, which would later call itself the National Unity Committee (Milli Birlik Komitesi) staged a *coup d'état*, seizing power on the basis of its alleged inalienable right to guard the republican regime. Since then, Turkey experienced 2 direct and 1 indirect (in 1971, 1980, and 1997) successful military interventions in which the government was effectively ousted from the power and one failed coup attempt in 2016.

With the passage of the 1961 Constitution, the military junta introduced a “tutelage regime” through which they could control the political system without the need of holding the political power in their own hands. Through this system, the aim was that the military and civilian bureaucracy would always be in a position to have the last word and ensure that civilian politicians would stick to the Kemalist ideology. This tutelage system remained intact for the rest of the twentieth century.

## The AK Party (Justice and Development Party) Rule

### The Era of Democratic Reforms: 2002-2012

The results of the November 2002 elections were surprising to many. The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AK Party)<sup>1</sup> which was led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won the elections by getting 34,3 % of the votes. What was more surprising was that only the Republican People Party of Deniz Baykal and some independents besides the AK Party passed the threshold to enter parliament. Thus, thanks to the Turkish electoral system, the AK Party won a great victory and received 363 of the 550 seats (66 %) in the parliament with only 34,3 % of the votes. The Republican People Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) received 178 seats with about 19,4 % of the votes. About half of the electorate was not represented in the parliament between 2002 and 2007.

The founding leaders of the AK Party, namely, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç used to be among the followers of Necmettin Erbakan and his “National View”. However, they belonged to a more reformist branch and opposed Necmettin Erbakan’s leadership. Thus, shortly before the 2002 elections, they departed from Erbakan’s movement and founded the AK Party. Unlike the National View, the AK Party has not been hostile to the West and pursued European Union membership. Thanks to the democratic reforms that the AK Party carried out in its first three

1 Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, abbreviated as AK Party, literally means white/clean, and by extension, “pure”, “uncorrupt” Party.



years in power, the European Union opened full-membership negotiations in 2005. In the economic sphere, contrary to the National View, the AK Party made peace with market economy. As a result of this reformist identity, the AK Party earned the support of liberal intellectuals as well. This successful economic and political performance provided the AK Party with another victory in the 2007 general elections. The AK party received about 47 % of the votes and 341 seats in the parliament.

The second term of the AK Party in government witnessed its open struggle against the tutelage system. In 2007, the tutelage system tried to intervene with the election of the President which was scheduled for April 27. The civilian and military bureaucracy did not want the AK Party to elect the President on its own. On April 27, the military issued the so-called “electronic ultimatum” on the website of The Chief of Staff that warned the AK Party not to elect a person to the Presidential Office who could damage the secular identity of the Republic.

The final response by the AK Party was to call for early elections in July 2007. The AK Party received 46,6 % of the votes and 341 seats, CHP 20,9 % and 112 seats; the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) 14,27 % and 71 seats. On August 20, the Presidential elections were held in the Parliament. In the first two rounds, no candidate was able to secure 367 votes. However, the AK Party’s candidate, Abdullah Gül got elected as the 11th President with 339 votes in the third round on August 28, 2007.

In March 2008, the judicial branch of the tutelage system took the lead and a case for banning AK Party was filed at the Constitutional Court by the Chief Prosecutor of the Court of Cassation, Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya. Yalçınkaya accused AK Party of becoming the focal point of activities subversive of the secular regime in Turkey and asked for it to be shut down and 71 members of the Party to be banned from politics for five years, including President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The Court handed down its decision in July 2008. 6 of the 11 members of the Court cast their votes for banning the Party while 4 voted for a monetary fine only. Thus, the AK Party barely survived another attack by the tutelage system.

The judicial dimension of the tutelage system was tackled by a referenda that took place on 12 September, 2010. In the referenda, 58 % of the population voted in favor of the proposed changes, most of which were pro-democracy reforms. The most important changes were related to the judiciary. It is not misleading to say that between 2008 and 2010, to a great extent, the tutelage system was dismantled. The AK Party entered 2011 elections against this background, winning another large victory

with 50% (49,8) of the vote. The expectation was that the government would attempt to solve the remaining problems with respect to democratization and human rights. As indicated above, the Kemalist regime was based on strict secularism and Turkish nationalism. While harsh secularism had victimized the pious Muslims and non-Muslims, Turkish nationalism had victimized the Kurds and non-Muslims such as Armenians, Greeks, and the Jews. So, given that the tutelage was cleared away, it was expected that the government would solve the problems of these segments of the society as well. In fact, the government solved the grievances of the pious Sunni Muslims. For example, the headscarf problem at universities and the public offices was solved; women can now attend university and work at public offices with their heads covered. However, the grievances of other sections of the society were not addressed properly.

### The Authoritarian Turn: 2012-2017

In the wake of the 2011 elections, the government adopted a new discourse. This discourse brought about a rather nationalist, populist-conservative AK Party replacing the previously more reformist, conservative with liberal tones party. If we have a look at the public debates that were started by the leading figures of the AK Party since 2011 we can begin to see this change. One such symbolic debate raged over the issue of abortion during the spring and summer of 2012. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Prime Minister, commented that abortion was equivalent to murder and revealed government plans to restrict it. This created a backlash especially among the secular segments and the feminist movement of Turkey. Another debate that took public opinion hostage was on alcohol consumption. The government moved to restrict consumption of alcohol by restricting the hours for selling it and regulating the places of consumption. Although it was not a total ban on alcohol consumption and they were mild restrictions even with the western standards, the regulations were perceived as attempts at imposing a religious way of life since they were put forward by a conservative government in a Muslim country.

Finally, in conjunction with educational reforms, Prime Minister Erdoğan commented that the aim was to raise a pious youth. All these debates and policies make more sense when viewed in the light of a comment made by Aziz Babuşçu, the Chair of Istanbul Branch of AK Party. He stated in a conference along the lines that “in the past the AK Party entered into a coalition with the liberals. The past ten years were the years of dismantling [of the tutelage regime] and we partnered with liberals around the issues of freedom, law and justice. In the future we will depart company. The future will be the era of construction and our liberal ex-partners will not like what

we will construct.”<sup>2</sup> All these policy debates and comments were interpreted to mean that what AK Party wants to do now is not to bring more freedom for everyone in Turkey but rather to create a country in its own image.

The Gezi Park protests started in such a climate during the summer of 2013. Initially, the protests had an environmentalist tone and were against the construction plans of a shopping mall in the place of a public-park in İstanbul. After a small group was brutally dispersed by the police, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets. The government did not step back and this further polarized the society. The events continued for more than a month and claimed 8 lives. These demonstrations are believed to be a spontaneous reaction by the people who felt that their way of living was increasingly under attack by the government policies.

After the demonstrations subsided the government began a witch-hunt for those believed to be behind the events. The tax inspectors were dispatched to those corporations which were deemed to have supported the demonstrators. The newspaper bosses were pressured by the government to fire those columnists who supported the protesters. Many journalists lost their jobs as a result.

However, on December 17, 2013, a political and legal earthquake happened. This date marks the start of the biggest graft probe in Turkish history. The sons of three important ministers along with some businessmen were taken into custody with the corruption charges. Furthermore, the Minister of European Affairs was accused of getting bribes from a businessman with Iranian origins. All four ministers resigned within a few days. The government reacted to these police investigations by arguing that this was a coup attempt by “the parallel state”. The “parallel state” denotes the supposed secret organization composed of the members of the Gülen Movement<sup>3</sup> that took root within the police, judiciary and other significant state offices.

By claiming that the graft probe was a coup attempt through judicial means by the followers of Gülen Movement, and enacting laws and issuing regulations to fight

2 <http://t24.com.tr/haber/babuscu-onumuzdeki-10-yil-liberaler-gibi-eski-paydaslarimiz-in-kabullenecegi-gibi-ol-mayacak,226892> as displayed on 03.02.2015

3 The Gülen Movement, which is officially accepted as a terror organisation especially since the 15 July, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, is led by a former preacher, Fethullah Gülen, who has been residing in the US in a self-imposed exile since the late 1990s. The Gülen Movement has been one of the most influential religious communities in Turkey and been very active in education, publishing, media and some other business ventures. See Yavuz, Hakan. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

back, the government put the judiciary effectively under its own control. By placing the executive above the law, all these developments left the principle of the rule of law in Turkey in ruins.

After getting the situation under control, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ran for the Presidency and was elected in the first round by 51.79% in August 2014. Prof. Ahmet Davutoğlu became the head of the AK Party and received the role of Prime Minister.

The governing AK Party placed the introduction of *presidentialism* as the new government system at the center of its election campaign in the June 2015 general elections. Despite all efforts, the AK Party was not able to win enough seats to change the constitution on June 7th, 2015. In fact, for the first time, the AK Party was unable to win enough seats to form the government on its own. After some futile coalition negotiations President Erdoğan announced that there would be snap-elections on November 1st of 2015.

Turkey underwent a violent turmoil between June and the November general elections in 2015. In less than five months, more than 600 citizens, including security personnel, civilians and Kurdish militants lost their lives.

Thus, Turkish citizens went to the polls in not an environment of peace but that of insecurity on November 1st. Surprisingly, the AK Party won a landslide victory with 49.5% of the votes, gaining a majority with 317 seats in the Parliament. The AK Party's Ahmet Davutoğlu formed a majority government on 24 November 2015. However, the second Davutoğlu government did not last very long. Amid a power struggle within the AK Party, Prime Minister Davutoğlu was replaced by Binali Yıldırım as the Chairperson of the Party, and thus, Prime Minister.

The event that will change the Turkish legal and political landscape in the decades to come took place on the evening of 15 July, 2016. A junta within the Turkish military attempted a *coup d'état*. Along with the police forces, the citizens resisted the military personnel, who were equipped with rifles, tanks, helicopters and even F-16 jet-fighters. The clashes lasted until the early morning of July 16th and ended with the defeat of the junta. The forces loyal to the government took control of the military bases held by the junta, and the leaders of the plot surrendered.

The Government accused Fethullah Gülen and his followers in the military of being the masterminds of this plot. On the 16th of July, two members of the Turkish Constitutional Court along with 2,745 judges and prosecutors were detained on the

allegation that they are members of Fethullahist Terror Organization (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü, FETÖ). On the 20th of July, a state of emergency for three months was declared. Since then, the state of emergency was extended 4 times and Turkey remains currently under the state of emergency.

The government purged civil servants believed to be linked with Fethullah Gülen. More than 150,000 people, consisting of police officers, bureaucrats, academics, teachers, physicians, engineers, and various other civil servants, have been purged from their public office without any proper administrative or judicial investigation and due process of law; over 100,000 persons were detained, and 50,000 persons were arrested in the days since the coup attempt. Many journalists who regularly contributed to newspapers such as Zaman, Bugün and Cumhuriyet were arrested. More than 2,000 associations and labour unions were closed. About 5,000 private companies were confiscated. Thousands of private schools and hospitals were closed and their assets were confiscated.

Finally, on 16 April, 2017, a constitutional amendment was accepted at a controversial referenda by 51%. This amendment changed the government system from a parliamentary system to a presidential one. What is most problematic from a liberal perspective in the amendment is that it concentrates the power in the hands of the executive branch, i.e. the President. In this new system, besides some other prerogatives, the president has the right to dissolve the parliament; to remain as the chair of his/her own party; to effectively elect all the members of the Board of Judges and Prosecutors; to appoint all the members of his cabinet and all other high state officials without the need for approval by the parliament.

## Conclusion

Using the term popularized by Fareed Zakaria, democracies in which the principle of the rule of law is not upheld are called as “illiberal democracies”. In such democracies, individual freedoms are very weakly protected against the encroachments by other individuals and the state which is controlled by numerical majorities.

In this article, the main focus was on the last 15 years, namely, on the AK Party era. It was argued that approximately during the first ten years in power, the AK Party performed well in terms of bringing Turkey closer to the category of free countries. Thanks to this progress, the European Union and Turkey started negotiations for full membership of Turkey to the Union. Especially after the referendum of 12 September, 2010, which dismantled the tutelage system to a great extent, it was expected that

Turkey would move in the direction of free countries, i.e. become a liberal democracy. However, this expectation was not met.

A close examination of what happened in the political arena of Turkey especially after 2012 reveals that the AK Party has established itself as the dominant party under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The AK Party controls the state apparatus with its cultural, economic, legal, security and media dimensions. Furthermore, the AK Party created a private media machine which consists of the majority of newspapers and TV channels that propagate government policies. Furthermore, through the tax auditors and government inspectors, the media companies that are not directly controlled by the government are intimidated and silenced. In this way, the media, which is a source of ensuring the rule of law in a democracy, has been to a large extent pacified in Turkey.

In light of this discussion, it would not be misleading to characterize Turkey as an “illiberal democracy” where respect for the principle of the rule of law and individual freedom is greatly weakened.

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# Forget socialism. Authoritarian nationalism is now the greatest threat to liberty

*Rasmus Brygger*

I started identifying myself as a classical liberal in my teenage years. Like most other teenagers, there were a great many things and ideas that I was opposed to – spanning from political correctness and hippies to the socialist welfare state I grew up in. Living in a country with one of the world's highest tax rates made it easy to identify socialism as the root of the status quo, and I quickly found others I could share my youth rebellion with. The rebellion being opposing socialism. In a sense this is also true for the free market movement as a whole. Like any angsty teenager, we spent a whole lot of energy on things that we are *opposed to* and less on what we are really *for*. From my experience, many classical liberals are first and foremost anti-socialists and as such are defining their political beings as opposed to not just socialism itself, but many ideas and movement often associated to socialism: political correctness, feminism, hippies (all movements that could be somewhat traced back to liberal ideas, I would argue, but that's a subject for another article). But not just that; because of our teenage opposition-mentality we would also team up with some bad kids on the block, not because we share similar ideas, but because we can agree on what we dislike.

Take the typical political position of classical liberals. In Europe, it is the norm that classical liberals form governments with conservatives, and American libertarians have traditionally sought influence through the Republican Party. Now this makes sense when it comes to economic policies – conservatives and classical liberals can typically find some common ground in keeping taxes low (or more realistically: not raising them as drastically as the socialists). But on almost any other subject, liberals and conservative opinions differ (or at least should) on a basic ideological level: classical liberals are individualistic, and would always want to protect the individual's rights before the “common good” while the opposite is (typically) true for conservatives.

During the Cold War this alliance of necessity was the only way to slowdown the socialist movement. And taking things into perspective, who wouldn't accept a tad of conservative nationalism if it meant protecting the liberal democracy as a whole?

