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Right-Wing Populism: Concept and Typology

Anton Pelinka

Historical roots, theoretical implications

Populism is a general protest against the checks and balances introduced to prevent 'the people's' direct rule. The beginning of modern populism was a radical understanding of democracy as government by the people, beyond the distinction between majority and minority, beyond limitations 'the people' are told to respect. Populism also tends to neglect the problem of inclusion and exclusion: Who belongs to 'the people' – and who does not? What are the criteria to be part of the 'Demos'? (Dahl 1989: 119–31).

As a concept, populism is a rather vague understanding of democracy, emphasizing plebiscitary direct democratic elements over a representative indirect democratic structure. Populism is based on Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of democracy as 'government of the people, for the people, and by the people'. In other words: 'the people' should govern themselves. Intermediary actors like parliaments and political parties are secondary instruments at best, and potential obstacles for 'true democracy' at worst.

The conceptual weakness and political impetus of populism are responsible for significant contradictions. Populism starts from an understanding of 'the people' as a given factor. The weakness is the lack of a clear understanding of 'the people': who is part of it – and who is not? Were Native Americans and African Slaves part of the people when, in 1776, some Americans declared and spoke on behalf of 'We, the People of the United States'? Is everybody who lives in a given territory – independent of their roots – part of 'the people'? The principally radical consequences of populist democracy are based on an extremely ambiguous precondition – the self-evidence of 'the people'.

Populist democracy as a theoretical construct of political order goes way back to the first known discourses about democracy. As a way to define the sovereignty of a political system, 'the people', the 'Demos', were seen as the final source of power – an alternative to kings, tyrants or experts like Plato's philosophers. At the beginning of democracy was the construction of the 'Demos' – as the logical opponent of any kind of monarchical or aristocratic order (Müller 2011: 7–48).

The people 'is never a primary datum but a construct' (Laclau 2005: 48). The 'Demos' has to be represented. The reality of representative democracy creates frustration among those segments of society that do not feel represented by that which has always been a rather élitist establishment. The frustration and anger of members of the 'Demos', directed against the official and legal representatives, are the sources of contemporary populist movements and populist parties.

In modern times, populism is the antithesis to 'Madisonian Democracy' (Dahl 1970). 'Madisonian Democracy' – especially articulated in the theoretical mainstream underlying the American constitution – is based on the understanding that 'the people' should have a role in politics; but the people's power must be limited by the prerogatives of the minority, and through safeguards give an enlightened upper class the possibility to prevent a takeover by 'the mob'. 'Madisonian Democracy' represents élitist scepticism regarding majority rule – a scepticism expressed in the separation of power and the system of 'checks and balances'.

The shaping of the US constitution provides for an excellent introduction to the history of 'populism'. In the Constitutional Convention (1787), the basic competing ideas on how to form a representative government were articulated. On the one side, there was Alexander Hamilton's deep scepticism about democracy. He argued against 'popular passions' and displayed a strong revulsion at the 'amazing violence and turbulence of the democratic spirit' (Beeman 2010: 168f.). The constitution, strongly influenced by James Madison, was the product of a compromise between the idea of democracy as such and (in the view of the 'founding fathers') the necessary control over 'the people' by an enlightened élite.

Populism is the consequence of an optimistic understanding of majority rule. The populist creed is that 'the people' are entitled to govern – without restrictions. The problem – of course – is the definition of 'the people'; the problem is that any understanding of the 'Demos' makes inclusions and exclusions necessary: who does and who does not belong to 'the people'? This is not a problem any kind of democratic understanding can avoid. The history of modern democracy is the history of permanent debate about the necessary inclusion of excluded people – like the 'lower classes', women and (former) slaves. Populism tends to differ from other approaches to democracy by assuming a kind of self-evidence for the inclusion in as well as for the exclusion from 'the people'.

Populism, as a modern phenomenon with an impact on politics, can be observed in different forms, beginning from the nineteenth century. Populism has been the term to characterize protest movements expressing disillusionment and disappointment with established systems. Populist movements in the Americas – in the United States as well as in Latin America – have opposed an existing order for being insufficiently democratic. The different movements – from Agrarian populism in the North American West to Peronism in Argentina (Barros 2005: 254–63) – aimed for a better 'real' democracy.

Robert Dahl's analysis of the development of democratic theory shows the beginning of 'populist democracy' as an antithesis to Aristotle's pattern of 'mixed government': As any unchecked government in Aristotle's understanding tends to develop negative qualities, giving all the power to 'the people' would create plebeian chaos (1970). Democracy should be combined with elements of monarchy and aristocracy. The same

approach defined the beginning of the modern concept of the separation of power and of 'checks and balances' – reflected in the writing of John Locke, Charles Montesquieu and others and enshrined especially in the constitution of the United States: 'the people' has power – but only within certain limits, watched over by an independent judiciary and checked by an élitist Senate and a strong executive.

Modern democracy in Europe and America began with guarantees against the 'tyranny of the majority'. This is expressed, by different power-sharing arrangements, as the necessity for cooperation between different institutions (like the US presidency and the US Congress) and different societal segments – like the formula for Swiss democracy, which consists of a permanent coalition arrangement between the representatives of different religious and linguistic identities.

Modern democracy, as enshrined in the US constitution and the Swiss consociational democracy (Lijphart 1977: 21–52), has been a phenomenon full of ambiguities from the very beginning: on one side, democracy claimed to give all the power 'to the people'; on the other, democracy took care to channel the people's power through the institution of a system of representations.

In the nineteenth century, populism began as a protest against the overwhelming power of élites: economic élites like the 'trusts' in the United States; social élites like the dominant aristocracies; political élites like elected representatives who did not seem to care enough for the interests of 'the people'. Robert Michels' 'Iron Law of Oligarchy' and the key terms 'Democratic Aristocracy' and 'Aristocratic Democracy' described and explained the self-interest of democratic representatives – élitist interests contradicting the populist doctrine of democracy (1962: 43–51).

