

Populism, nationalism, extremism: expressions of antipolitics in Europe?

Abstract: *The vast majority of the papers on populism describe this political phenomenon as one which is very difficult to explain and to analyze due to its discursive versatility and behavioural chameleonism. Furthermore, we would argue that the term populism covers more political and social realities than one single term would normally concentrate from a semantic point of view. This is why many analysts of this phenomenon, such as Guy Hermet (2007) or Gianfranco Pasquino (2008) propose the use of the plural populisms instead of the singular populism, which would permit the formulation of a clearer definition of this ubiquitous phenomenon. On the other hand, in view of the new dynamics of populism in the period preceding the debut of the 2008 economic crisis, some authors (Mudde, 2004:541; Touraine, 2007:38) have defined the phenomenon as a system of "post industrial" parties and thus, "post classial". Others (Taguieff, 2002; Knight, 1998; Viguera, 1993), trying to give an interpretative unity to a process which is hard to classify, have defined populism as a certain style of making politics varying in discourse from one society to another, but similar through its intimate structures of behaviours and ideas.*

Keywords: *Neo-populism, anti-system, disfunctional democracy, nationalism*

From populism to neo-populism: a difficult process of conceptualization

Where does new populism come from and what are the reasons of its success? The thesis of these authors' paper is that, during the second half of the 20th century, populism, especially in its extremist forms, compromised the political evolutions that have led to the Second World War, has remained in a residual state and has resisted diffusely in all the strata of European societies. None of the European societies has been spared of this evolution, even if the impact has been different from one society to another. In all this time, populism has been maintained primarily by the frequently used "theory" of the conspiracy of the corrupt political elite against ordinary citizens, a scheme permanently used both by politicians and by mass media. Already, before the 2008 economic crisis, ever since the last decade of the past century, new forms of populism, adapted to the socio-economic and political conditions of contemporary society have appeared in the Western European countries. And if the present effervescence of populisms is a consequence of the economic crisis, their roots are much older and

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can be traced back to the interwar period and beyond. For a historian such as Guy Hermet (Hermet, 1997:34), populism and nationalism have been placed together even since the 18th century when the inventors of the representative regimes have united them to make their message easier to understand by the "popular classes". Due to this "original sin", the nationalism-populism confusion would have still been present today and, once nationalism – especially after counterrevolutionary conservatism merged with nationalism as a reaction to the initial success of revolutionary nationalism – took on more extremist forms beginning with the second half of the 19th century, populism, nationalism and extremism have begun to be seen as expressions of the same political ethos. This is why, for many historians or exegetes whose focus is on nationalism, the relation between the two concepts is the *consequence of economic and political evolution within the nation-state*.

Anyway, if the economic problems which appeared even before the effective onset of the crisis would not have been able to revive populism, they reconfirmed a part of their assertions. On the other hand, the absence of a credible ideological alternative – given the per se acceptance of the "end of the world" vision by all the mainstream trends – has contributed to the doctrinal mess of the Western left and to the privileging of an economic discourse, under the influence of "the third way", or in a deconstructive way in the detriment of the traditional societal orientation. The fall of Eastern communism has affected a doctrinal dynamics that was at a serious loss of speed for the past two decades. In the Preface to the French edition of *The War of Identities*, Ernesto Laclau (Laclau, 2000:6) noticed that "this slow erosion has led to a generalized scepticism regarding the central categories of the classic discourse on emancipation – such as «revolution» - and has ended by discussing the ideal of emancipation in itself." And populism has fully profited from all these evolutions.

This is why a short overview of the conceptual evolution of populism is required. In a narrow sense, the origin of the term populism can be found as an expression of a political engagement in the narodnicist movement (in Russian, narod means people) which expressed, in tsarist Russia at the end of the 19th century, a combination between a vulgarized form of socialism and agrarianism, both grafted onto the older Russian nationalism. It is interesting to note that the roots of populism have appeared in such diverse societies and in the case of such contradicting actors. However, at its origins, populism addressed the rural world both in Russia and in the USA, which shows that in the middle of the 19th century the agrarian world was still perceived as the epicentre of the people. The spectacular social and technological changes in the century of industrialization have left out the vast majority of society – the rural medium and especially the peasantry. The political world and democracy implicitly have moved to town, and in the case of Russia (with its rudiment of aristocratic-bureaucratic democracy at the beginning of Alexander the Second's reign) within the capital city of Saint Petersburg. Politics seem to be an exclusively urban field and the current ideologies of the time adapted to this perspective. Liberalism, whose original agrarian component – we are referring to land ownership, humanization of external property etc. – is forgotten in the desire to adapt to urban politics and to react to political conservatism that makes the apology of the past rite of landowners (boyars, nobles etc.) that in the meantime have moved to town as well. Furthermore, this is also the age of social quakes caused by syndicalism and later socialism of the strongly organized workers' movement, full of ideology and active vitality. As opposed to these changes, the rural classes appear as immobile and without any political initiative.