That was then. We know now that the welfare state doesn't seem to be the road to serfdom, as Friedrich Hayek feared. The West is still rather prosperous, and our civil

liberties are still there – more or less. Russia and the former Eastern Bloc are in most cases the exemption, but that has as much to do with authoritarianism as socialism. Don't get me wrong, the welfare state undermines personal liberties as well as economic growth, but you would have to be completely contrarian to believe that it has meant the end to the liberal democracy. The air has been let out of the socialist balloon; there aren't really any socialist movements in The West anymore. The old Marxists are now so preoccupied with conserving the welfare state, that all talk of revolution has been tabled indefinitely.

The opposite is true of the authoritarian nationalists. Bear in mind, not all conservatives are nationalists, and not all nationalists are authoritarian, but a great number are, and at the moment the authoritarian nationalist movement is the fastest growing and most dangerous political movement globally. Being nationalist in nature, this movement has different forms in different countries, but there are some common characteristics to these ideas.

The first and foremost is the idea that the country should somehow be the citizens' first priority. Trump's 'America First' comes to mind as a perfect example. But what does it mean to put America first? And first before what? The global society, humanity, the individual? To believe that you somehow own your countrymen some special form of allegiance that surpasses your responsibilities to foreigners can be found in most countries' histories, but is principally speaking a dangerous idea. When push comes to shove, it means that the ethical value of your countrymen's life and welfare is somehow higher than that of foreigners. In other words, the universalistic principle as the cornerstone of liberalism – the idea that all people are equal – is being challenged by this “put-your-country-first mentality”.

The consequence of this shift in ideas is most evident in the immigration debate. From a classical liberal viewpoint, you would argue, that an individual should not be restricted in his freedom of movement. As long as he doesn't violate other peoples' rights, he should be allowed to move where he would like. Furthermore, it would violate citizens' private property rights to not be able to invite foreigners to their property. This has more or less also been the basis of immigration policy before the welfare states, but now once that the average immigrant poses an expense to the welfare state and, you could argue, statistically is more likely to be a criminal or a terrorist, the border has been closed. Often with support and applause from people labeling themselves as classical liberals – people who might never ban tobacco and alcohol because of the strain these things are on the welfare state's coffers, but who nevertheless accept violating foreigners' rights in the name of “common good”.



The problem is not just the closing of borders, but the blatant discrimination in both policy and public debate that are against Muslims, who should be treated as individuals first, but are now more and more seen as a collective and thus treated with less rights than you and me. That opens the gates of authoritarianism. And not just against Muslims, but all who oppose the ideas that serve the “common good”.

The point of this article is not just to declare a new opponent for classical liberals, but to get liberals to acknowledge their own role in this new threat to liberty. Some might support President Trump for his superficial (but hollow) pro-business statements or some might simply value the idea of furthering economic wealth over civil rights. The same goes for the Brexit movement that could definitely be defended from a classical liberal standpoint, but now most likely will serve as a bastion against free trade and immigration. Why? Because liberals have no allies in the nationalist movement, and furthering their cause will almost certainly mean a step back for the pro-liberty movement.

My home country Denmark is a good example of this shift. Twenty years ago the nationalistic Danish People’s Party was small and without influence. Today, they are the second largest party in Denmark, likely to soon be in government, and the policies and views that 20 years ago were labelled extremist are now shared by the majority of parties - including the classical liberal parties which are now suddenly the spearhead of anti-Islamic policies.

The interesting question is, of course, why this shift happened and why it came so fast. An important part of the explanation is external changes: 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the increased threat from Islamist terrorism and lately the influx of Syrian refugees. All have all pushed the Danish mentality to be more critical of everything Middle-Eastern. But this is also a matter of how nationalistic populism has been received in Danish politics.

The Danish People’s party is historically a rather new tendency towards nationalism, evolving out of the Progress Party (akin to the Norwegian party by the same name), which was economical right, but also very nationalistic. The Danish People’s party, on the other hand, has had a more social democratic position, but offered to support the center-right government from 2001 to 2011 in return for stricter immigration policies. Because the center-right parties needed to have close collaboration with the Danish People’s party, they themselves adopted many of these anti-Islamic, nationalistic views, and since this opened a flank in elections, several of the left wing parties adopted these policies as well.

The Danish People's party's position can be everything ranging from banning burqas to declaring a state of emergency because of terrorist threats. A majority of parliament recently passed a law restricting freedom of speech for religious preaches and the discussion of who is and isn't Danish is now a weekly occurrence. Meanwhile, a new right-wing party calling itself "the new right" is close to getting into parliament with rhetoric about how we are nearing a civil war with Islamists. It is a movement that preys on fear and division - and it's very successful.

The Danish case is a cautionary tale about how willing are politicians to adopt morally questionable - and historically a bit extreme - positions if it serves a political goal. As soon as nationalism becomes mainstream, people seem to forget how political extreme such a position is. And as long as classical liberals are willing to get a few tax cuts in return for supporting this tendency, there aren't many who oppose this development. Is political influence really worth all that?

The classical liberal movement needs to grow up. The last thing we need now is contrarian teenagers blindly fighting against the status quo, because to some degree, the status quo is the only thing keeping the authoritarian nationalists at bay. That, of course, doesn't mean that classical liberals should stop criticizing socialists and the welfare state - that too, is important - but we should choose our friends and battles more wisely. There are good reasons to be against the UN's Declaration of Human Rights because of its focus on positive rights, but losing it in this political climate would most likely only serve to lessen the negative rights as well. The same goes for the European Union: losing the EU right now would lessen bureaucratic rules, but we shouldn't kid ourselves - with nationalists in power, it would also mean goodbye to free trade and free movement in Europe.

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# Plot Against the Democracy - An interview with Anne Applebaum

## **1. What is your definition of populism? Are there any differences between modern populist regimes and so called “illiberal-democracies”?**

Populism is historically just the name given to any political movement which call itself “anti-elitist.” There have been populist movements of many kinds in American and European history, both leftwing and rightwing. At the moment, though, the word is being used in a different way. Although there is no necessary link between populism and illiberal democracy – you could have an anti-elitist movement which was liberal – there are a number of illiberal populist movements that have gained prominence in Eastern and Western Europe, and in the United States, which seem to represent something new. Perhaps it is simply that populists are illiberal because elites have been seen as liberal.

## **2. How would you compare contemporary populism with populism of the 20th century? What are the main similarities and the main differences?**

Well, the Bolsheviks were populists. Communism was a violent form of populism whose goal was to replace the rule of the current elite with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Today’s movements are not violent, or at least not yet.

By comparison to the progressive populism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though, many of these movements are indeed antidemocratic. Some of that is frustration – people are genuinely angered by slowness of democracy in an era when everything else is happening so quickly. Some of that is the desire for power to go to one particular social group.

Probably, though, the current wave of populists has most in common with the Latin American populists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a good deal of hypocrisy – things are being done in the name of “the people” when in fact the real beneficiaries are the new elites.

In Poland, for example, the levels of corruption, cronyism and nepotism is much higher than it was. Trump has followed the Latin American playbook putting his family in positions of power. This is standard kleptocratic practice that we know mostly from Central Asia. But it is new in the United States.

### **3. What is the role of disinformation and propaganda in the context of the populist surge? How can the immune system of the open society be improved to address these challenges?**

I believe that we are living through an information revolution: This is a transformative, revolutionary moment, like the moment of the invention of the printing press. Why are so many elections, in so many democracies, suddenly taking such surprising turns? Here's my guess: just as the printing press broke the monopoly of the monks and priests who controlled the written word in the fifteenth century, the internet and social media have, within the space of a few short years, undermined business models on which the democratic political media were based for the past century, and undermined the institutions behind them too.

In many democracies, there is now no common debate, let alone a common narrative. People don't even have the same facts – one group thinks one set of things is true, another believes in something quite different. Social media contributes to this phenomenon, by allowing people to select the news and opinion they want to hear, whether factual or not. The tendency to seek out comforting narratives has created homogeneous clusters online – otherwise known as “echo chambers.” People get their news from their close knit, ideologically similar friends; most members of an echo chamber share the same prevailing world view, and interpret news through this common lens. This phenomenon contributes to the growth of hyper partisanship and intense polarization and contributes to the distrust of “normal” politics, politicians and political institutions.

The new information network is also conducive to the spread of false rumors, and even complex disinformation campaigns, whether generated naturally or imposed from the outside. American and French voters have just become aware that the Russian government organizes leaks inside democracies and then launches trolling campaigns that makes use of supposedly secret material, however banal. But Russia has been using these tactics to great effect in central and Eastern Europe for many years. Now the international alt-right – American, Swedish, German and other far-right groups – are running similar campaigns.

Although there is no silver bullet, I do believe that changes in thinking and behavior across a range of institutions, in the media, government, as well as civil society, can help make people more resilient to disinformation. We need more monitoring projects, to understand what Russians and others are doing; more education, to help people understand what might be real and fake online; more coordination internationally will also help fight back.

**4. If populism is a permanent shadow of representative democracy, as Jan Werner Muller put it, do you see any institutional problems of European political parties, national governments and EU institutions that are unintentionally fostering populism?**

The decline of political parties in Europe is a major source of populism –I believe that this is also connected to the changes created by the internet. Socialist parties once had a base in the trade unions; Christian democratic parties were connected to the church. They have both lost their social bases because neither the trade unions nor the churches are that important any more. Instead, people find like-minded groups online.

The fact that so much of politics in the West ceased to be ideological was great while it lasted, but may have created its own backlash. For the past 25 years, the business friendly left and very pragmatic center right competed over very small differences in policies.

This is not of course true in Serbia but it is true in the UK, France, Germany, and it was boring. People want something more from their government other than the argument about a 1% tax raise. It is also true that you cannot underestimate the appeal of nationalism. You didn't forget that in Serbia but the rest of us, we forgot.

There is a second problem, namely that the political divides no longer reflect real arguments, which are now not left-right but open-closed or nationalist-internationalist. One of the few politicians who saw and benefited from understanding these new divides was Emanuel Macron. He realized people are sick of the left and people were suspicious about the Republicans. Instead, he sought something different.

The EU is also at fault, but I think for different reasons. I've thought for a long time that the EU focuses on the wrong things. Brussels spends a lot of energy on regulation, some of which may be necessary but some is not. It never had a coherent foreign, defense or border policy. It is the weakness of the EU that bothers people – it doesn't give people any sense of security, it doesn't project European values to the world.

European leaders greatly underestimated the returning of authoritarianism in Russia and they were very arrogant in thinking that nobody finds these values appealing. They forgot that authoritarianism has its own attraction and unless you are pushing against it, then it's going to push against you.

**5. After the victory of Emanuel Macron in France and the expected victory of Angela Merkel in September's elections in Germany, there is a kind of anti-populist short relief in Europe. But nevertheless, problems are still there. Especially in Hungary, Poland, Italy and our Western Balkans region. What would be from your perspective the best way for European countries to overcome populist's problems?**

We need to do some fundamental thinking about what Europe is, and to redefine what it stands for. Again: people don't only want bureaucracy, they also want Europe to mean something. I think Europe sees itself as a possible source of stability in the Western Balkans although it is a bad moment to talk about EU expansion. It is important both in economical as well as in ideological ways for Serbia and Ukraine for example.

People don't usually say so, but I believe foreign policy should be a priority for Europe now too. I would also start to look at how to create a European defense force that can be part of NATO and I would look at how Europe can project its power beyond its borders. The refugee crisis is essentially a security crisis, caused by a war in Syria which the EU has not helped to stop. It's time for Europe to become more active about ending instability in the Middle East and pushing back against Russian disinformation in Europe. That would give people some reason to believe in European security again.

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## Where do we lose ourselves when it comes to populism and really good public policies? – The case of the Republic of Macedonia

*Jasmina Trajkoska*

Populism today is a threat for liberal democracy because it evolved from a struggle against elites into a social irresponsibility of the political elites. According to the newest insights, it is confirmed that populism is not solely a negative concept, however, in the Republic of Macedonia, we do have cases in which it is used negatively.

The slavish political culture of the citizens, together with the weak socio-economic conditions, the low political socialization and the lack of individual social responsibility of individuals holding public functions, in every regard, denotes a fertile ground for negative populism.

Since its independence, Macedonia has been facing negative populist measures. In the last ten years it has faced its own peculiar and distinctive type of populism and authoritarianism called “Gruevizam” (Nikola Gruevski was Prime Minister from 2006-2016), in relation to the “Brankovizam” (Branko Crvenkovski was Prime Minister from 1992-1998, 2002-2004, then the President of the Republic from 2004-2009), which formerly created incredibly “favorable” conditions for the impeccability of the Gruevizam. The most basic expression used for the execution of this populism was the term “reforms” which resulted in socially nonproductive public policies later turned into a series of corruptive scandals.

All people belonging to vulnerable social categories, left on the margins of society in the time of Brankovizam, became the main supporters of the reforms in the time of the Gruevizam, reforms which were not aiming for the better. This is the main reason for the success of the concentration of power in great measure in the hands of the highest ranking officials of the VMRO-DPMNE political party. This happened in several phases which comprised and took under its control the most important segments of the political system. Medical doctors, professors, journalists, academicians, the NGO sector and middle school teachers were individually taken under control. In the meantime, the frail division of power between the legislative, the executive and the judicial authority was institutionally weakened. All of this was widely welcomed with open arms due to the traditional dissatisfaction of the previous elite and the expectation

of positive reforms. This led to having the most centralized establishment to date, as well as a complete control of the political system by the party top of the then ruling elite. This absolutely confirms the fact that negative populism strengthens authoritarian rule in societies by using the servile political culture.

I think populism in the Republic of Macedonia may be put into two categories: “apparent populism” which relates to the already implemented reforms through various projects that can be now seen as malversations and “hardly visible populism” whose consequences shall be present in a very long future period, during which it shall become an obstacle for further steps in the realization of “non-populist policies” that are important for a real leap towards a liberal democracy.

The “Skopje 2014” project is an “apparent populism”, as well as the educational reforms, the media propagandists, the greeting of politicians with every passer-by, the use of many “experts”, who in the name of quasi-professionalism, were supporters of the policies of the ruling party, the counter-protests which were full of nationalistic slogans and all those situations in which, if found endangered, they directed the question not to their personal endangerment, but rather to the endangerment of the state itself. “If the leader is in danger than Macedonia, its existence and the future of Macedonians is in danger as well”. I will point out one of the most blatant and most basic examples of populist measures presented in the sense of offering something for “free”: free public transport for seniors twice a week, free railroad transport for the youth, free arrangements for public spas for seniors, free housing construction projects, etc. All of these public policies supported by the state budget were presented as “caring” of the leader for the people and his “good will” that should be appreciated instead of being criticized by the citizens.