Robert Michels' criticism, published at the beginning of the twentieth century, exemplifies the ambivalence of the (seemingly) radical democratic approach of populism. On the one side, Michels can be used to make Leninism understandable: the very idea of rotating élites and the inbuilt possibilities of democratic recall stood at the beginning of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR), even if it soon became clear that the soviet system petrified élites beyond the élitism known from 'bourgeois' democracies. On the other side, Michels' criticism has been used by Fascism and Nazism: if (liberal 'bourgeois') democracy is nothing more than a scheme to protect the existing élites, fascist élitism must be seen as the better alternative, as an openly declared honest élitism.

Carl Schmitt and others argued that the 'Führer'-state represented the 'people's will' more efficiently and more truthfully than the liberal parliamentarianism of Weimar or Westminster. The 'Führer' or the 'Duce' – united with 'the people' in a rather mystic way – acted on behalf of 'the people'. 'The people' were reduced to the function of legitimizing the leader. In practice, this meant that the people were allowed to applaud the actions of the leader (2007: esp. 80–96).

The intellectual and analytical weakness of populist democracy is rooted in the assumption that 'the people' do exist, and exist in a homogeneous way. This creates the 'ambiguities and paradoxes' of populism (Laclau 2007: 3–20): who is included in and who is excluded from 'the people' is not seen as the result of social and cultural developments but as a simplistic dogma, by ignoring social fragmentations. National and race identities are constructed to create the illusion of 'natural' borders between 'us'

and 'them'. The differences within 'the people' tend to be overlooked. 'The people' exist above the diversities of class and religion or gender and generation.

The whole concept of 'the people' is an antithesis to the reality of cleavages as developed by authors like Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (Lipset 1981, Rokkan & Flora 2000). Considering the reality of intra-societal conflicts, the very idea of a uniform nation ignores the existing differences – and the long-term existing lines of conflict as the result of varieties of social, economic, ethnic and religious identities. In reality, the people – any people – consist of different identities, creating contradicting interests. If the term 'people' no longer means the historical opposition to the monarchy, and if it is not an abstraction for the whole of humankind, then the term people is not a concept which can be used for any serious analysis of contemporary politics and society.

The ambivalence of the concept can be exemplified by asking a question of the 'defining other': who is not part of 'the people'? At the beginning of modern democracy, the defining other was the ancient regime, the pre-revolutionary power of monarchs and aristocrats. When, in 1776, in Philadelphia, Americans declared 'We, the People of the United States', the defining other was the British king and a political order designed on the other side of the Atlantic. This moment was anti-aristocratic and, in its historical context, revolutionary.

Excluded from 'the people' in 1776 were not only the king and the British aristocracy but, implicitly, native Americans and African-Americans. The concept of 'the people' had, from the very beginning, an ethno-national aspect. When – more than two centuries later – the revolutionary movement in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had to define the people it was speaking for, the choice was between 'We are the people' and 'We are one people'. The first slogan was purely anti-*élite*, directed against the rule of the communist one-party state. The second slogan had a distinct ethno-national meaning: the people were 'the Germans'. African students or Vietnamese workers, who may have demonstrated in Leipzig under the first slogan, must have felt excluded under the second: they ceased to be part of 'us', they became part of 'them'.

The consequences of conceptual ambivalence

As long as democracy was identified with revolutionary movements, directed against the rule of princes, there was no need to confront potential contradictions and ambiguities, like the question of inclusion and exclusion, of minority rights and checks and balances. Democracy's historical success made it necessary to reflect on the people's power and this power's limitations, on the need to interpret democracy as a representative form of government. When the rule of the kings ended and the political systems all over Europe and in most of the world became republics or parliamentary monarchies, the historic 'defining other' of democracy and populism lost its meaning. On the one side, one could declare 'mission accomplished': as soon as democracy had become self-evident, populism had reached its final goal. In Fukuyama's interpretation, not only did the victory of democracy mean an 'end of history', as democracy enjoys a monopoly no longer challenged by an alternative concept (1992), it could also imply

an end to the populist drive. Populism, one could argue, had become the victim of self-elimination by success. Do not 'the people' govern everywhere?

But populism survived – as a tendency to criticize existing democracies for not being sufficiently democratic, to ask for more direct power for 'the people' – and less for the people's representatives, to protest against the self-interest of politicians, parties and parliaments who tend to forget their democratic mandate. Populism survived – not within the mainstream of democratic activities but as an element outside this mainstream. But to survive, populism needed a new 'defining other': who was to be seen to be the decisive opponent of 'the people'?

As there is no democracy without significant misgivings, there has never been a deficit of potential opponents of 'the people'. Corrupt élites have always been on the radar of critical democrats. Arrogant economic or intellectual power brokers have given enough reason to see them as a significant problem for democracy. And, other 'people' offered themselves as defining others: people defined as 'alien', as foreign due to birth, citizenship, religion, culture or 'race'.

Depending on the definition of the people's defining other, the different contemporary populist phenomena can be categorized in different ways. But any kind of populism directed against an ethnically and/or nationally and/or religiously defined 'other' can be seen as 'right wing'. Left-wing populism does exist. But by definition it is not ethnically exclusive. Political parties with an agenda aiming primarily at the exclusion of or discrimination against (sub-)societies or different social groups follow a narrow ethno-nationalistic and potentially racist agenda claiming to speak on behalf of 'the people' – but the people they are speaking for are defined by the exclusion of others.

This narrowness does not contradict the anti-élitist agenda. Ethno-nationalist populism at the beginning of the twenty-first century challenges élites whose positions are based on higher education and individual achievement. By criticizing élites in this way, right-wing populism is using rhetoric traditionally associated with left-wingers. It is a socialist (or quasi-socialist) rhetoric directed against profiteers, especially in the context of globalization. But it is a leftist rhetoric, always suspiciously missing one element of traditional socialism: the international dimension. Any sign of solidarity with the fate or misery of those who are excluded from 'us' is missing. The anti-élitism of the right-wing populist may be called socialist. But it is a narrow national socialism that the right-wing parties in contemporary Europe are expressing.