On the other hand, the “hardly visible populism” is used by the accomplices of political elites for strengthening and consolidation of negative populism to a certain extent. Every architect not caring about urbanism, every teacher not caring about literacy, every professor not caring about the manner of taking exams, every mason not caring about the quality of the building, every Member of Parliament feeling responsible to the leader instead of to the citizens, every “critic” whose criticism is questioned, every journalist not caring about journalism ethics, every judge not caring about justice, every politician acting like an owner of the state, are typical representatives of the above.

This whole process of unprofessionalism and empowerment of negative populism brought about for the political system to become completely nonfunctional in



its essence, which the citizens hardly recognized. Thus, political socialization of every individual and the return of a system of values which is not going to have the political party as a “centerpiece” of the political system is a necessity. The Macedonian citizen is not drawing its personal strength or security from personal qualities, but rather from the level of close relations with a “high ranking government official” and how easy it is for him to reach this person with the aim to achieve a personal goal. This directly leads to the lack of criteria in professionalism as well as the complete participation and partocracy strengthened in a form of a behavioral culture in our political system, which definitely represents a basis for the development of negative populism. On the other hand, we know that even the term “democracy” is not always positive in its essential meaning, that there are various types of democracies and those in which negative populism is the basic characteristic of governing are called tyrannical democracies. This is when devastating public policies with long-term negative consequences are executed in the name of the citizens.

Basically, the negative type of populism comes out of the unreadiness of the society for a liberal democracy and the lack of individual social responsibility of every part of a certain occupation in the political system’s frameworks. This leads us again to the initial debates on what is politics? – whether this is a social good or a social misconduct. We have to overcome the form of “hardly visible populism” which requires for the capacity of the society to put the general social good before the personal interest of individuals, so we can have the least possible degree of negative populism.

The political socialization which leads towards the demand of responsibility is in the same direction and all of this can be achieved by constructing a new system of values in which clientelism, participation, corruption and nepotism shall be penalized and not rewarded. In order to succeed in decreasing the rate of “negative – hardly visible populism”, we have to focus on the primary human characteristics when a person is a public official and thus this person has to promote individual social responsibility. Without the individual social responsibility of officials who built the system of values, we cannot expect positive populist policies.

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## A letter from Italy on populism and recipes to avoid it

*Francesco Clementi*

The failure of the European ruling classes in managing global challenges is the main reason why, for over 20 years now, there's been talk of a populist zeitgeist, a wave of social dissent, often primitive and simplistic. Populism feeds on radical arguments and collective emotions, spreads suspicion, sows doubts and thrives on verbal provocations which quite often lead to physical ones. Populism often attempts to transform charismatic leadership into a cult of personality, gathering support among those who feel marginalised by society and progress, the self-proclaimed victims of globalisation. These are people who feel excluded from the democratic process because their political and institutional systems pay no attention to their needs and requests. By playing on these instincts, this phenomenon – populism – is spreading throughout our democracies, where its virus finds a suitable breeding ground. This is partly due to the fact that established political parties and other authorities which have developed over the course of the 20th century are no longer perceived as representative, and it's partly due to a more complex and pernicious crisis of democracy and the erosion of its quality. The latter is the most crucial issue facing this new yet not-so-new millennium. Populism is a term for which scholars struggle to provide an accurate definition. It covers an incredibly vast cultural and social semantic universe and is thus comprised of multiple dynamic elements and elusive traits, among which, first and foremost, an intensive use of rhetoric. The diverse manifestations of populism lend a certain vacuousness to the word itself. Accordingly, within the populist phenomenon, we find clear indications of cultural oversimplification, functional illiteracy, fear and fears (e.g., the fear of immigrants, or of losing everything) and, last but not least, a deep distrust of elites and institutions – which, it is worth noting, is the binding force that holds this large-scale phenomenon together. Populism-inspired movements are eating away at our democracies. Over the past few years, from one election to the next, they seem to have embarked on a march for the conquest of popular consensus at every institutional level in nearly all European countries, and they are making a run to become the ruling party. The ultimate reason for this rise of populism is the loss of credibility suffered by the political elites, or the so-called establishment, over the past decades. On the one hand, they have been incapable of responsibly, conscientiously and appropriately addressing the challenges posed by a world in which the pace of life has accelerated dramatically; on the other, they have been shamefacedly exalting the animal spirits of their constantly bickering leaders

(with all the vengeful, violent and underhand actions this often entails) as if putting on a show for the public. This has been increasingly the case in an age of pervasive media and global social networks. And those kinds of leaders have proved ineffectual again and again. By being incapable of matching their words with deeds and showing a counterproductive tendency to be divided and quarrelsome, the elites have signed their own demise, making possible what was unimaginable just a few years ago. However, one significant aspect is starting to become clear, namely that winning elections is not enough. It never is. It has not been enough to prop up the erstwhile ruling classes against the tide of populist movements, and it will not be enough for those populist movements that are running governments – as is currently the case in the city of Rome, for example – to be on the ready to win new elections. The reason for this is simple: one can win elections as a populist, but if one truly intends to govern and introduce change, one can no longer remain a populist. Governing means making choices – that is, dealing with the complexity of the available options and solutions and heading in one specific direction – instead of avoiding said complexity by coming up with excuses. If populism, as suggested by Columbia University professor Nadia Urbinati, is “the extreme border of representative democracy” (Micromega, May 2014), when called upon to govern, it is bound to face a dilemma. Either it attains an institutional standing, thus relinquishing its role as a universal release valve in order to become a political entity seeking specific, appropriate and feasible solutions, or it ends up imploding, destroyed by its own rhetoric. After all, populism as a phenomenon is intrinsically negative, always against something or someone, never in favour of anyone specifically. This is why all brands of populism can be bunched together as being anti-establishment rather than being right or left wing because what ultimately matters to them is being against. Thus the differences among the leftwing anti-austerity radical movements, such as the Spanish Podemos, the Greek Syriza and the Pirates in Sweden and Germany, or those between the xenophobic, racist and far-right Alternative für Deutschland in Germany and the Five Star Movement in Italy, and between the National Front in France and its Austrian counterpart led by former presidential candidate Norbert Hofer, ultimately dissolve. Their position along the time-worn, right-left axis is of no consequence, what really matters is the pro-/anti-establishment axis, the opposition between inclusion and exclusion.

Where does this lead us? Populism and consensus in the medium term are natural enemies. Petitioning for consensus in order to govern, and not just to represent, is a much more difficult task than providing a mouthpiece through which all those who feel disenfranchised and sidelined by social dynamics can voice their confusion and insecurities. Slogans, invectives and shouting can no longer do the trick; what is required at this point are real answers to real problems, based on appropriate and

viable solutions. One might argue that we do not have the time to grant populist forces the chance to govern, thus revealing to the electorate their ineptitude in solving the problems and challenges of our times. This claim is true. And this is clearly where the challenge for non-populists lies. Is important to be aware of the widespread fear of the unknown and to recognize the difficulty of explaining the current problems and their possible solutions to increasingly frazzled and divided societies. At the same time, it is essential to bear in mind that we cannot win the battle for consensus against the populist movements and parties unless we are truly convinced we are capable of providing the solutions we promise. Non-solutions are no use to anyone. And while populists can transform even a non-solution into consensus, seeing as they are not required to be credible, a non-solution is of no use to non-populists who aspire to govern. For the latter, credibility is an essential requirement, one that is carefully scrutinized and assessed by the electorate.

In Italy, The Five Star Movement is trying to present itself as a governmental party, searching for new figures in society, presenting new shocking ideas and proposals, and lowering the radical tones of the most-prominent MPs, presenting no-solutions as solutions. But I am not so sure that this strategy will be sufficient for them to win the political elections, and obtaining the majority in both Chambers of the Parliament. The Italian electors are more quiet and moderate, and at least on the ballot for the Senate, they will vote widely for the “old” parties, which may be also for Forza Italia, Berlusconi’s personal party.

However, the dilemma remains the same: how much will the old parties be able to convince voters more than the populist parties? In any case, the only way to defeat populism, both in the medium and the short term, is to go back to the ways of old, by cultivating the kind of credibility that stems from keeping one’s promises, which in turn lends credibility to what one promises to do. After all, there are no other alternatives to counter a phenomenon that, given its size, facets and plurality of forms, risks being successful due to the spinelessness of the ruling classes rather than the skills of its leaders. Certainly, a great antidote for populism would be a federated Europe: the best way to repeal anti-establishment movements and could provide the right recipe for a solution to major problems.

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Giannina Rafo

*“An idea is like a virus. Resistant. Highly contagious. The smallest seed of an idea can grow. It can grow to define or destroy you. The smallest idea like: ‘Your world is not real.’ A simple little thought that changes everything.”* — Dominick Cobb, *Inception*, 2010.

There are a million ways in which we can define populism, but I would like to start by defining it as the disease of democracy. This disease proliferates like a virus and lives in the political and economic culture of the authoritarian statism that today predominates in Venezuela.

Currently, Venezuela maintains in full force the need to destroy ideas that might promote the popularity of collectivism, and build, through the dissemination of ideas of freedom, the liberal alternative. The unfortunate thing is that in Venezuela, most people have never met the call of freedom and prosperity, drunk as they have been on populism and political personalism.

## Political mediocrity leads to populism

In Venezuela, we have perpetually been on a quest to find a “supreme leader” and place him in a position of power where he is supposedly going to “solve all our problems.” Since there is no such thing as a unitary “will of the people,” populists are frequently charismatic leaders who can at least appear to unite people with disparate views and desires. Their supporters think, “We believe that the leader embodies our will, so we don’t need spaces in which this can be contested,” and “We should let the leader do the job.”

A great example of this is how Hugo Chávez’s personalism permeated Venezuelan politics. His autocratic leadership led to a dangerous model where he and the military had a central role in government and the economy. This doctrine emphasizing the significance, uniqueness, and inviolability of his personality, disrupted the predictability and routinization of party organizations, undermined liberal democratic institutions, and led Venezuela to its current crisis, in which institutions have become so crippled that crime is rampant, corruption is the bread of every day and the quality of life has collapsed.

The real concern is that those consequences are obvious only after the architects of “Socialism of the 20th Century” have done their damage, though most of the society still thinks their leader needs a chance. It’s all about manipulated masses.

### Populist use of language and construction of parallel realities to manipulate masses

It is important to highlight what the Venezuelan academic Carlos Rangel argued throughout his life: that there are political myths that prevail in Latin America and specifically in Venezuela (populism, anti-imperialism, revolution, etc.) which are the root cause of economic and social backwardness in the region. Only by identifying and destroying those myths — by means of arguments based on the principles of freedom (liberal democracy, rule of law and market economy) and the favorable results to the people where they are applied — can our countries get out of ignorance, poverty, insecurity, and authoritarianism.

This idea should once again serve as a reminder not only for Venezuelans, but for all Latin Americans, to rethink whether we should continue to be victims of the political adventurism of the collectivist left, represented by a sector of the ruling class that promotes corruption and opportunism.

Jean-Francois Revel once said that the underdevelopment of the Latin American region was, above all, due to political rather than economic reasons. I would like to add that it is also a cultural issue; although we have vast resources and can do everything from climbing mountains, to exploring the deepest oceans, to founding global oil companies, for some reason we can’t move past this idea that we need political overlords who tell us what we can and can’t do with our own lives. As the opening quotation of this piece illustrates, the socialist world in which many Venezuelans live, which is mounted on scandalous myths and lies, “is not real.” We must grow a very simple idea: should we wish to be free again, the defense of freedom and the limitation of power as a condition for security and prosperity is our only alternative.

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# The Postmodern Dictatorship in Russia

## – An interview with Peter Pomerantsev

- 1. Exactly one hundred years ago, the Russian Empire went through a series of crises that culminated with the October revolution and the civil war. What followed shaped the modern history of Europe. The USSR ceased to exist in 1991. Today, however, especially in Russia, we witness a rebranding of the Soviet heritage. What is the relationship and the attitude that the contemporary government of Russia have towards this heritage, and what is their key motivation in building this relationship?**

Let's start with the revolution because they are different things. So, they are very scared of the revolution, because it obviously symbolizes a radical change and that is not something that the present regime wants. They have really been playing down the revolution. The most interesting historical project this year about the revolution, actually, has been done by the liberals. [person] used to be the editor of a small independent TV station, he created an internet project which is still going, where some different characters from the revolution tell their story every day. They have a live tweet feed, retelling the revolution day by day, a hundred years on. There are different reasons why they have done all this, but one of them might be to saw the seed of the possibility of change. The meaning of the revolution has in many ways been reversed, where the liberals are now the ones playing with these ideas, because they want change, while the conservatives, who are more pro – Soviet, try to forget about the idea of the revolution as it is a threat. So I think this is really something to think about. This is not history we are talking about, rather it is the uses of history in the present.

Basically, the Putin historiography, the way it is taught in schools, if you simplify it, is very simple. It is not about Soviets or Russians, it is about leaders. It is about strong leaders – good; weak leaders – bad. So historically, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Stalin, Brezhnev – good, while Tsar Nikolai, Gorbachev, Krushchev – bad. So that is the division. It is not about ideology, it is about strength.

- 2. In your book “Nothing is True and Everything is Possible” you define the Putin regime as a “postmodern dictatorship that uses the language and institutions of democratic capitalism for authoritarian ends”. How would you present this concept in more detail? What are the similarities and what are the differences between the Putin model of governance and the model of governance of the USSR period?**

So even since then, since my book is about the 2001 – 2011 period, it sort of ends in 2013, it ends with Crimea. . In the book I say, “the game is changing”, but its postmodernity still survives. In a sense that things are all, using this wonderful Baudrillardian term, which is hugely popular in Russia, a simulacrum. Things are obviously different from the Soviet times. Of course, Russia is more open now, with open borders and all. But also, the Soviet Union was very centralized. It was one ideology, one party, with one decision making chain. Modern Russia networked, diffused, decentralized for an authoritarian regime, open borders, etc. With the rest, the things I care about, which are the media, television, the propaganda, it is also the change of the use of ideology. The Soviet Union had one ideology, and therefore it was quite easy to oppose it. Also, they had only one version of truth. It was a modernist project, in a sense that they were trying to achieve an officially great rational dream, to achieve the ideal society through scientific means. That meant you could also catch them out, so the BBC World News Service and the Radio Free Europe could broadcast the truth into the Soviet Union about arrests, about what was really going on there, and people would care about that and try to stop it.

The new regime is completely postmodern psychologically, in a sense they don't care about the idea of truth, they don't care about the future, they are not going anywhere, they are not trying to achieve anything. But it is also postmodern regarding ideology, in a sense that you do not have only one ideology, you have a simulacrum, all these fake political parties, actually controlled by the Kremlin, which are meant to give a facade of a democratic debate. But if you sort of poke them, they are not real political parties. But it goes deeper than that, if we take this idea that things are what they seem. Everything in Russia is not what it seems. It may be written “Police” on the door, but it does not do the job of the police, it does not protect you from criminals. It actually enables criminals. You see, for example, traffic policemen, they are not being traffic policemen, they are doing something else in that job, collecting money usually. So everything isn't what it seems. In that sense there is still a relationship with the Soviet Union, because that, too, was something pretending to be communist, without being it. So you could see the roots of it in the Soviet Union, but it obviously went on.

- 3. It is often the case that the power of Russia, be it real or exaggerated, is analyzed through its military capacity or the capacity of its security – intelligence apparatus. Very little attention, however, is paid on the media architecture, sophisticated propaganda, and influence channeled through culture and art. If “the task is to synthesize Soviet control with Western entertainment” as you put it in your book, what are the methods and strategies that Kremlin uses to achieve it in practice?**



Domestically, I do not think there is anything clever there, they just buy the Western TV programs and they show them, and then, they make Putin into a reality show of their own. Putin learnt a lot from Berlusconi, who apparently told Putin, but I do not know how reliable this quote is, that “if it is not on TV, it does not exist”. Putin understands the power and value of television, the first thing that he did when he came to power was to take over television stations. They make it entertaining by making a lot of shows, but what they have also done, they make the news like a movie. A lot of it is around the war, which really pushed the boundary between the movie and war. So by the time we get to war in Crimea and the Ukraine, it is presented on the Russian news really like a movie, like entertainment. But even in the Iraq war there was still journalism happening, people were still reporting on what was happening, but in Ukraine, there was no need to do that anymore. Literally, stories were made up, stories are often made up in war time, but they wouldn't be made up nonstop. You would see these kind of actors appearing in different scenes on the news. You had several famous scenes where there was this one woman, who was an employee of the party actually, she was in one news segment as a woman in Odessa as a woman worried about her relatives, and in the next segment she was playing somebody else in another Ukrainian city. They were literally just taking actors. And NTV crews, NTV is one of the Russian channels, the TV crews were turning up in Odessa, and they would organize a little crowd saying “Look, there's a protest there”. This happens often in Russia. I think it is that they took something that they saw in the West, no doubt, and they took it to its logical extreme. This is somewhat a very Russian thing to do, take an idea from the West and take it to its logical conclusion. Like they did with Communism, they saw it in the West and took it to its logical conclusion. There is really a pattern there, like we will take a novel and take it to its logical conclusion.

It is very interesting to talk to the viewers as well. I did some focus groups, among Russian Latvians. They are not stupid, they understand that most of what they see on Russian TV is probably bollocks, but they go like “it's fun, we watch it because it is entertaining” and as long as people are watching you can always get your message across, even if they don't believe you 100%, something stays there.

**4. It seems that the Russian government supports and encourages various and ideologically diverse populist parties and movements in Europe. What would be the motivation for this from the perspective of the political power structures in Moscow?**

In a way it is a very old practice, the Kremlin has always tried to reach out to different parties in the West. In a way it is an old playbook, to split the West. Let's

step back for a second and ask a different question: Is Russia a threat to the West? This is a question that is often answered. On one hand, the answer is obviously “no” because in any war we would probably win. But that’s not what the West is, the West is an idea. It is an idea that the countries in the EU and NATO, so basically America and Europe, will defend each other, and that they are somehow a part of one great project together. So to defeat the West, Russia does not have to defeat the West in a war, it just has to undermine that idea. And that is actually not very hard, because there are plenty of people in the West who think that. The populist parties that you just mentioned are an example. So the Kremlin encouraged them as they can, sometimes more openly and financially, like with Marine Le Pen, when they gave her money. Sometimes, with the German parties it is harder to tell. I do not think this has to be direct payments, it can be favors, media exposure, business favors, for example it could be easier to invest in Russia if you are helpful, you really have to climb into details of these relationships.

There is also another way of looking at this, which is these parties using the Kremlin. They are constantly, I imagine since I am not in the room, but I imagine, they constantly go “we will help you, give us some money” and the Kremlin is like “prove you can do something first”, especially with some Balkans, Bulgarian parties. This is not a linear relationship. I think that Orban is fascinating this way. He wants the Russian money, and he wants to use Russia to get at the EU, for example whenever the EU is giving him a hard time, he goes like “Alright I will go to Russia”. So he is using Russia in this conversation and I think trying to get money from Russia at the same time. I think the Russians are very well aware they are being used. You have a game where everyone is using everyone else, everyone is trying to trick everyone else, and everyone is blackmailing everyone else. I guess it is especially that way in the Balkans, you certainly know more about that than I do, but it certainly looks like that from the side. So these things should not be seen as linear, these are complex games where everybody is playing each other and they are often using Russian threat as a way to get leverage.

## **5. Who is Vladislav Surkov, the “Kremlin demiurge” and why is he important for understanding of the Reality Show Russia?**

This is what makes it so wonderfully Russian, you know. There are a lot of countries with people like that, who run the PR or propaganda, but Surkov then goes on and writes novels about it. Which are very good. I mean they are not very good, they are talented, he is gifted, they are short stories which are kind of self analytical and very cynical. And very playful and postmodernist. He is fascinating that way, a gift

that you do not picture coming that way, like Trump, a weird mixture of power and media and script writing. They have always been together, but not when the performance is everything he is really mixing it, the performance, the theatre, the politics, they are all one thing. I mean, his e-mails were hacked during the Crimean war. The e-mails are this wonderful mix of people who are pitching him movies, people writing to him about art, and then something like “Do we destroy this party in Donetsk”. It is a weird mix and he kind of brings it together, the playfulness and the power. In that sense he is very much symbolic of his time, we should not overestimate his power, he is somebody who serves power, not somebody who dictates power. Putin trusts him, because he is still there.

**6. What is the ideological portrait of the political opposition in Russia, and what is the real strength of the civil society? How is it possible, if it is possible at all, to distinguish between organizations and groups that genuinely favored the rule of law and the ones that are fake and paid by the government?**

The civil society, with all the non-governmental organizations, is very weak. This is one part historical, Russia has always been a very centralized country. The power structures have been centralized, but it is also because of oil. The economic structure and the economy have also been centralized. The oil makes economic power centralized, and everything crystalizes around money. It's not like Ukraine, where there are some superficial similarities with Russia, but where the state is weak, and you have a really strong civil society, as there is no money, so people have to form business organizations, organize around church, family organizations. You always had this tradition, historically, of the state being an occupier, whatever it was, the Russians, the Germans, who has ever occupied them, and the Ukrainian civil society always developed outside the state, while in Russia to be any sort of actor you always had to be within the state.

It's a little bit like, you always ask in Russia, “What is the genuine opposition?”. You always debate if they are playing the game or they are genuine. Often the line is when you get shot and killed, after that they go like “Oh, he was genuine”. It is very hard but you can point to the individual people or groups where you see, just by their level of sacrifice, that this is the real thing.

**7. What kind of political dynamics should we expect in near future in Russia? Do you believe that a critical mass of democratic forces with real impact could be formed and that such a critical mass could bring about more rule of law, better institutions and less corruption in Russia?**

We are seeing protests all across the country and it is technically a middle class country, so, yes, why not. You have enough people who own cars, have flats, there is a limit to how much they can be pushed around. But that is not really the point I think. The point, I think, is that there is a bigger historical point about Russia being empire. And that as long as it still sees itself as an empire, that seems to be related to the need of a Tsar like authoritarian figure. So we will know that something has changed when Russia stops thinking of itself as an empire. And that is something very hard, I mean Britain was relatively good at getting rid of the empire, but it still has its moments of madness based on this historical memory of being an empire. That is what has to change. My symbol of that is when the leader of the country would stop living in the Kremlin, when we see them not living in the Kremlin anymore, and the Kremlin just becomes a museum, maybe then Russia ends up in a new historical plain. Most Russians just want a fairly normal middle class existence but it really is this idea of being a really great power that kind of infects everything else.

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*Eduardo Fernández Luiña<sup>1</sup>*

PODEMOS has burst in the Spanish political landscape after the electoral success it obtained in the elections to the European Parliament in 2014. After those five European MEPs, the organization increased up to 71 MPs in the Congress of Deputies and 15 Senators, becoming one of the most powerful political formations in the Legislative branch of the Kingdom of Spain.

If we study both the origin of the party and its electoral success, we find a large number of questions that we should try to answer throughout this brief article on the organization. How was it born? How is it organized? Does it have real possibilities to grow and to continue dividing the already fragmented political party system in Spain?

## **The origins: From a social movement to a political party**

We cannot understand PODEMOS without the 15 M<sup>2</sup>. This social movement served as a breeding ground for the organization to recruit some of its leading cadres. And we cannot understand the 15 M without being aware of the serious economic, political and social crisis that has affected Spain since 2008. If we analyse everything step by step, we can understand why this disruptive and dangerous political organization was born.

In 2008, one of the biggest economic crises in its history exploded in Spain. At that time, unemployment rose from 7.9% in 2007 to 27.2% in mid-2012. In some of the autonomies<sup>3</sup>, the figure reached 50% of the working population, literally provoking a real social upheaval “The crisis took out a whole sector of the economy, that is the construction industry.”

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2 The 15 M was a social movement. The movement protested because of the economic crisis Spain suffered at this moment. For more information visit: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martin-varsavsky/spanish-revolution-of-201\\_b\\_867156.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martin-varsavsky/spanish-revolution-of-201_b_867156.html)

3 Autonomous community. Decentralized territorial entity. In Spain there are 17 territories with autonomy, among them stand out due to the high social and political conflict, Catalonia and Basque Country.

The loss of jobs generated a disaffection that was taken advantage of by some organizations of the extreme left.

The lack of job opportunities, the rampant corruption that had been discovered among the political elite of the two main parties of the Spanish political system (center-right Popular Party (PP) and center-left Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)) and the rescue of some banks (State owned banks called *Cajas de Ahorro*) increased the political disaffection and anti-system currents. On May 15 (2011) numerous demonstrators occupied *Puerta del Sol* (in the centre of *Madrid*) and developed a social movement led by a group of extreme left-wing individuals from the academic world. This phenomenon, known as the movement of the *Indignados*, served as a process of recruiting elites - of the current organization - and as an experiment to raise the population and, capitalizing discontent, to obtain power.

Thanks to his ability to coordinate social frustration and due to his public exposure on television, Pablo Iglesias burst into the political landscape with a new organization eager to gain power. The first experiment was the European elections. In this electoral competition, PODEMOS obtained 5 deputies of the 54 Spanish MEPs in the European Parliament. The result propelled PODEMOS in the fourth position behind the two dominant parties that gave stability to the Spanish political system.

### **The assault on the Spanish legislative power: The success of PODEMOS in the parliamentary elections of 2015 and 2016**

The social movement and the success in the European elections produced an atmosphere of ecstasy in the Spanish radical left. As Pablo Iglesias pointed out, they were playing to win and not to be the opposition. The situation could not be more complex by the end of 2015, when elections to the Spanish Parliament took place on December 20<sup>th</sup>. The results demonstrated a clear fragmentation of the traditional system of Spanish political parties and strengthened PODEMOS and its leaders. The organization obtained 13% of the votes, but due to the union of this political force with a relevant number of small far left parties distributed throughout Spanish territory, its presence was 21% of the valid vote and 69 out of 350 deputies. A success that put in danger the Spanish political system emanated from the democratic transition in 1978.

These elections drew a complex parliamentary map that prevented the formation of a national government. Spain was, literally, 315 days without government until the convening of new elections that took place on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016. On

that date, a reinforced PODEMOS in coalition with *Izquierda Unida* (the former Communist Party of Spain), obtained 71 Deputies, achieving 21.10% of the valid vote. PODEMOS became without doubt the third political force after the Popular Party (with 137 Deputies and 33% of the vote) and PSOE (with 85 Deputies and 22.6% of the votes cast). The crisis was capitalized by the party and the organization's electoral and communication machinery catapulted this young political party from being a marginal organization in early 2014 to becoming the third largest political force in 2016. Two years of unprecedented growth have put in trouble the political system of the country.

### What does PODEMOS sell? What does PODEMOS offer?

We could label PODEMOS as a left-wing populist organization. When we analyse the political program, it is plagued with contradictions. It is a political offer aimed to the discontented and frustrated individuals by the economic crisis. However, the essence of the organization is more problematic and dangerous. There are a lot of articles (Timermans, 2014; Tamames, 2015; Müller, 2015) that pointed out the most important objective of the PODEMOS PARTY: The central desire of PODEMOS is to destroy the Spanish system emanating from the transition to democracy in 1978. This is the central objective of the organization. This is the most important thing for several of its founders: Íñigo Errejón (professor of Political Science and also adviser and consultant of different leftist Latin American governments, for example Bolivia), Juan Carlos Monedero (professor of Political Science and adviser of Chávez and of Maduro) and Pablo Iglesias himself (professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences of the *Universidad Complutense de Madrid* and his colleagues). That elite believes that the transition was a process planned by the right for their own benefit. And in this process, the forces of the left, especially the Communist Party of Spain, were accomplices. Therefore, due to the need to recover the system and overcome the right, it is necessary to modify the nature of the same, changing its architecture as we know it.

It is undeniable that Spain enjoyed one of the sweetest periods of its history between 1978 and 2008. However, for PODEMOS, the aforementioned period (from 1978 to the present) is the result of a conspiracy by the right-wing forces that must be corrected. To this end, the political program of PODEMOS emphasizes the critic to the monarchical form of government, the right of certain peripheral communities to decide on their future and a better redistribution of wealth.