The anti-élitism of the populist right is the most significant difference from the traditional right of the mainstream: the nineteenth century defenders of the 'ancient regime'; the reactionary romantics who fantasized about an ideal pre-revolutionary life; the conservative sceptics of democracy; the stalwarts of the Church's dominance over politics – these are not what contemporary right-wing populism is about. There may be some tendencies to use religious loyalties against religiously defined 'others', or some sentimental perception of pre-modern times, but the essence of right-wing populism is a democratic claim: right-wing populism today can easily identify with 'we, the people' of the bourgeois revolutions – as long as 'the people' are seen to be distinctly different from other peoples.

The development and stabilization of (liberal 'Western') democracy in Europe had a significant impact on the definition of 'the other'. The 'enemy' against whom populist movements and parties mobilized is no longer a one-party regime and is not the traditional feudal regime of the past. There are aspects of an anti-élitism directed against economic élites and/or intellectuals, but the most important populist energy today is directed against the enemy who is considered to be foreign – ethnically, culturally and religiously foreign. Contemporary populism does not so much mobilize against the (perceived) enemy above but more against the (perceived) enemy from abroad. Populism has become more and more ethno-nationalistic.

Populist anti-élitism today is directed against those who seem to be responsible for Europeanization and globalization, and especially for mass migration, against élites who have opened the doors to foreign influence and to foreigners. Of course, the basic assumption of this perception does not reflect a realistic picture of the past, which has always been characterized by migration. And, of course, the tendency to see individuals (politicians – the 'classe politica', or intellectuals – 'the chattering classes') as responsible for modernizing trends is beyond any realistic and empirically sound analysis of the trend which tends to put an end to the nation state.

Populism simplifies complex developments by looking for a culprit. As the enemy – the foreigner, the foreign culture – has already succeeded in breaking into the fortress of the nation state, someone must be responsible. The élites are the secondary 'defining others', responsible for the liberal democratic policies of accepting cultural diversity. The populist answer to the complexities of a more and more pluralistic society is not multiculturalism. Will Kymlicka's 'liberal multiculturalism' is not on the agenda of ethno-nationalist populists – despite the evidence of multicultural realities he and others are providing (2009: 61–86). On the contrary, right-wing populism sees multiculturalism as a recipe to denationalize one's (own) nation, to deconstruct one's (own) people.

Of course, there is a great deal of easily recognizable naïveté in the populist assumption that there are pure nations and homogeneous 'peoples' in today's world. Populism constructs a non-existent ethno-national purity to defend it against those who seem to jeopardize such fictitious purity. But as long as there is a tendency to believe in the non-existent homogeneity of 'us', there is enough energy to defend 'us' against 'them'.

Contemporary populism is very much a phenomenon of the Far Right. But it is also to be seen in the actions of mainstream parties and of parties of the Left. Right-centre and left-centre parties tend to simplify their political message – like the French Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) under Nicolas Sarkozy, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) under Gerhard Schröder or the British Labour Party under Tony Blair. Mainstream parties are tempted to play down the complexities and contradictions of their policies to claim they are speaking on behalf of 'the people'.

There has always been and still is the populism of the Left: the German Left Party is using some anti-immigration, and especially anti-EU-rhetoric, in a verbally milder but substantially not so different way. And in the European Parliament, the positions of the party grouping of the 'United European Left' – an alliance of some unreformed communist parties and left-socialist or left greens from Scandinavia – do not differ very

much from the Far Right in their attitudes towards European integration (Bartolini 2007: 313f.).

But it is the Far Right which is using the mobilizing keywords and topics which are dominating some of the political discourses: migration, multiculturalism and the end of the nation state. In the United States, Ross Perot's campaign of 1992 can be considered to be populism of the centre. Centrist populism has been replaced in the United States by the populism of the Tea Party, a kind of libertarian anti-government movement playing the patriotic (jingoistic) card of 'American Exceptionalism' (Lipset 1997). There has been significant anti-élitism in the American varieties of populism – directed especially against the academic élites from the élite universities. But all in all, the most dominant character of the contemporary US populism is no longer the radical farmers' movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but a distinct nationalistic agenda, based on the assumption of a very specific role the United States has to play, an assumption – and this is a significant difference from the European variations of the Populist Right – which is based on strong religious Christian-fundamentalist beliefs.

Contemporary populists have some strong anti-government tendencies – for example, mobilization against 'Washington' in the US case. The defining other may be a treacherous government but the core message is nationalistic (or, in the US case, 'patriotic'): we have to defend 'us' from the aggression of foreigners, of foreign thinking, of foreign agents, of foreign ways of life. Contemporary populism is distinctly anti-cosmopolitan – anti-internationalist.

Populism and party typology

Until the late twentieth century, populist parties were not considered a specific prototype for a party. The basic literature – like that of Giovanni Sartori (2005) – did not see 'populism' as a defining agenda for a 'party family', like liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, communism or Christian democracy. Sarah Harrison and Michael Bruter see populism as one of four pillars (together with the xenophobia, reactionary and repressive positions of contemporary extreme right parties but not responsible for defining a party family of its own) (Harrison & Bruter 2011: 207–9). Populism is seen as responsible for a specific strategy and a specific behaviour – but not for a specific programmatic outlook. Populism was a distinct method of mobilization used by very different parties. The Russian Bolsheviks used populist techniques in 1917, as did the Italian Fascists in 1922. Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'fireside chats' during his presidency had a distinct populist flavour, like Harry Truman's re-election campaign in 1948. Populism as a technique – not as an ethnically exclusive programme – played an important role in the beginning for the European green parties. Populism was (and still is) an instrument open to anybody, any politician, any political party.

Populism's anti-élitist character makes it easier for parties outside the mainstream to make use of populist elements. But even presidential parties in the United States have been able to behave like a 'populist' 'us' against an élitist 'them', a 'defining other' within the political system ('Washington') or outside the system – like economic élites.