The economic and political program of the organization is terribly deficient and at times incoherent. The “designers” of the organization have demonstrated their

ideological commitment and a little economic formation. If we had to summarize the economic political program, we could point out the following PODEMOS wishes:

- 1) Sharing existing work in the Spanish labor market to reduce the existing unemployment.
- 2) Nationalize the bank and exit the EURO (if necessary).
- 3) Promote an aggressive social housing policy.
- 4) Increase the minimum wage.
- 5) Increase the progressiveness in the Spanish tax system (already excessively high).
- 6) Expropriate certain properties and incur in defaults of public debt if considered right by the population. Yes, you read that well... it is correct, they want to democratize the default or payment of the public debt.
- 7) Promote a universal basic income.

In addition to these measures, already dangerous for a society of free individuals, they want to nationalize the media. They say that nationalization would imply a democratization of the media, diminishing the power of the great capitalists. As Assis Timermans points out:

*To advance towards a system in which the map of the media responds to a concrete design from the State is always to reduce freedom and to facilitate the subjection of citizens to power (Timermans, 2014).*

PODEMOS does not believe in individual freedom. If they obtain a greater power than they already enjoy, the existing freedoms run the risk of disappearing.

### **Conclusions: They can win?**

As we have seen, this article has presented the origins, development and political offer of the PODEMOS party organization. PODEMOS is the third largest political force in the current Spanish party map. If the effects of the crisis are not reduced, the organization will grow as it has been proven, thanks to an attractive speech and a good marketing campaign. This proves that they have the capacity to capitalize the social discontent to obtain power.

Now, it can be assumed that if unemployment goes down and the economic situation improves, PODEMOS will have problems in obtaining electoral wins. The improvement in productivity and employment will weaken the organization. Let's hope



so because Spain and its citizens deserve a future in freedom and PODEMOS is the biggest enemy of an open society.

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## The Logic of the Enemies of Liberty - An interview with Tom Palmer

- 1. You often say, on your conference speeches and interviews, that the world has entered a new era of political and social conflict. In this new era, those who oppose the ideas of individual freedom, open society and free economy use different arguments and techniques than their historical predecessors did in the XX century. What does this mean in practice?**

Actually, we're seeing some recycling of old ideas that most people thought had been discarded in 1945. We've just not seen them in this particular form for a long time. The "Identitarians" are recycling the ideas of collective, rather than individual, identity and value, the ideas that brought us hatred, war, mass murder, and a devastated continent. That is often associated with the "right." On the left, there has been a resurgence of a new kind of identitarian politics and, unsurprisingly, it has given fuel to the re-emergence of identitarian ideas on the right. Leftist ideology is something we're acquainted with, but since the collapse of the USSR we haven't seen it quite as organized as we're seeing it now.

What's unique is the degree to which both far left and far right have integrated their ideologies with the extremes of postmodern thought. Extreme post-modernists insist that all social forms are social constructs and they infer that they are therefore products of will and that will is inevitably a collective one. Thus, when will is invoked, whether explicitly or implicitly it is no longer the will of this or that person, but the will to power of a collectivity, whether a race or a class or a nation, that produces social forms and thus the identity of the members of the greater social wholes. As such, individuals are epiphenomenal, mere foam on a deeper surface, entirely lacking in substance, and thus, frankly, expendable.

Those ideas were formative for the rival collectivisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, both the far left and far right draw on common intellectual sources that were deeply enmeshed in anti-liberal National Socialist ideology, specifically the ideas of Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger, both of whom were explicit enemies of liberalism and both of whom have inspired illiberalisms of many sorts, including radical Islamism -- the intellectual architects of the Islamic Republic of Iran were avowed Heideggerians, leftist political correctness, and the neo-Nazi "Alt-Right" and "Identitarian" movements.

Because the attack on individual liberty, toleration, and the rule of law has such deep metaphysical roots, the response must be both metaphysical and political, that is to say, the ontological primacy and the worth and value of the numerically and materially individuated human being, to use Thomas Aquinas's phrasing, must be reaffirmed, both morally and at the deeper level of ontology. Group identities are not primary, but derived. It is the individual human being who lives, suffers, experiences, and dies, not the group. Groups are real, to be sure, but they are not ontologically equivalent to the individuals of which they are composed, for they are composed of individuals and their complex relationships with each other. A forest is not a really big tree; a building is not a huge brick; a society or a nation is not a big person. And that society or nation is not "more real" than the individuals who make it up, each of whom has a unique identity.

- 2. For many people, it seems hard to believe that someone would embrace conflict and struggle over cooperation and peace. It might not be surprising that certain fringe groups reject the idea of cooperation and prosperity, but it seems that these violent and zero – sum world-views sometimes appeal even to moderate people. What moves people to favor conflict and violence over peace, freedom, mutual benefit and prosperity?**

That's a big question. In some cases, people seek their identity and worth only through identification with a group. That's true of street gangs and it's true of violent leftist or rightist political movements. A person of little personal accomplishment can stand tall in the knowledge that he or she is a member of a "race" or a "class" that has accomplished what he or she has failed to accomplish. That's quite evident in the cases of ultra-nationalist, neo-Nazi, and racist groups, who offer recruits unearned identities and unearned accomplishments and glory.

Moreover, the violence is especially attractive to disaffected, alienated, and young men who can indulge their impulses to violence. Civilization is a matter of learning to control oneself and to internalize standards of behavior; violent gangs, whether political or not, and for the latter, I have in mind drug gangs and the like, liberate young men from those internal restraints and many of them exult in it. You can find the highest celebration of violence in the writings of a great German author, Ernst Jünger, who wrote in his great novel about his experiences in the first World War, *The Storm of Steel*, "I learned from this very four years' schooling in force and in all the fantastic extravagance of material warfare ... there are ideals in comparison with which the life of an individual and even of a people has no weight. And though the aim for which I fought

as an individual, as an atom in the whole body of the army, was not to be achieved, though material force cast us, apparently, to the earth, yet we learned once and for all to stand for a cause and if necessary to fall as befitted men. ... It is not every generation that is so favoured.” He fervently believed that his generation had been favoured by being plunged into war. In fact, he was attracted to both National Socialism and Bolshevism, because both offered planned social orders, subject to human will. Contrast that with the approach of another best-selling writer from the Great War, the Erich Maria Remarque, who wrote *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which portrayed the very unglorious nature of the suffering and degradation of soldiers at the front. Jünger was celebrated by the ultra-Nationalists and the liberal and cosmopolitan Remarque had to escape Germany as his books were thrown into the flames.

Jünger and others considered violent confrontation the apex of their existence. Jünger’s friend Carl Schmitt built out of violent confrontation a political theory based on the distinction between “friend” and “enemy” – in German, *Freund* und *Feind*, that has been immensely influential on both left and right. Schmitt’s philosophy of conflict, basically dressing up thuggery in legal language, figures prominently in the thought of anti-liberal leftists such as Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Negri, and Chantal Mouffe and anti-liberal rightists such as the French identitarian Alain de Benoist, the writers and editors of the German nationalist publication *Junge Freiheit*, and the Russian fascist Alexander Dugin. They live for conflict. As Žižek asked in one of his virtually unreadable screeds, “is not the relationship to an external Other as the enemy a way of disavowing the *internal* struggle which traverses the social body? In contrast to Schmitt, a leftist position should insist on the unconditional primacy of the inherent antagonism as constitutive of the political.” What Žižek either didn’t understand or deliberately occluded is that Schmitt did not consider the enemy as “an external Other,” but was focused, as has been demonstrated in Raphael Gross’s study *Carl Schmitt and the Jews*, on precisely internal “inherent antagonism,” in his case between Jews and other races, but for Žižek and others any other enemy will do; of course, many leftists also focus on Jews, usually referred to using code words, such as “financial interests.” Those who uphold antagonism as constitutive of our lives together, who believe that we can only have friends when we have common enemies, always hold the Jews in reserve; in European history, at least, they have proven to be the most convenient enemy for such people.

3. **On surface, many of the ideas that populist movements advocate for are the recycled ideas of some of the XX century philosophers and authoritarian thought leaders. On your public lectures, you speak about the influence of Heidegger, Schmitt, Marx, Engels or Marcuse**

**on contemporary political thought leaders. It seems that today these messages are still present in the political discourse – the messages have just been put in a slightly different package: if we see the rhetoric of the populists on the left, such as Syriza, Jeremy Corbyn, or the social justice groups on American college campuses, but also on the right, such as the alt-right movement, or Jobbik party in Hungary, they all pretty much use the same ideas as in the XX century. We know these ideas did not work then and that they brought nothing but violence, destruction and poverty. How comes that we who favor free trade, peace, individual freedom and open society, have not managed to convince people to abandon these authoritarian ideas?**

Let me start with Marxism as an illiberal movement. Marx and Engels in their old age insisted that their theories were the result of the study of the laws of history, resulting in a science of socialism. That is not supported by the history of their own development. Although Engels wrote in 1880, “These two great discoveries: the materialist conception of history and the revelation of the secret of capitalist production through surplus value, we owe to Marx. With them socialism became a science....,” in fact, Engels was the one who influenced Marx, with his 1843 essay “Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy,” which was an attack on liberalism for moral, not historical or scientific, grounds. In 1844 Engels thundered against the free-trade movement: “You have brought about the fraternization of the peoples – but the fraternity is the fraternity of thieves. You have reduced the number of wars – to earn all the bigger profits in peace, to intensify to the utmost the enmity between individuals, the ignominious war of competition!” So, trade was condemned for promoting greater mutual benefits, which weighed so much more than reducing the number of wars. That’s worth thinking about further. The beneficial and pacific results of trade were cast aside as unimportant, compared to the immorality of earning profits during peacetime. Engels had attacked “the avarice of the calculating or gambling speculator” and pilloried “usury,” or receiving interest for lending money, relying on the primitive idea that it represented profit without doing any work: “The immorality of lending at interest, of receiving without working, merely for making a loan, though already implied in private property, is only too obvious, and has long ago been recognized for what it is by unprejudiced popular consciousness, which in such matters is usually right.”

And, of course, Marx upped the ante with his anti-Semitic broadside “On the Jewish Question,” published in the same issue of the journal with Engels’s attack on liberalism. Thus, “Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us

look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew. What is the secular basis of Judaism? *Practical need, self-interest.* What is the worldly religion of the Jew? *Huckstering.* What is his worldly God? *Money.*” That became a common trope for anti-semitic hate groups. Marx attacked the very idea of toleration and equal rights in a free society in which relations are voluntary, contractual, and to mutual benefit. Thus, “The Jew has emancipated himself in a Jewish manner, not only because he has acquired financial power, but also because, through him and also apart from him, *money* has become a world power and the practical Jewish spirit has become the practical spirit of the Christian nations. The Jews have emancipated themselves insofar as the Christians have become Jews.” The worst thing he could say about liberalism is that under liberal principles “Christians have become Jews.” That hateful screed set the stage for some of the horrors that were to follow. (I should add that Schmitt was a big fan of the essay by Bruno Bauer on which Marx was commenting and which Marx thought did not go far enough.)

I’ve mentioned the centrality of anti-Semitism for a reason. It’s central to the illiberal movements of both left and right, because Jews are not merely convenient scapegoats, but can be identified as both the internal “Other” and the scheming speculators who enrich themselves without work, who have created vast conspiracies to cheat everyone else. As Marx put it in his 1856 essay on “The Russian Loan,” “The loan-mongering Jews of Europe do only on a larger and more obnoxious scale what many others do on one smaller and less significant. But it is only because the Jews are so strong that it is timely and expedient to expose and stigmatize their organization.” That language, notably “their organization,” could have been lifted from one of the ugly identitarian pamphlets being passed out today. Such ugliness is found on the far left, but it is central to the far right, as well, going back to the 1920s and 1930s. And recently they have also come up with new enemies against whom they pledge to protect our identities.

Those ideas appeal to a deep need to be identified with something bigger than oneself and to identify some clear enemy, a foe who creates feelings of solidarity. But why is there an increase in such ideas now? The answers vary from one country to the next, but there are common features. One is the issue in some countries of downward relative social status. We classical liberals have explained for years that zero-sum games, in which every gain is balanced by an equivalent loss, are very, very rare; far more common are positive-sum games, in which the sum of the gains is positive, and negative-sum games, in which the sum of the gains is negative. The former are exemplified by voluntary trade and the latter by theft, which usually inflicts on the victims losses that are far greater than the gains to the thieves. Other important examples of negative-sum games are war and comparison. A great benefit of the rule of law and

freedom of exchange is to substitute positive-sum games, games of mutual benefit, for the rare zero-sum games and the far more common negative-sum games.

But there is one area where that logic of liberalism fails to gain purchase: relative status. It's common to celebrate when various groups rise in relative social status. In the US, women, African-Americans, and others rose in status dramatically over the past decades. Donald Trump's predecessor was America's first president of color and his opponent, who gained more popular votes, was female. Well, when dealing with relative status, if someone rises, someone else has to fall. And who fell? White voters without college degrees, who voted 67% to 28% for Trump over Clinton. A rapid decline in relative social status left them angry. It's one of the triggers of authoritarianism, as it was in Germany after the first World War, as the German population was told that they had won the war in the east, but were betrayed and reduced to the status of a defeated and guilty nation. It's no wonder that a motto of "Make America Great Again" would appeal to people who felt that they were no longer on the top of the status pyramid. Several European countries seem to have seen similar movements, as well, but again, what has happened in Hungary or Poland or Britain or France or Germany has, in each case, its own local roots.

Current research indicates that authoritarian responses are triggered by perceived threats to group identity, social status, and physical security. The first two seem to be present in a number of countries that have seen rapid social change and the third is provided by the 24-hour news coverage of radical Islamist violence and, in the case of Europe, the refugee crisis. The actual numbers of murders from terrorist assaults are fewer than during other periods, such as the violent 1970s, but the coverage is incessant, generating a heightened sense of threat.

- 4. If we speak of authoritarian populism, we often use examples of certain individuals from the Donald Trump circles, we speak about some parts of the Brexit movement, Marine Le Pen in France, Victor Orban and Jobbik in Hungary, Syriza, or the Independent Greeks and the Golden Dawn in Greece. Are there any similarities between these movements? How come they came about and became mainstream at approximately the same time? What are some of the patterns that they share and are there any major differences between them?**

There are indeed similarities, as well as unique characteristics. Jan-Werner Müller, in his interesting book *What Is Populism*, identifies the distinguishing feature of populist movements as the claim that "they, and only they, represent the people." Donald

Trump invoked that theme repeatedly, most explicitly on May 7, 2016, when he stated, “The only important thing is the unification of the people, because the other people don’t mean anything.” In other words, there are some among us who are not «the people.» He has also called the media «the enemy of the people.» Trump and Le Pen and Orban and others all represent the «authentic nation,» and their enemies are, thus, the other people who don’t mean anything, or the enemies within. That is a central feature of authoritarian populism.