It was development in prosperous Europe that became responsible for the rise of a specific type of populist party. Herbert Kitschelt was among the first to describe and analyse the phenomenon of a 'new radical or extreme right' (2006: 286–8). Kitschelt sees a distinct agenda, partially different from that of the traditional extreme right: the 'new' extreme right is different because it does not have 'movement support' like traditional fascism. A small formal membership and the absence of an organized rank-and-file activism are behind the volatility and fluidity of contemporary right-wing populism. The parties' electoral bases are lower-middle-class and blue-collar voters. The programmatic agenda in some cases (like Denmark) is a protest against taxation, but especially and generally strong opposition to immigration and European integration.

A not so new phenomenon is the decisive role of a central 'charismatic' figure. Personalization tends to overshadow the issues. The most significant example is Pim Fortuyn's party – its success and decline. The party's dramatic upswing in 2002 was followed by an equally dramatic fall. Without its murdered leader, the party lost its orientation and appeal (*ibid.*: 287). Pim Fortuyn's case is important for understanding the differences and similarities between right-wing populism and traditional far-right extremism: Pim Fortuyn stood for certain aspects of cultural tolerance which were unthinkable for the traditional far right of the past – like tolerance of feminism and same-sex orientation. Pim Fortuyn and his party did not claim to destroy 'the system' – as did the traditional fascist parties in the past. He claimed to defend the liberal values of Western democracy against the intruders from elsewhere, against immigrants and Muslims in particular.

The 'new' far right in (Western) Europe is not characterized by a strong structure, an organized movement, a dense party organization or semi-military militias. The 'new' far right is very much single-issue oriented. It is not the specific concept of a 'new state' beyond the rules of liberal democracy that right-wing populism has its focus on. It is not any kind of (superficially) 'revolutionary' agenda that right-wing populist parties are using to maximize their electorate. They have a very defensive agenda, the preservation of the status quo – or the status quo ante – as it was before mass migration, Europeanization and globalization started to challenge the nation state. Their ideal is the homogeneous, democratic nation state.

There is a social parallel between contemporary right-wing populism and the traditional extreme right: their appeal has been (or is) especially successful among the lower-middle-classes, among those voters who believe that the socio-economic trend is directed against their status, among 'modernization losers'. But it is not the 'small bourgeoisie' and farmers of the past – so significant for the rise of fascist parties in the first half of the twentieth century – it is a new kind of modernization losers who are over-proportionally backing the 'new' far right. It is the 'working class', defined as blue-collar voters, which is, to a significant degree, responsible for the successes of right-wing populist parties (Beyme 2011: 58–65).

In Austria, the FPÖ became the party with the highest number of blue-collar voters among Austrian parties in the 1990s. In France, the decline of the French Parti Communiste and the rise of the FN are interdependent phenomena: the 'working class' has become a decisive part of the far right's electorate. Together with the 'gender bias' – the far right attracts an over-proportionate number of male voters – the trend of the

'modernization losers' towards the far right has become a significant quality of the right-wing populist electorate (Mudde 2007: 135f., 297f.).

The swing of the blue-collar vote from the left to the far right is the consequence of two long-term developments:

Blue-collar voters in Europe have much more to lose than (as Karl Marx and Engels put it) 'their chains': they have a significant network of social security and (modest) individual prosperity. As the (national) welfare state is less and less able to guarantee security and prosperity, the blue-collar electorate has responded in a similar way to that of the 'small bourgeoisie' decades ago.

Blue-collar voters in Europe are no longer the (quantitative) winners of modernization. The numbers in the industrial work force are shrinking all over Europe. The winners of modernization are white-collar voters – and the work force outside the European sphere, in eastern, southern and South-East Asia in particular.

Contemporary right-wing populist parties articulate an empirically arguable fear: the fear of today's less-privileged segments of European societies. As it enjoys certain advantages that the development of welfare systems within an increasingly prosperous Europe has guaranteed, the contemporary 'small bourgeoisie' – the proletariat – protests at the decline of its social status. The traditional leftist parties, for most of the twentieth century the parties of the proletariat, seem to be paralyzed between the growing segments of better educated, culturally liberal and socially progressive voters and their declining traditional blue-collar electorate. The European proletariat has lost its political anchor. The right-wing parties – to a certain degree newly designed – are offering, to the victims of modernization, the opportunity to articulate their anger. Voters lacking higher education and in traditional blue-collar jobs, who feel threatened by globalization and the loss of national sovereignty, are tempted more than others to vote for the populist far right.

To win the blue-collar vote, the far right had to realign itself. The old fascist recipe – based on strict authoritarian or totalitarian tendencies plus traditional nationalism – would not have been successful for a blue-collar strategy today. The post-1945 history of the far right in Western Europe demonstrates the inability of post-fascist and post-Nazi parties to become a significant factor in Europe. The far right needed a strategy without the traditional nationalistic agenda, without the replaying of French-German or other ethnic conflicts. And the far right had to dissociate itself from any direct link to its fascist/Nazi past. The Italian post-Fascists had to play down their links with the Mussolini regime, as had the Austrian FPÖ with respect to its historical Nazi links.

Right-wing parties in Europe – at least in Western Europe – have become parties without a history. By avoiding any discourse about fascism or Nazism, by claiming to represent a completely new agenda, right-wing populism tries to avoid a debate which could jeopardize its rise – a debate about Mussolini or Hitler, Franco or Pétain. If the contemporary far-right parties in Western Europe are using historical memories, it is about events centuries ago – like Joan of Arc or the invasion of the Ottoman armies. In some cases, far-right parties dissociate themselves from a non-democratic past more convincingly than others, which

still satisfy an anti-democratic revisionism like the Austrian FPÖ. But the Austrian far right is, to a certain extent, less part of the contemporary Western European tendency as represented by Gert Wilders and more that of the strongly revisionist contemporary Central and Eastern European far-right parties.