In addition to that and the other features I mentioned earlier, all of those you mention have connections to the Kremlin, which, partly under the influence of a truly malevolent figure named Alexander Dugin, has been waging information warfare against open and liberal social orders, against constitutional democracy, and against peaceful social cooperation generally. That has meant financing in various cases, sent through a variety of means, whether RT and Sputnik, Russian embassies, bank loans, and sponsorship by such corrupt Kremlin billionaire cronies as Konstantin Malofeev and Vladimir Yakunin. Besides such connections, the Kremlin has an army of information warriors who manage thousands and thousands of twitter accounts, many computer controlled, facebook accounts, and more, all of which produce anti-liberal disinformation on a truly massive scale. Recently, researchers noted a large number, 63,099 to be precise, of Twitter accounts with user names that end in 8 random digits that tweet between 8 am and 8 pm Moscow time about Ukraine, Brexit, Trump, the migrant crisis, Crimea, UKIP, and other favorite topics of the Kremlin. Как интересно, one might say.

**5. It seems that even though their rhetoric is full of perpetual conflict, struggle and violence, they also profit from each other, and often support each other’s political campaigns. Why do they do this? One would not, for example, expect nationalists of one country to support nationalists in other countries?**

That alliance in a kind of “Nationalist International” is temporary and inherently unstable. An illiberal international will invariably lead to conflict, because their illiberalisms are incompatible. They are united in hating liberalism, the philosophy of co-existence and toleration, but they typically hate each other, as well, and they will turn on each other. Hungarian nationalists hate Romanian nationalists and Slovak nationalists, and those groups hate Hungarian nationalists, portraying Hungarians as monkeys, for example, but for the moment they will join in hating liberalism. Liberals in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania do not hate each other and they need to work together for peace, because the nationalists are thirsting for violence.



**6. If we look at the popularity that some of these movements enjoy, we might be led to believe that these projects have been very well planned for years. Is this the case, or did they just see the opportunity and capitalize on it?**

I think that the Kremlin has been working for over ten years to foster an illiberal movement and various otherwise unconnected trains of events have come together well for them. That said, they have also made disastrous mistakes, as we see in Ukraine, which the Kremlin could have kept in their orbit had Putin not chosen one of the dumbest and greediest men in all of Ukraine as his puppet.

And they also seem to have lost by trying so hard to get Trump into place; it's backfired in terms of key Kremlin objectives, such as repeal of the Magnitsky Act that targeted eighteen persons identified with the Kremlin and involved in the murder of a Russian lawyer who had uncovered a startlingly large corruption scandal. The Kremlin retaliated by forbidding the adoption of Russian orphans by American citizens, which is why the Trump family members and campaign officials said that they discussed "Russian adoptions" with Kremlin agents during meetings. It's not gone well for the Kremlin. That said, they've been working on it for years.

There is another element, which is a parallel re-emergence of a radical "Traditionalist" agenda that is rooted in a very strange occult movement from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which has been promoted by the authentically bizarre Mr. Dugin. It's been documented rather well by the political historian Mark Sedgwick in his book from Oxford University Press, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. What those people believe is truly weird, including crazy myths about magical Aryans inhabiting the North Pole, the conflict with Atlantis, and other krank views. But it's been incorporated in such neo-Nazi publishing houses as Arktos Media, based in Budapest, which has brought out a large number of Fascist, National Socialist, and generally illiberal works in a multitude of languages. They have been building their network for some years and forging connections among various neo-Nazi, Fascist, and other "Identitarian" movements across Europe.

**7. If we want freedom to prevail, if we want more people to accept the values of peace and cooperation and the view that the world is not zero – sum and based on perpetual conflict, what should we do? How does one convince people who fundamentally reject the idea of cooperation, or even prosperity as such?**

I've devoted some thought to those questions. I think we should start by understanding that these new movements aren't simply ignorant of some lesson in economics, such as that policies to increase the supply of money and credit lead to higher prices or that price controls cause shortages. They don't need a calm explanation about the foundations of social cooperation and prosperity. They often have some acquaintance with classical liberal ideas about the rule of law, individual rights, and spontaneous orders and they completely reject them. They appeal to other values, mostly oriented around heroic conflict and noble violence, and they reject Enlightenment principles, rationality, and science generally.

Following Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, and other anti-liberals, they are generally poly-logists, believing that each group has its own logic, so they are resistant to rational argumentation generally. That said, we should engage them rationally and not merely ignore them. Their ideas should be critically examined and exposed as fantasies and fallacies.

We should also use humor to mock their pretensions to being the heirs of great warriors, as if they lived on the set of a Lord of the Rings movie. Jobbik, to take one example, is laughable. Their leaders are smart and often educated and multi-lingual, but they appeal to people who are very sensitive to being respected and who would be repelled from association with such a militantly hateful movement if they expected that others would laugh at them. They are very status conscious, after all, and that is one way to undermine them. Gaining an identity by not being this or that group, whether Jews, or Roma, or black, or gay, is the cheap way to acquiring an identity. You don't have to accomplish anything other than not being something else. Of course, some of them, especially among the leaders, are obsessed with fears that they may, indeed, have such backgrounds. Various Jobbik leaders come to mind, as well as the Russian anti-Semitic Fascist politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, whose father, Volf Isaakovich Eidelshstein, was not Russian, but Polish, and, the worst part for an anti-Semitic lunatic, a Jew. It takes a psychologist to understand what moves many illiberal politicians, and political strategists who understand psychology to combat them.

In short, we need to revisit philosophical issues and defend liberal ideas at their deepest level. Further, we need to embrace the discipline of psychology, including the important new advances in evolutionary and experimental psychology, and use it to understand and counter the desire for unearned identity through identification with races or classes and, more importantly, the negation of the identities of others. Please let me conclude with three other book recommendations that are quite relevant to these issues, all by psychologists. They are Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels*

*of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Joshua Greene's *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*, and Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Religion and Politics*. All offer deep insights, well grounded in empirical science, for understanding the re-emergence of collectivism. Empirical psychology should be at the center of the defense of liberalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# Ukrainian populists: in favour of everything good, against everything bad

*Mariia Chaplia*

After the Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine was expected to enter an era of radical reforms, which however stagnant still remain on the agenda, but haven't started being implemented by this very day.

There are two major enemies of freedom to be blamed for this: corruption and populism. Both of them reinforce each other and together make up a harmonious cornerstone of the Ukrainian political system. While corruption stands for a convenient method of sorting out affairs at all levels, populism serves as its blinding form, which holds the notion “in support of everything good, against everything bad” as the defining element.

## Everything for everyone

Unlike their like-minded Western colleagues, Ukrainian populists haven't defined the interests of the middle class as their target; they make promises to everyone notwithstanding social status and age. When the elderly cry for higher pensions and students want more government funded scholarships, Ukrainian populists enthusiastically step in with their rhetoric about the importance of increasing government spending and preserving free education.

When small businesses start making loud pleas about too high rates, they lament with all their heart about the need to reduce taxes. Should you ask them about the relevance of keeping more than 1500 public enterprises, Ukrainian populists will say that the number must be decreased, but the people working there can't be left without their jobs.

What is achieved at the end of the day can be rather summed up as “nothing for no one”. As a result, according to a [recent poll](#) from the International Republican Institute, only 18 percent of the surveyed backs President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Volodymyr Groisman, while 76 percent hold an unfavorable opinion of both. Though Ukrainians have presidential and parliamentary elections in two-years, it's their prerogative to make the right decisions. But will they?

Due to a weak capitalist tradition in the Ukraine, which corresponds with more than 70 years of socialist rule by the Soviets, it comes as no surprise that Ukrainians got used to relying on government in almost all spheres of their life. Starting from 1991, when Ukraine gained its independence, Ukrainians have been consistently trying to elect the “right” politician, that should as a Messiah step out of the crowd, take the power given to him by the electorate and without any abuses heal all the wounds every single Ukrainian citizen might have. As with every unattainable goal, the idea is just to keep moving towards it at all costs by gradually decreasing the value of every next effort. This led to a situation where poor quality politicians, who never stick to their promises and steal public money, get easily re-elected by making changes to their rhetoric.

The fact that there is not a single party in Ukraine, apart from the nationalist “Svoboda”, that has an ideological backbone, also contributes to this. In most cases, Ukrainian politicians “change colours” by swinging between political parties and opinions with the speed of the light, and, thus, make it hard for voters to remember what they proclaimed some time ago. Therefore, populist politicians in Ukraine always have all requests for accountability dismissed.

### Donbas war plays to the populists' advantage

Every Ukrainian politician feels obliged to start his every speech with a tribute to those who got killed or injured during the Donbas war by placing all the burden of responsibility on other Ukrainian politicians or, more often, on the Russian government. [According to UN figures](#) released in June 2017, at least 10,090 people have been killed and 23,966 injured since the Donbas conflict started in April 2014. The bigger the numbers are, the vaster a field for manipulation is. Henceforth, these numbers are used to justify the necessity of inefficient policies and distract attention from corruption and power abuse.

The [deprivation of Saakashvili of Ukrainian citizenship](#) without any legal merits, failed decentralisation and justice reforms, extension of moratorium on the sales of the agricultural lands, nationalisation of the biggest bank, sugar quotas and price regulation, tens of loans from the IMF, failed privatisation and anti-corruption reforms, new bureaucratic institutions, a higher than before minimum wage and increased tax rates stand out among numerous steps made by President Poroshenko to usurp power. The most important thing here is that even though the outcomes of

these policies are outrageous and have placed Ukraine on the 166th position in [2017 Index of Economic Freedom Index](#), they have been mostly tolerated by the population which accepts that war time requires harsh measures.

### More freedom, less Roshen chocolate

If the Ukraine with its [37.6 percent of overall tax burden and public debt equal to 80.2 percent of GDP](#) suffers from diabetes, where the sugar level makes the extent of government intervention, then what Ukraine needs is a serious medical treatment, not Roshen [a company owned by the President] chocolate.

Yet Ukrainian populists are too obsessed with remaining in power and keeping their inconsistent and senseless rhetoric, as well as public money flowing so long as it is unpunishable. If you know you can steal a candy from a public basket when no one is watching without any consequences, why not do it? Ukrainian populists have been driven by such approach for years. Not only have the Maidan murders not been investigated, but also the former corrupt political elites still enjoy the protection of the contemporary government.

Every social change is built from the bottom up. In Ukraine, civil society is the major advocate of freedom. Back in 2013, during the Revolution of Dignity people, united by the idea of freedom, started founding many grassroots organisations. The process is still ongoing, and even though most of them are not liberal in the classical sense, they aim at liberal improvements, such as transparency, justice reform, electronic governance, LGBT rights, education reform, etc.

While Ukrainian populists keep promising everything to everyone, and poisoning Ukraine with their sugary intervention, grassroots organisations are pushing for real change and making Ukraine freer.

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*Dr Eamonn Butler*

The high point of populism in the UK has to be the completely unexpected win for the Leave campaign in the recent 'Brexit' referendum. Despite an impressive line-up of those in power and authority telling the public that to Brexit would be so much of a disaster that no rational person would even contemplate it, a majority of those voting decided to defy them and vote to leave.

Thus the government backed Remain, and gave dire warnings that any minister who spoke otherwise would no longer have a future. The Treasury issued a 'facts' leaflet to every voting household, predicting recession, deficits, trade losses, job losses, higher taxes, cuts to public services if Leave won. All that seemed to be missing was predictions of a plague of frogs, flies, and the rivers turning to blood. The Bank of England said it was ready with 'emergency measures' if the disaster happened, and even the World Bank joined in. Universities said that research grants would dry up and UK universities would slip down the world tables. The leaders of Britain's biggest businesses and financial institutions warned that they could up sticks and move to Frankfurt. Even President Obama was wheeled in to London to say how the UK would be 'at the back of the queue' in trade talks if it were no longer a part of EU-US trade negotiations.

The wall seemed so impregnable that even the UK Independence Party leader, Nigel Farage, thought on the night that his side had lost. That is what the opinion polls were saying overwhelmingly. And yet, despite all the firepower that the government and its allies had mustered, the Leave side won the Referendum. The UK general public defied their leaders and voted with their hearts.

Why did the public reject the official wisdom, not to mention the official bullying? There are many reasons. The immediate ones were not unlike those that led to the election of Donald Trump in the US. (And significantly, when Trump was elected, the first foreign party leader to go to Manhattan and have himself photographed alongside the President-elect in the gold elevator was no other than Nigel Farage, who Trump suggested would make a great UK ambassador to the United States.)

As in America, the wealthier places in the UK voted for the status quo. London, with its huge financial services industry that depends on EU business—and its large middle class who depend on EU workers to clean their homes and offices, wait on

them in restaurants and staff their businesses—was strongly for Remain. As were university towns such as Cambridge. But Cambridge was a Remainer island in a sea of Leavers. In the vast counties that surround it, people voted to Leave.

While EU immigration had been a boon for the wealthy and educated middle classes, it had been a real threat to the jobs of rural and manual workers. When the EU opened up to immigration from Eastern Europe, the UK (under Tony Blair, to his credit) was one of the few countries that played by the rules and accepted the immigration unconditionally. Workers from Poland and other countries arrived in their millions—many of them with degrees and high qualifications, but very willing to work long hours as cooks or cleaners, or digging drains and picking fruit, all for pay that seemed hugely generous to them but dismally poor to domestic workers. And there were other local whose jobs had been lost through EU policy too. The UK's once-proud fishing industry was seen as a victim of the Common Fisheries Policy, which allowed Spanish and other boats to fish close to the British coast—a disaster for coastal ports and fish markets such as Grimsby, all big Leave voting regions.

It was not just about immigration, though that was the gut issue that finally won the referendum. There was a wide view that the UK, as one of the largest contributors to the EU budget, was sending large amounts of money to Brussels, to be squandered by an unelected and unaccountable elite on wasteful prestige projects abroad. One look at the impressive EU buildings in Brussels and Strasbourg is all you need to convince British taxpayers that the EU is out of touch and living in self-contained luxury at their expense.