The contemporary success of the far right is based on its ability to become populist. The old extreme right had been openly anti-democratic, following the script of totalitarian personalization. The new far right argues from a democratic perspective. In France and in Sweden, in the Netherlands and in Austria, the populist far-right parties do not oppose the rules of the democratic constitutions. They argue for change – within the frameworks of the constitutions. They do not present an alternative to the political system as it is; they present an alternative to specific policies – like migration and European integration.

Gert Wilders, very much in the tradition of Pim Fortuyn, does not oppose the concept of human rights – like the traditional far right did in the past. Gert Wilders claims to defend basic human rights against Islam. His party speaks not against liberal democracy, but on behalf of it. It tries to be seen as the protector of liberal democracy against the enemy from the outside – against the ‘cartel of traditional parties and social partners’ (van Praag 2008: 178f.).

This populist agenda enables the populist far right to slip into the role of defender of the national welfare state. The democratic, social and welfare state, the product of a broad post-1945 consensus between the mainstream parties and between business and labour, is hijacked by the far right. The difficulties national welfare systems have had to face since the 1980s all over Western Europe make it possible for the far right to portray itself as a protective shield for the welfare state. This is the main element of the far right’s successful blue-collar electoral strategy. This is the reason small extremist parties, traditionally backed by bourgeois and agricultural voters, became the representatives of significant segments of the European proletariat.

A typology of contemporary right-wing parties

In Europe, there are several differences within the group of right-wing parties. The parties of the far right can be distinguished between traditional far-right parties and right-wing populist parties. For some authors – like Hans-Georg Betz – radical right populism is a rather new phenomenon, linked to the traditional extreme right in only a limited way (Betz 1994); others, like Sarah Harrison and Michael Bruter, stress the parallels between the old and the new (populist) far right (Harrison & Bruter 2011). The general debate accepts a significant overlapping between the old, (neo-)fascist or (neo-)Nazi far right and the newly emerged populist far right. The different opinions are about the extent of continuity between the old and the populist far right.

Rightist populist parties with or without pre-populist roots

The Austrian FPÖ is perhaps the best example for right-wing populism based on a pre-populist past. The FPÖ is the successor of the Pan-German ‘camp’ in Austria’s

history, responsible for the strong 'Anschluss' movement during the first decades of the twentieth century. When Austrian Pan-Germanism became part of the rising Nazi movement, Austrian Pan-Germanism became as populist as was the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche ArbeiterPartei (NSDAP). But this did not completely eliminate the pre-populist social roots of Austrian Pan-Germanism, represented by 'honourable' citizens – lawyers and pharmacists, doctors and farmers – especially in the provinces. The FPÖ with its new beginning in 1955 seemed to fall back on its roots. But locked into the status of a small party, it started to become populist in the 1980s – making the party into a model case of successful populist xenophobia (Wodak & Pelinka 2002).

The model for a right-wing populist party without pre-populist roots is the Dutch Freedom Party. Based on the short but spectacular success of Pim Fortuyn, the Freedom Party succeeded as a single-issue party: anti-immigration and anti-Islam are the all-dominating topics the party is using. As the party is – differently from the FPÖ – free from an anti-democratic fascist past, it does not have the burden of a quotable history of traditional racism and especially anti-Semitism; but neither does it have a traditional milieu (Mudde 2007: 84–6).

A different example is the Swiss People's Party (SVP), which does not have any continuity with an anti-democratic past. The focus of the Swiss far-right populist agenda is on immigration – especially on Muslim immigrants. But differently from the Dutch radical populist right, the SVP has been a member of the Swiss government – within the four-party coalition – for decades (Kriesi & Trechsel 2008: 94–8).

Rightist populist parties with or without a national revisionist agenda

Revisionism – understood as opposition to the outcome of the Second World War – is a distinct quality of many of the extreme right parties. The nostalgia for Hitler and Mussolini, Pavelic and Franco, and other fascist, semi-fascist and/or Nazi dictators has been, for decades, the driving force behind the extreme right in Europe. Revisionism had its focus on the territorial design of post-1918 Europe – like the German-Polish or Italian-Slovene borders. In some cases – like in the case of Hungarian revisionism – territorial nostalgia is still directed against the post-First World War borders.

The second element of revisionism is focused on liberal democracy, and especially against the concept of universal human rights. This is the link between a more general xenophobic or racist attitude and a specific direction: the anger of the far right has been, and still is, directed against social groups defined as 'foreign', be they migrants (like the Turks in Germany) or not (like the Roma in Central and South-Eastern Europe). It is especially the second revisionist orientation which is manifested in a populist manner. But the two sides of the European far right are interwoven – and it is not an 'either or', but a 'more or less', which distinguishes the parties of the European far right.

A good example of the relationship between populism and revisionism is the Italian case. The first post-fascist Italian elections took place in 1946. At that time, the country was ruled by a broad coalition of anti-fascists from the left and the centre. The elections more or less confirmed a 'grand coalition' of Christian democrats, communists, socialists and some minor centrist parties. The only principle opposition against the governing

alliance came from a seeming newcomer – the ‘Fronte dell’ Uomo Qualunque’ (‘The Common Man’s Front’). The party combined the protest votes of (former) fascists and regional discontent. At the beginning, the ‘Qualunquists’ successfully played the card of the ‘man of the street’, who is overwhelmed by the dictates of the political élite – and the (Western) allies who were still present in Italy at that time (Ginsborg 2003: 99–105).

When the coalition between the Christian Democrats and the Communists ended, in 1947, the Qualunquists soon started to decline – to be replaced by an openly revisionist party, the neo-fascist ‘Movimento Sociale Italiana’ (MSI). The more general right-wing populism of the Qualunquists was replaced by the open revisionism of a traditional (neo-)fascist party.

The implosion of the Italian party system in the 1990s brought a realignment of the Italian far right. A new party became influential on the far right – the Lega Nord. The Lega ‘emerged as a result of the un-freezing of political cleavages . . .’ (Bulli & Tronconi 2011: 51). The Lega is not concerned with defending Italy’s fascist past but with protesting Roman centralism – in that respect distinctly not following the fascist tradition and mobilizing anti-immigration sentiments. The Lega represents the third stage of post-1945 Italian right-wing extremism: from populism to revisionism of a neo-fascist kind and back to a new version of populism – with a specific revisionist agenda directed against the central Italian state.

Rightist populist parties of Western and post-communist Europe

A special case is the rise of far-right populist parties in the Nordic countries. Scandinavia, for a long time considered to be the safe haven of liberal tolerance, has become a hotbed of anti-immigration activism, especially directed against migrants from Muslim societies. The Danish People’s Party, rooted in a broad protest movement of the 1970s directed against taxation, has been the trendsetter. Other Nordic parties followed. The parties – the Danish People’s Party, the Sweden Democrats, the True Finns and the Norwegian Progressive Party – are not the products of any revisionist agendas. Neither the national conflicts of the past nor a visible nostalgia for Nordic fascism play any role in the performance of the Nordic far-right parties. They are parties with an extremely narrow outlook – they are against immigration; and they oppose the deepening process of integration within the EU. The anti-immigration topic played a role in the Norwegian mass murder of July 2011: the perpetrator’s 1,500-page manifesto praised the Nordic rightist parties (Living with the far right 2011).

Different from contemporary right-wing populism in Western (and especially Northern) Europe, the far right in post-communist Europe follows a revivalist strategy. The old cleavages and prejudices are identical to the agenda of parties like the Greater Romanian Party, the Hungarian Jobbik, the Slovak Slovenská Národná Strana (SNS) or the Bulgarian Ataka. Open anti-Semitism and ethno-nationalism – directed especially against minorities (like the Turks in Bulgaria or the Roma in all these countries) – are combined with the renaissance of an aggressive attitude when one of the nationalisms is dealing with another – as can be seen, for example, in the clashes between Slovakian

and Hungarian nationalists. The same can be said about the post-Yugoslav situation: the war after 1991 can be considered to be the latest of the Balkan wars between those with nationalist aspirations (Glenny 2000, Ismayr 2010).

The collapse of the communist systems created a specific political environment. As 'nationalism' was – officially – anathema under communist rule, the political freedom created by the transformation of 1990 and 1991 was seen as a new freedom for the suppressed nationalistic sentiments of the past. In Western Europe, nationalism was – with the exception of openly anti-democratic parties and movements – never suppressed and had not become a 'victim'. In Central-Eastern Europe, different kinds of nationalism could take the victim's role after transformation.

Rightist populist parties with a libertarian economic agenda and rightist populist parties with a kind of (national) socialist agenda

Today's US populism is in many respects – not in all – different from the European phenomenon of the populist far right. One difference is the clientele: the Tea Party represents the older white middle class with 'somewhat higher incomes than typical Americans' – distinctly not proletarian voters (Williamson et al. 2011: 27). US populism usually has a strong religious-Christian fundamentalist agenda.

Contemporary European populism disproportionately represents the lower classes, especially blue-collar voters; Tea Party followers are from the economically rather prosperous segments of US society. Right-wing populism in Europe articulates the fears of the modernization losers; the Tea Party speaks on behalf of a significant religious interpretation of politics, especially concerning the attitudes of Evangelical Protestants. The European populists are using religion (Christianity) only as a vehicle to construct a cultural war against 'Islam'. The populist electorate is – with the exception of the Polish PiS (Law and Justice Party) – rather secular. The Tea Party is not a party but a pressure group, one more or less linked to one of the two traditional US parties, the Republicans; the European populist parties are competing for votes with all the others, especially the mainstream parties. The Tea Party is a movement with the intention of influencing the Republican Party – with some significant impact on electoral results (Karpowitz et al. 2011); the European populist right-wing parties are not – at least not primarily – movements. They are political parties.

There are some parallels – the focus on immigration and variations of nationalism: in the US case the patriotic interpretation of 'American Exceptionalism'; in the European case either more traditional forms of exclusive ethno-nationalism (especially in Central-Eastern Europe) or a kind of post-nationalist nationalism, directed against newcomers who are constructed as 'foreigners'. All the variations, on both sides of the Atlantic, are potentially racist – like the anti-Semitism and the anti-Roma sentiments of the Hungarian Jobbik or the Islam-bashing of the Dutch Freedom Party, as are emotions directed against Hispanic immigrants in the United States.

But the biggest difference is the anti-state, anti-government orientation of the Tea Party, an orientation not to be found within the European populist parties. European right-wing populism tends to be pro-state, tends to criticize the absence of a strong role of government in the realm of the economy, tends to lament the decline of the

national welfare state. The tentative anarchism, so typical of the US Tea Party, is nothing the European far right could endorse. European populist far-right parties represent 'nativist economics' (Mudde 2007: 122), based on an understanding of state intervention in the economy.

Of course, there are variations. The Danish Progress Party, predecessor of the contemporary Danish People's Party, represented a strong anti-taxation sentiment – not so different from the Tea Party's libertarianism. But the general agenda of Europe's contemporary far right is to ask that the State play a significantly stronger role in economic matters. In that respect, Europe's right-wing populism is more socialist than (neo-)liberal. But in the national variety of socialism, the far right represents a brand of socialism lacking a systematic agenda of international solidarity.

All the different variations of Europe's far right are in the process of developing a common identity by constructing common enemies. The specific common enemy of the Polish PiS, the Hungarian Jobbik, the Danish People's Party and the Norwegian Progressive party is globalization. Defined as the lifting of economic and cultural and political borders, the far right defends 'identity' – first and foremost national identity, but more and more European identity in the sense of Western 'Christian' civilization, the 'Abendland'. For the far right, the Europe they are defending is not the Europe of the EU. On the contrary, the EU is seen as responsible for the dangers national identities have to face. The mobility (and modernity) that the EU stands for is anathema to the parties of the far right.