And there was a feeling that the authorities in Brussels simply did not understand Britain's needs and psyche. They were out of touch. Small businesses, which unlike the large exporting businesses, were strongly in favour of Leave, complained about the snowstorm of EU regulations that they had to implement, even if they exported nothing at all to other EU countries: why have EU labelling and other standards, for example, if your goods are never going to leave the town they are produced in?

There is a deep issue behind this objection, though it is rarely understood or stated. The UK legal tradition is permissive, and has been for most of the last 1500 years—with a brief interlude when England was invaded and ruled by Norman French. In England, the tradition is that you do what you like, and only if a problem arises do the courts stop you. The continental tradition is restrictive. You can only do something if the authorities give you specific permission to do it. So detailed regulations are needed before you can do anything. Instead of British business being able to act in any



way that seemed 'reasonable', they now have to follow a long and minutely detailed rule book. No wonder they are annoyed.

The remarkable success of the ultra-left Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, is another example of populism in the UK. When Prime Minister Theresa May called an election this year, her party were well ahead in the polls and she expected to win a much larger majority that would help her steer through Brexit. In the event, Corbyn's Labour movement—with its promises of re-nationalization, abolishing student fees and more public spending—surged and came close to winning. All those Conservatives who had paid £3 to join the Labour Party and vote in the 'unelectable' extremist leader Corby were suddenly looking very worried.

Should they be? The mood of the UK public seems to be that they want to give a bloody nose to anyone in power. If the polls suggested Corbyn looked anywhere near to becoming Prime Minister, they would no doubt vote against him just as they voted to discomfit Theresa May.

Old tribal party loyalties have declined—and not just in the UK. More people now move far from home to seek work, and people are more socially mobile and less rooted into a local or class consensus. More accurate opinion polls are a huge benefit to savvy voters—and with politics dominating more of our lives and becoming more important to people's livelihoods and lifestyles, voters are indeed becoming more savvy. Tribalism has given way to tactics, and people can see the results of their tactical voting in the polls and the results.

And increasingly, they see politicians, journalists, officials, lobbyists and policy people as a different class—a new class of ruling elites, no better than the unelected aristocracy used to be. Many things have fed this separation of the political class from the public. The 24-hour news cycle leaves journalists desperate to fill the airwaves, and hungry for inside scoops from politicians. The politicians, meanwhile, are hungry to get themselves, and their own spin on events, into the media. It is an unholy alliance, and very much of a Metropolitan one—London is where the political power is, and where the media are centred too. What comes over to the public is therefore metropolitan attitudes that seem distant from their own concerns: fixation with gender politics that is lost on the non-metropolitan public; a keenness for trade, globalisation and immigration that people in the less prosperous parts of the UK see as a threat to their jobs. Certainly, such openness to trade and migration has brought benefits; but in defending them as perfectly natural and right, the power elites have lost touch with the culture, and the country's tribal notions of identity.

The joy of democracy is not that it enables you to choose leaders peacefully. Its real benefit is being able to get rid of them peacefully. It is easy to elect leaders, it is more difficult to restrain them once they have tasted power. But more and more, people feel they have no power to rein in their leaders. The government budget continues to grow, and the political and media class advance their own agendas, using the taxes of hard-pressed people to fund them. Bans on Members of Parliament having second jobs has cut them off from commercial life, and created a new class of professional politicians, but off from the public.

Meanwhile, business seems to grow larger, and thanks to their lobbying of governments that have more and more resources to dish out, wins more favours to keep out competition so that the public have no option to go somewhere else. Technology is developing so fast that it is not just car workers who wonder whether all their jobs will be replaced by robots: even professional people see it coming. The financial crash has led to incomes stagnating, and people seeing no end to their 'just about managing' troubles.

It is not so much populism in the sense that people share in their guts certain values that shock the educated elites—capital punishment, racism, anti-immigration, job protection, the usual list—though to a large extent they do. Rather, their problem is that they see themselves as ignored and exploited by those who are supposed to represent them. And faced with all this, the British public are doing what the British public have always done: poking fun at their leaders and making life as uncomfortable for them as they can. As long as they do not miscalculate and elect someone like Jeremy Corbyn, many of us think that this is actually no bad thing.

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# On populism and situation in Poland

## – An interview with Marek Tatala

### **1. How do you understand the roots of the authoritarian populism in Europe? What are some of the similarities between European populist ideas, movements and parties, that they have in common despite the differences between the countries they come from?**

Support for the authoritarian populist parties in Europe has been on the rise for years. However, it does not mean that there were no populists in the past. I think we should rather talk about the waves of populism, similar to economic cycles, but not necessarily correlated with them, as the roots of populism are not only in the economy. Moreover, these waves do not have to be synchronized among countries, though we see that today's growing left and right populism is a pan-European trend. The most recent estimates of this trend were done by the Swedish think tank Timbro. In the Epicenter Network's summary briefing about Timbro's Authoritarian Populism Index, we can read that "on average, around a fifth of the European electorate now vote for a left or right wing populist party". Finally, we should be aware that populism may have long term consequences. In my own research about institutional and political causes of the Greek crisis, I emphasized the impact of the 1980s populism which through its devastating impact on the political culture and foundations of the economy significantly contributed to the crisis in the late 2000s.

Because the wave of populism is high again in Europe, and other parts of the world, there are many attempts to identify similarities between European populists. The list is long and it seems that it is getting longer with each new article or book on this topic. I will only emphasize those similarities which, from my perspective, are very common, and at the same time very dangerous for economic growth and stability as well as for personal freedom. Firstly, hostile attitude towards rule of law; secondly, strong and often emotional critique of globalization and regional economic cooperation; thirdly, the pursuit of providing safety by the state at the expense of personal liberty. The first and second characteristics, if converted into policies, pose a real long-term threat to prosperity, while the third characteristic is dangerous for our basic individual liberties and is weakening the responsibility of human beings for their own lives.

Identifying roots of authoritarian populism is an important task before we start to fight against it. There is definitely not a single root that we can for sure connect with all the populists around the world. Economic factors might be important but I

think what is more essential is perception about some economic phenomena. We should also remember about non-economic root causes, like cultural factors or desires to achieve safety, and again I think it is also a question about the perception of some events or threats. Therefore, much effort should be devoted to efficient anti-populist communication in both the traditional and new media. Moreover, some roots are very country-specific so reliable nation-specific diagnosis by the anti-populist side of civil society, NGOs, or political parties is always necessary. Especially, if they want to deal efficiently with populism without trying to outbid the populists.

**2. Some journalists and intellectuals think that the growth of populism in Europe and the United States is a consequence of what they call „neoliberalism“, claiming that populism comes as a consequence of free markets and the shrinking role of the state. What do you think about this?**

We should always ask people who claim that something is a consequence of “neoliberalism” to define what they really mean when they use this label. Using various labels is popular in a public debate but they are often meaningless. For example, terms “leftist” or “rightist” in politics tell us today very little about the true political agenda. Some parties call themselves right-wing but their proposed or implemented policies are more left-wing than ideas of many social democrats. Good examples of such right-wing parties are the Polish ruling Law and Justice or Marine La Pen’s National Front. Moreover, “neoliberalism” is a word that has become an insult which was well explained by Oliver Marc Hartwich in his article “Neoliberalism: the genesis of a political swearword”.

It is true that “liberalism” or “neoliberalism” are sometimes presented as causes of growth of populism around the world, but in my view it is incorrect and lacks any empirical backing. Many people wrongly associate various negative phenomena in the world with “liberalism” or “neoliberalism”. Poverty, hunger, corruption, environmental destruction or financial crises are the things that free market ideas are often blamed for, without any in-depth analysis.

I think Milton Friedman was right in his 1974 interview with the Reason magazine when he said: “I think a major reason why intellectuals tend to move towards collectivism is that the collectivist answer is a simple one.” In my opinion, blaming “neoliberalism” for stimulating populism is another example of this simplicity among some intellectuals or journalists on why deep root causes of authoritarian populism, as I have already mentioned, are much more complex.

**3. Free market reforms in Poland that served as an introduction for transition of other countries in Central and Eastern Europe have been described as some of the most important reforms in Europe after the Second World War. However, during the implementation of these reforms there were various challenges and resistance from opponents. Why do people find it hard to embrace transitional reforms? From your perspective what is the greatest legacy of Polish reforms?**

Poland has been rightly presented as a success story of peaceful economic and political transition. For more than two decades the country was developing at a pace exceeding an average of 4% a year. It was faster than other countries of Central Europe. Per capita income, adjusted for differences in price levels, increased from 29% of income per capita in Germany in 1992 to 55% in 2015 as summarized in the Civil Development Forum's report "The next 25 years: what reforms we need to implement to catch up with the West?"

Thanks to the initial free market reforms, and continuation of the pro-reform path, we observed both rapid and stable rate of economic growth in Poland. Ukraine had a slightly higher GDP per capita in 1990 than Poland. However, we see today how the lack of successful economic and political transition has led to a huge divergence between these two countries. Poland was not only a regional economic tiger because of its growth after 1989 did not differ much from the growth in South Korea and was faster than in Chile or Malaysia. Therefore, it is not surprising that Arup Banerji, World Bank Regional Director for the European Union said recently that "Poland is an outstanding economic and development success story, moving from middle-income to high-income status in record time."

Moreover, the political transition was also smooth and peaceful and different political parties from left-wing social democrats to right-wing conservatives ruled and changed in power after elections without any violence. The institutional framework has significantly improved thanks to domestic efforts and external incentives such as EU and NATO admissions.

Despite all of these remarkable successes we still hear some resistance to radical reforms and rapid transition in Poland. Firstly, some opponents of the reforms speak about "social costs of reforms". I think this is highly misleading. Many "social costs" were not a consequence of free market reforms but of over 40 years of real socialism in Poland. The reforms initiated in the late 1980s and early 90s just revealed the truth about how inefficient, bankrupt and crony was the previous regime.

Secondly, some critics indicate what should have been done better and we hear it from many perspectives – some say that the reforms were too much free market-oriented while others claim they were not free market-oriented enough. It is much easier to criticize certain policies of the past reformers with all the knowledge we have today. It often happens without any considerations for the economic and political uncertainty back then. Leszek Balcerowicz and his pro-reform team operated in a specific political environment including conditions inherited after over 40 years of socialism and with the Soviet soldiers still on the Polish territory. Despite all the uncertainties, challenges and obvious imperfect information about Poland's success story after 1989, in comparison to many other countries, is the best proof that the Polish reformers were right.

#### **4. Speaking of Poland, the populism and authoritarian tendencies of the current government are frequently discussed. How is the populism in Poland different from populism in other countries? What are some authentic factors that shape the situation in Poland?**

When we look at different characteristics of the authoritarian populists, the ruling Law and Justice exhibits many of them. I would like to refer to just three features of populism that I have already mentioned. The ruling party is hostile towards rule of law and critical towards regional cooperation (e.g. within the EU, with respect to the EU values and standards) and some aspects of globalization. Law and Justice also emphasizes that safety is more important than liberty, treating both values as substitutes. The economic populism of Law and Justice is also quite strong.

In the declaration presented by the Center for International Private Enterprise and its partners in Brussels this year, it was emphasized that “the promulgation of opportunistic economic policies in pursuit of partisan gains, to the detriment of society and the economy, as well as the elimination of checks and balances and *ad hoc* policy changes, threaten long-term economic prospects and democratic health.” I think that this is a very adequate description of current situation and challenges in Poland.

When we talk about some authentic factors that shape the situation in Poland three elements should be emphasized. Firstly, because Polish society is very homogeneous it is much easier for the populists to use threats connected with immigration or in general with “the outsiders”. Secondly, the economic situation in Poland is relatively good (and was when the populists won elections in 2015), especially when one ignores long-term perspectives. It is not necessarily because of any specific policies of the current government but rather despite their policies. Therefore, Law and Justice

can still use redistribution and taxpayers' money to pay for higher electoral support. Thirdly, many misunderstandings, lies and conspiracy theories about successful Polish economic and political transformation give fuel to populists in Poland. It is much more difficult to fight with them in the age of so called fake news and the powerful social media.

**5. Economic populism is very present in Serbia. This attitude often reflects in skepticism towards the free market economy, competition and free trade. This agenda is embraced by both left and right. Is economic populism present in Poland as well and in which form?**

In 2016 4Liberty.eu Network devoted its 4Liberty.eu Review to the topic of populism, including my article “Economic Costs of Populism: Poland Should Learn from Greek Mistakes”. I defined there economic populism as this type of economic program which sacrifices medium and long-term economic growth and stability of the economy for the sake of short-term political gains. Economic populists often talk about improving lives of ordinary people. But their primary goal is to capture (or rather to buy) political support, win elections or keep political power.

Economic populism is also very present in Poland. It is something that connects populist parties from the right (e.g. ruling Law and Justice) with the radical left (e.g. Razem party, which seems close to the Greek Syriza or Spanish Podemos but fortunately with much less support). The Law and Justice party won democratic elections after a very populist electoral campaign, and as the economic conditions are still favourable it is fulfilling some of its promises. There are new social expenditures, including 500 Polish zloty or around 120 euro monthly for every second and child thereafter in families. The minimum retirement age, gradually increased by the previous government to reach 67 years in the future, was lowered to 60 for woman and 65 for men. It is irresponsible policy especially in the context of the Polish demographic situation and it will have serious long-term consequences for current and future generations. Economic populism is also visible in the so called “re-Polonization” which is de facto re-nationalization of some enterprises, including two large banks. Instead of completing privatizations the government is strengthening state owned companies. And then we have some “villains” (from the perspective of the ruling politicians) – like banks or large supermarkets – punished by proposed or implemented taxes and regulations.

Law and Justice has not presented any serious response to the real challenges in Poland, like low private investment rate, insufficient productivity growth, demographic

problems, low employment rate among some groups or a bad situation in public finance. Instead, economic populism has been strong and long-term economic growth and stability of the economy are sacrificed for short-term political gains

## 6. What do you think will happen in Polish politics in the near future?

Despite anti-reforms and some harmful policies, the ruling Law and Justice still leads the majority of opinion polls. The economic situation is good and the costs of populism are hidden and dispersed. Moreover, some opposition parties are playing with the Law and Justice in their game of populism. It may lead to intensification of the destructive political competition.

This, in turn, can truly damage the Polish political system and political culture if not prevented in time. We should not allow for convergence towards populist equilibrium i.e. destructive populist competition between major parties that can lead to a populist trap (like it happened for example in Greece). Fortunately, the majority of the opposition is united around the idea of rule of law and here the cooperation between political parties, but also civil society organizations, should be even stronger to avoid long-term damages to the institutional framework of Poland.