In combination with other traditional enemies – 'America' or the 'Jewish Conspiracy', merged in the code word 'East Coast' – today's far right calls for a Europe different from the rational federation-building that the EU can be identified with. If the traditional nationalistic contradictions between nationalism and nationalism can be replaced by an all-European agenda, and directed against globalization and immigration, America and 'Brussels', the populist far right could become Europeanized; it could be transformed into a European party family of post-ethno-nationalist populist parties translating the ethno-nationalist agenda into an agenda of exclusion, with Europe confronting the 'defining others', like Islam or America, 'multiculturalism' or 'political correctness'.

This could be seen as a final triumph for the concept of European integration: the arch-enemies of European unification, traditionally divided by the nationalistic conflicts of the past, could develop into a European party family and a European party within the EU – no longer so different from the Europeanized mainstream parties such as the conservatives or social democrats, liberals or greens. Thanks to populism and its not necessarily nationalist agenda, yesterday's extreme right could transform itself into an all-European populist party. If the West European, post-nationalistic and post-revisionist trend defines the future of Europe's far right more and the Central and Eastern European, traditionally nationalistic and revisionist tendencies less, the contradictions between the different brands of nationalism will not stand any longer in the way of a unified European far right. The present anti-European or at least anti-EU agenda of the far right could be replaced by a fight for a post-nationalistic, but strictly exclusive Europe – for 'Fortress Europe'.

It is especially the Austrian FPÖ which is trying to bridge the gap between the post-nationalistic far-right parties like the Dutch Freedom Party and traditional

nationalism as represented, for example, by the Hungarian Jobbik. The purpose of these not yet successful attempts is to establish a far-right party group in the European Parliament (Schiedel 2011: 91–6) This would make the European far right an all-European factor beyond the EU member states.

How to deal with right-wing populism?

The established European democracies have developed different kinds of policies regarding the rise of right-wing populist parties:

- *Delegitimizing* the right wing due to its incompatibility with democratic values, enshrined in constitutions; excluding the right wing from the electoral process.
- *Isolating* the right wing by excluding it from electoral or executive alliances.
- *Embracing* right-wing parties in the hope that populism in power will demonstrate its professional inability and the impossibility to fulfil the expectations of its voters as a governing party.

The first option is based especially on the German model of militant or defensive democracy ('Wehrhafte Demokratie'). The theoretical justification for the instrument of outlawing an extremist political party is based on the understanding that democratic freedoms should not be guaranteed to the enemies of democratic freedom. This leads to delegitimization and, in particular cases, to the outlawing of extremist parties. With respect to openly neo-Nazi parties this has a clear impact: parties like the German NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany), always threatened by the possibility of becoming outlawed by Germany's Federal Constitutional Court, have been kept on the fringes of the political system.

As the populist far right claims to represent a 'true' form of democracy better than the mainstream parties, the instrument of delegitimizing and repressing the populist far right is seen as an implausible instrument. This is the reason why the legal existence of parties like the Dutch Freedom Party, the French FN, the Austrian FPÖ, the Danish People's Party or the Italian Lega Nord is not threatened. The populist far right – different from traditional fascism – is anxious to prove its democratic credentials. The populist far right tries to demonstrate its legitimate existence within the framework of representative democracy. Following the arguments of the populist far right, the mainstream parties have a problem with accepting democracy. From its viewpoint, it is the populist far right which has to defend democracy – against the 'political class', against the 'power cartel' of the traditional mainstream parties. Any threat to the rule of law – such as a ruling by the German Constitutional Court to outlaw such a far-right party – is considered to be too crude an instrument, not sophisticated enough to deal successfully with the populist far right.

For that reason, most of the European political systems tend to live with extreme right-wing parties. Even the German government has been more than hesitant in using the constitutional instrument of outlawing the NPD: The argument is that it may be

better to confront the enemies of the democratic consensus in the public arena of Parliament and electoral campaigns.

Parties without an obvious link to an anti-democratic past or anti-democratic intentions cannot be confronted by the instruments of the judicial system. A possible consequence is the isolation of the party, preventing it from becoming a power broker within the party system. This is the intention of the French and Belgian 'cordon sanitaire'. The French FN and the Belgian (Flemish) Vlaams Belang are challenged by the negative consensus of the other parties, a common understanding of the other actors not to permit the far right any role in coalition-building. A policy of 'cordon sanitaire' means that the other parties – from the moderate (conservative) Right to the Left – agree to avoid any kind of alliance with the far right. This policy of isolating the far right is not designed to succeed as an electoral strategy – the far right may become more attractive as the only opposition to a perceived cartel of the political establishment. Jean Marie Le Pen's success in the French presidential elections of 2002 is evidence to such an effect. But a 'cordon sanitaire' prevents any such party winning executive power: neither the FN nor Vlaams Belang has yet been able to transform electoral success into executive power (Mudde 2007: 197, 289).

The obvious precondition for the success of such a 'cordon sanitaire' is the existence of a stable majority which does not accept the far right as a legitimate partner. As coalition governments are the rule in European democracies, the 'cordon sanitaire' reduces the possibility of forming a coalition. It is a permanent temptation for mainstream parties to use the far right, either as a bargaining instrument to get better coalition agreements with other mainstream parties or, if necessary, to violate the 'cordon sanitaire' and bring a far-right party into a coalition cabinet.

This leads to the other option: mainstream parties have to compete with the far right, a policy of embracing. The principal argument for this kind of strategy is that by bringing far-right populist parties into government positions, the populists will fail – due to the incompatibility of their populist agendas, which may succeed as long as a party is in opposition without the responsibility of government. It is argued that far-right parties in government cannot deliver what they promised while in opposition.

This temptation can be felt by parties of the (mainstream) Right and by parties of the Left. The case of Austria 2000, when a conservative mainstream party (the Austrian People's Party ÖVP) accepted the far-right FPÖ as a coalition partner to force the (mainstream) Left into opposition, is a source of possible temptation for the centre-right. The case of Slovakia 2006, when a leftist mainstream party (the social democratic Smer) welcomed two smaller far-right parties (SNS – National Party, HZDS – Movement for a democratic Slovakia) is a source of temptation for the centre-left: Confronted by the choice to govern in a coalition with the far right or to go into opposition, mainstream parties may opt to bring the far right into a coalition government.