Some areas in which the ruling party may want to introduce harmful and populist policies to capture votes even if economic populism ceases to work are: laws on media (to weaken private media independent from the government), justice system (to increase political control over courts) and electoral law (in favour of the ruling party). I hope that opposition to any of these moves will be strong in Poland. The last wave of protests in defence of judiciary independence achieved success as they led to two vetoes by the President of Poland.

Bad transitions, like one we see nowadays in Poland and other countries where the populist are in power, should not paralyze, but mobilize. The populist governments should become an incentive to reduce the influence of the government and politicians on our lives. The antidote for economic and non-economic populism is not bigger populism with a different label, but strengthening of individual freedom, rule of law and foundations of a free market economy.

In my statements at the U.S. Helsinki Commission briefing in July, I emphasized that Poland has a historic potential to be an inspiration for societies east of Vienna (e.g. Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia) and the Balkans looking for higher quality of life and greater individual freedom. The strength of Polish democracy and successful



pro-market reforms should continue to serve as an example for the regions. It is one more reason why we should fight, in an efficient way, against populist ideas.

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# An antidote to populism

Zoltan Kesz

Populism is as old as democracy and as long we choose our representatives in (mostly) free and fair elections, we have to face the threat of their attempts at abusing public trust and the political system. Since we have recently experienced a surge in support for populist parties all over the world, sharing best practices to defeat them is more important than ever. Successfully beating them is not unheard of and definitely not impossible, although it is never easy.

## Anatomy of a populist regime

Populism comes in a wide variety of shapes and forms. It usually has a certain local flavour, including messages and attitudes which are specific to the political culture and history of a nation. There are also some common elements that everyone who is actively working against populists in their country can relate to. First of all, they strive on conflicts which are often rooted in real problems but are extensively fictionalized and blown out of proportion.

The explanation for this is that they do not actually want to find true resolutions for the issues they raise because they know that it would diminish their support. They want to keep the electorate in a sense of vulnerability, in a permanent state of war. To achieve this, populists continuously construct both internal and external enemies, and make up various existential threats to maintain their position as the “*saviour of the nation*”.

In Hungary, for example, the first external threat was the IMF, then came the EU and the refugees, while NGOs and the democratic opposition became the internal enemies, proclaimed to be traitors and foreign agents. Lately, George Soros became the central figure of government propaganda, his face featured on endless rows of billboards spreading conspiracy theories about him. Policy and real-life issues lost their priority because Viktor Orbán, Hungary’s populist Prime Minister, wants everybody to focus on the perceived threats he created.

To efficiently combat this populist agenda, we have to ask ourselves, what is the opposite of populism? Is it liberalism? Is it conservatism or maybe socialism? None of those of course, because the true opposite of populism is responsibility.

It is not difficult to see how irresponsible populist politics really are. They sacrifice common sense for electoral victory, they fight fictional conspiracies and made up enemies instead of solving the real issues. Some may actually see this as their strength, that instead of communicating complex policy agendas, they can use simple and strong messages very effectively. In my opinion, this is their weakness, their Achilles heel which we can use to defeat them.

Populists will inevitably talk about remote enemies whose attack is always imminent but never actually happening. They are fighting their fictional wars in the distance – in Brussels against the EU, on a global scale against the United States, and so on. This type of narrative is very effective in the mass media, looks appealing on billboards and unfortunately convinces many people. But at the end of the day, it has little to do with their everyday life, it won't fix their schools and hospitals, it won't improve the roads or increase wages. What we have to do is not just changing the narrative from populist hatemongering to public policy – that would be extremely difficult to accomplish in itself. We have to move the conversation to the level where populists have nothing to say, where issues are more important than blatant rhetoric. We have to go local!

### Go local!

Experience shows that two key demographics are contributing to the electoral success of populist parties. One is their core voter group consisting of people who feel left behind by globalization or betrayed by the political elite. Don't mistake them for poor, undereducated or deprived in any sense. They can be rich, urban, university graduates with stable jobs or they can be rural blue-collar workers; their common attribute is the real or perceived lack of representation.

The other key group is made of disillusioned but democratic citizens who would not support populists but they do miss a viable political alternative so they refuse to participate in the electoral process. Interestingly, we could describe them very similarly to the core voters mentioned above. They can be rich or poor, urban or rural, educated or not, but they feel that there are no good options on the ballot, and that they are not represented by anyone. The importance of this group must not be underestimated. If one looks at the data from the last few elections around the world, it is clear that the majority of citizens are not populists. Emmanuel Macron won because moderate and democratic voters united behind him in the second round of the Presidential election. Geert Wilders polled high before the elections but those who

reject populism came around after all. Donald Trump won the presidency but lost the popular vote and even in Hungary, Viktor Orbán's populist Fidesz is supported only by a minority of voters (approximately one quarter of the total electorate votes for him). Thus, support from this group of disillusioned citizens is essential, they are the true majority and if mobilized, they can beat any populist.

However, it is quite challenging to engage any of these two groups and provide them with an alternative that they find viable and appealing. None of these people are going to be persuaded by TV ads, newspaper headlines or billboards alone, because they have seen all of that before. Also, if we try to reach them with conventional tools of mass campaigning, we have to compete with the simple but quite powerful narrative of the populists. There is a much better way to engage them: they have to be convinced in person, where they live, where they work and where they spend their free time.

We have to go where they are, and talk to them, communicate on the lowest local level possible. Candidates who want to win against populists must circumvent the national narrative of waging war against the evils of George Soros and Brussels. They have to work with the citizens and talk about the true problems they face every day. Turns out that most of the time, local issues have little to do with the EU, the IMF or with immigrants. People are much more concerned with the quality of healthcare they receive, with the state of the schools their children attend. They want to see better roads, they want to have better job opportunities, more security, less taxes, and so on. And they want to have representatives who listen to them, who are present and can be reached easily.

This might sound somewhat idealistic but my first-hand experience shows that it can be an incredibly powerful strategy. It takes a lot of hard work, resources and manpower to do it, but the *ground game* really is the key to defeating populism. A strong local presence, direct communication with the electorate and a clear focus on local issues means that candidates and representatives are bound to the voters who elected them. This is what I call responsible politics and what I consider to be the antidote for the populist surge we are experiencing in our countries. Our adversaries have absolutely no weapons against responsible politicians doing good work because by definition, populism is irresponsible.

### Closing remarks

All of this is based on my experiences in Hungary as a candidate and as a Member of Parliament. Of course, the realities are always specific to each country

but considering the similarities between populist political actors everywhere, most democratic parties can hopefully relate. Obviously, there is no silver bullet against populism but going local provides a very strong foundation for any winning strategy that can later be tailored for the specific political context. This can also be considered as an ethical way to combat populist tendencies, because instead of trying to outdo irresponsible promises and fearmongering, this strategy focuses on doing our job as politicians, representatives and community leaders better, with more responsibility and by interacting more with our electorate. Those who choose to fight for democracy must know that this is going to be a continuous struggle, as there will always be those who challenge the values of liberal democracy. All we can do is win as many battles against them as possible and keep going whenever we are defeated.

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# An Anti-liberal Challenge - Populism in 21<sup>st</sup> century Greece

*Dimitris Dimitrakos*

It is often said that populism is divisive. It is also said that it is anti-elitist. Both descriptions are correct. The explanation for this lies in the legitimation crisis which often gives rise to forces of populism. Populism in its current 21st century form arose by a disbelief, a distrust in democratic institutions on the part of large segments of the population who feel economically and culturally insecure. Once institutions are put into question, those who run them are in their turn judged: they are seen as the elite that fails the masses.

The reason for this lack of trust in democratic institutions should be sought in new phenomena connected with problems that have arisen as a result of abrupt changes brought about by the new global division of labour, the spread of new technologies and the disorderly influx of large numbers of migrants from Asia and Africa into Europe.

Globalisation and information technology have created new opportunities for growth and prosperity all over the world, but it has also created many losers among those who do not adapt to the new conditions.

The distress felt by large sections of the population as a result of these developments, is aggravated by the entry of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers from poorer and afflicted areas outside Europe. This massive influx of migrants/refugees is perceived by many, rightly or wrongly, as a threat to their security, their culture and their quality of life.

The mix of these problems acted as a kind of culture shock for many people. Democratic institutions, as they have evolved could not cope with the new issues raised. Let me clarify that by 'institutions' I mean laws and established practices within the democratic social order and not only state organizations as such.

Populist leaders of both left and right came forward, building and expanding on this distrust of institutions. It was simply responding to demand, as it were. What the new populists are saying is "Don't trust them, trust us." Or: "Don't trust the institutions, trust us who act in the name of the people, who are above the institutions."

A typical manifestation of this opposition of populist thinking to institutions is a speech on 29 June, 2017 by the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, and leader of the SYRIZA party, who said that he and his government will always find ways to overcome 'institutional obstacles' to their policies. Andreas Papandreou, the arch-populist leader who dominated Greek politics for more than two decades, had expressed this idea in succinct terms back in 1989, saying that institutions should not stand in the way of the people's sovereign power.

The idea behind this attitude has a distinctively authoritarian flavour. It implies that the people's power is supreme and any limits set to it by institutions is not to be tolerated. The 'enemies of the people' hide behind the institutions; they are within the 'establishment'; they are part of the 'system'. Therefore – so goes the argument of the populists - they must be constantly resisted. The divisiveness and aggressiveness of populist discourse is understandable in this context.

It is important to note that modern populism – which is very often called the 'new populism' – is not really revolutionary. It does not repudiate the social order, even if it opposes the 'system'. It is in favour of sidestepping and not overthrowing institutions, if they present obstacles to the implementation of the policies it advocates. It is not totalitarian, that is, openly antidemocratic, even if its policies could very well lead to it. It is, nevertheless despotic in temper and hostile to liberal principles and the open society.

The populists' constant demand is that power should be exercised by 'the people'. Their conception of democracy is the unimpeded rule of the many over the few. The principle is illiberal in a fundamental sense. In a liberal democracy power is exercised by the few in the name of all, once certain procedures are followed and certain rules respected which are prescribed by the constitution. The majority is not deemed to be the citizenry in its entirety, an approximation, as it were, of the whole. The minority must be taken into account in a liberal democracy.

In a liberal democracy rules count and so do institutions. Yet for the populists, rules and institutions are to be circumvented or ignored if they go against what they define as the people's interests, as conceived by the populists. The latter, more often than not proclaim certain short-term policies as being in the people's interests. These policies promise apparent gains, ignoring long-term consequences which may be harmful, even catastrophic. The seemingly easy and direct solution they propose for a problem, brushing off the long-term or mid-term negative effects is adopted by many. If trust in institutions is eroded, the populist can carry the day. For the same reason populism opposes the power of, and the loyalty to, institutions.

Democratic institutions were restored in Greece after the collapse of the military junta in 1974 and they functioned without hindrance from war or internal subversion. It has been often said, not without complacency, that post-dictatorship Greece has experienced the longest period of normal democratic life since the foundation of the Greek state in 1833. But the prevailing political culture was statist and anti-liberal, while party politics were based on patronage, i.e. on a reliance of politicians on voters as their 'clients'. This encouraged rent-seeking behaviour in all strata of the population. Enterprises, trade unions and professional groups sought political favour to advance their interests, each at the expense of others. New Democracy and PASOK, the two parties that exercised power alternately from 1974 until 2011 favoured the groups that supported them by offering protection to groups that felt threatened by the market and by increasing employment in the public sector.

The logical outcome was a generalized opposition to structural reforms. Every rent-seeker saw reforms as a threat to preferential treatment in his favour on the part of the state in its role as grand redistributor of resources. The accumulation of debt did not preoccupy politicians, since they could secure credits from the European Central Bank.

This politico-economic model was obviously irrational. It was dominated by state-dependent oligopolistic enterprises, trade unions, protectionism at all levels and subsidized enterprise. This model crumbled with the world recession of 2008. The Greek economy as well as society suffered a rude shock. Unemployment rose to more than 25%, and accumulated debt had to be repaid.

The deepening of the economic crisis in Europe was compounded by the refugee crisis resulting from war in the Middle East and its repercussions. Greece was hit particularly hard by both. From 2009 until the present day, there were five parliamentary elections and one referendum. People became increasingly radicalized and saw their general standard of living fall dramatically, their security threatened and their self-reliance challenged. Under these conditions, the 'GOLDEN DAWN', a totalitarian party of the extreme right, gained ground and ranked third in voters' preferences in the last three elections. During the same period, SYRIZA, a populist left-wing party rose to power and holds sway at this moment.

The reason why such a dramatic change in the political landscape took place is that a great number of people withdrew their allegiance from the two mainstream parties, believing that the 'system' had failed them. Something new looked promising. And the popular appeal of SYRIZA rested on the kind of promise that demagogues



are only too prone to make: of having one's cake and eating it too. Under conditions of overall disappointment, even despair, many people are prone to believe such promises.

SYRIZA's populism is built on an ideological raw material borrowed from Marx and Lenin – symbols, concepts, slogans – while the main thrust of its discourse is against some 'enemy'. The latter is NEW DEMOCRACY, the main party in opposition, presented as the lackey of rapacious moneylenders and capitalists. SYRIZA has ruled Greece for nearly three years and proved inept in getting back what the country lost as a result of the world recession from 2009 onwards. On the contrary, the absolute failure of its 'tough line' negotiating tactics in the summer of 2014 cost the country another €80 to €100 billion. Yet Tsipras managed to convey to his voters the belief that he could be trusted to preserve them from the worst outcome in dealing with the 'enemy'.

However, there are limits to the persuasive powers of populism. The main reason for this is that it cannot deliver. It fails in its promises. It can take advantage of a failure of institutions – a singular weakness of democracies that at times can have rude consequences. It can then win a battle on the field of trust. Trust is a complex and delicate relationship between those who share it. It cannot be obtained at will, nor can it be exchanged for something. It can be created and preserved under certain conditions. Once these conditions are no longer met, trust is lost. Trust is, moreover, the indispensable bond of political society, tying the members of a community with government and institutions. Populism cannot dissolve this bond entirely. It thrives on division, promotes conflict and thinks of social relations in zero-sum terms. That is why it views the market itself as an arena, not as a field of cooperation. It has an appeal for some people who, being perplexed, may be tempted for a direct relationship with a seemingly trustworthy representative of their will. At length, populism falls precisely because it is no longer trusted. This is due to happen in Greece in the next election. It is another question if what succeeds it can build efficiently what populism has torn down.

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