In both cases, we can observe the consequences of such a policy of embracing. In the short term, the losers have been the far-right parties: the ÖVP's as well as Smer's two far-right coalition partners declined significantly after the first period of their respective coalitions: the FPÖ in 2002, HZDS and SNS in 2010. The mainstream party which had invited the far right into a governing alliance benefited, especially the ÖVP, but Smer did also win a higher share of votes than they had before the arrangement

with the far right. But, in the long run, the conclusion may be very different: after the FPÖ split in 2005 and went into opposition in 2006, the Austrian far right successfully repositioned itself to where it had been in 2000, a party of about the same strength as the two mainstream parties of the centre-left (SPÖ) and centre-right (ÖVP). Embracing the far right and including it in a coalition alliance may be a recipe for domesticating right-wing populism in the short term, but not for a longer-term perspective (Swoboda & Wiersma 2008).

The case of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) provides further experience. The SVP has been part of the Swiss party coalition for decades. The SVP was considered to be a conservative voice for German-speaking Protestants. However, in the 1980s, the party started to change its attitude: it behaved like a populist opposition party, using immigration (and especially Islam) and the EU as the defining elements of its agenda. Among the extreme-right parties in Europe, the SVP must be ranked as the most successful: in 2007, the party received 28.9 per cent of the vote (Harrison & Bruter 2011: 7).

The SVP has no fascist past – it has become a very successful right-wing populist party despite being in power. Chantal Mouffe's observation that the appeal of far-right populist parties 'diminishes once they become part of the government, and they seem able to strive only when on opposition' (Mouffe 2005: 70) is correct with respect to the Austrian and Slovak cases, but the example of the Swiss People's Party demonstrates that there are no iron rules regarding the ups and downs of the far right; and there is no fixed recipe for dealing with right-wing populism.

Of course, the most convincing long-term strategy would be to extinguish the preconditions of contemporary populism by satisfying the needs and fulfilling the demands of those who are the potential electorate of the Far Right: the dissatisfied, frustrated, angry voters. As they are, to a significant degree, articulating socio-economic interests, it would be the responsibility of social and economic policies to eradicate some or perhaps most of the conditions on which the success of rightist populism is based: by improving or at least guaranteeing the standard of living and especially the social security of the populist electorate.

However, the traditional European welfare state, which has been so successful in integrating different segments of European societies by increasing social equality, is now a shambles. For some decades now, European societies have been characterized by increasing social inequality. The European labour market is in extremely bad shape – and not only due to the global financial crisis of the last three or four years. The gap between a generation that had become used to a comparatively high standard of social security after 1945 and a generation which has reason to believe it will not enjoy a similar standard is becoming deeper and more visible.

Of course, voting for parties like the Dutch Freedom Party or the French FN is escapism. Neither of these far-right populist parties can demonstrate any credibility to reconstruct the leaking networks of social security. The populist far right complains about globalization and the end of national sovereignty. But there is no conclusive agenda for re-establishing the nation state and its protective role. The rightist populist electorate votes first and foremost *against* the 'old' parties of the mainstream – and only secondly *for* the far-right parties. But the motivation – of a contemporary European,

20 years old, without higher education and threatened by unemployment and a general decrease in his (her) quality of life – to protest against the decline of his/her status quo by voting for a populist party is not, *per se*, irrational: He/she has reason to believe that the post-1945 systems of social security – the British or the Swedish or even the communist systems of Eastern Europe, systems which brought a degree of security – seem to be lost for good.

As the mainstream parties cannot credibly claim to be able to reinstate yesterday's level of national welfare – how can the preconditions of far-right populism be extinguished? Europe has to live with the phenomenon of far-right populism – because there is no visible policy to change the attitudes of the modernization losers: The losers are realizing that they have lost. They have lost the level of security and predictability established in Europe after 1945.

The perspective of a 20-year-old European without higher education is the perspective of a loser. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an undereducated European had reason to fear a deterioration in his or her chances in the near future. Compared with the expectations of one generation earlier, this undereducated European has to face mass unemployment as well as a decline in the quality of social security provided by the nation state. To eradicate these conditions, the reconstruction of the nation state and its sovereignty – or a transfer of the functions of social and economic intervention from the nation state to the European level – must be possible. The first option seems no longer to exist and the second does not exist yet.

In the foreseeable future, the social and economic preconditions favourable to the rise of right-wing populism will become stronger. To deal with the far right by re-establishing the good old post-1945 welfare state is not a realistic option. But if it is not possible to extinguish the socio-economic conditions of the contemporary far right, it might be possible to reverse the acceptance of extremist parties on the fringes of the political mainstream.

This possibility is demonstrated by Germany: the German party system permits the existence of some rather small far-right parties, but there is no equivalent of the French FN or the Austrian FPÖ. The crisis in the German welfare state is no different from the crises in the Netherlands or Denmark, but the response to rising unemployment and the general decline of social guarantees is different in Germany. It is plausible that this is – to a certain degree – a consequence of the post-1945 re-education. As a consequence of the shock German society had to face when the realities of the Nazi crimes could no longer be repressed, voting for an extreme rightist party has become socially, morally and ethically unacceptable. No other European democracy is as successful as Germany when it comes to minimizing the possibilities for the political far right.

Europe will have to live with radical populist parties. The different political strategies a democracy can employ to deal with the far right differ from case to case (Bertelsmann 2009). No general recommendations are possible. There is no simple recipe. But the German case demonstrates that a moral 'cordon sanitaire' can have a significant impact – not so different from the French and Belgian strategic 'cordon sanitaire'.

No strategy can succeed without changes in the electorate. As long as significant segments of society can be tempted by populist simplifications, by xenophobic rhetoric,

by prejudices creating scapegoats, right-wing populism will play a significant role in democratic politics – independently from the situation in the labour market and the ups and downs of the economy. The decisive answer to the challenge of the populist far right has to come from ‘the people’ – from the citizens, from the voters.

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