Just as in Russia populism in the United States was born in urban areas, but very quickly and moved the centre of interest in rural areas among farmers that represented hitherto the main U.S. social dimension. Industrial development during the Gilded Age has left rural areas outside the U.S. political and economic spaces, generating huge discrepancies between rural and urban areas. For this reason, American populism with a strong agrarian character found fertile ground to grow. Its ideological content is a mixture of agrarian socialism with religious conservatism, a reaction to the banking system and to the industrial sector, but also to the request of increase in access of "the people" to decision making. And one of the decisions that American populism wanted to take was to limit immigration to the United States. Immigrants were seen as the group that could be most easily absorbed into the industrial space that was just being born, as opposed to those who already considered themselves to be indigenous.

Thus, ever since it appeared, populism develops this "reactionary" character towards modernity – industrialization is seen as negative – of a society that is not prepared for a change in economic and technological paradigm. American populism has animated that certain part of society that was not able to adapt to a change and has influenced through this the entire political journey of the USA during that period. This is why it can be seen as a paradoxical movement – a revolutionary reactionary movement.

Of course, between this first populism and the populism that developed during the fourth and fifth decades in Latin America, first in Brazil under Getulio Vargas, but especially in Argentina under Juan Peron, where the differences are significant. The fact that South American populism came to power and influenced the history of South America made the expression interest towards the Latin American of populism to prevail, especially since the Russian variant was covered by the noise of the 1905 Russian Revolution and, especially, by the Bolshevik revolution and by Soviet totalitarianism.

Moreover, the interest for the Latin American variant of the term caused the formula of neo-populism, which drew attention to the return of populism on the first political stage, to appear in order to define the new governments in Latin America during the last decade of the past century as well as that of Alberto Fujimori in Peru and of Carlos Menem in Argentina. And because the significance of populism varies depending on the historical as well as geographical and cultural contexts, any taxonomy, as suggested by Victor Armony (Armony, 2002: 51-78), should adapt to the studied context. In Latin America, even if it has a pejorative acceptance, populism is not confused with the xenophobic far right, as often happens in Europe. Therefore, any universalistic temptation of defining populism risks leading to error. In this sense, European populism, as it has manifested in the last decade, must clearly be differentiated from its South American variant, as well as from its historical variants. This is not to say that the relation between new and old populism can be ignored.

An interesting try to overtake the theoretical confusion that manifests in the plan of defining populism Ernesto Laclau (Laclau, 2000: 93-105) noticed that the tendency of conceptually segmenting populism starts from the fact that a search is underway for the unity of the term according to its social or ideological content, as long as it is characterized rather through disparity. Thus, the Argentine theoretician proposes that instead of the temptation of considering populism on a general level as a irrational manipulation of the ignorant masses, and on this basis to proceed then to articulate certain interpretative categories adapted to particular cases, to proceed the other way around,

and the conceptual unity to be extracted from the particular aspect of the articulation of populist practices. For Laclau, regardless of its content, populism is characterized by the manner in which a series of unsatisfied requests that establish a line of antagonistic demarcation in the centre of social representation. This is why Laclau proposes a significant distinction between the differential demands (also called democratic) addressed to some state entities whose authority is not questioned and the populist demands that establish equivalence rapports with various unsatisfied demands built around what the Argentine theoretician calls void signifiers. This way of conceptualizing populism gives Laclau the opportunity to prove that, far from being a problem, conceptual ambiguity of populism is a condition of its existence. Thus it can give unity and coherence to the analysis of populism without having to resort to arbitrary exceptions when specific cases are analyzed. However, to this type of conceptualization of populism proposed by Laclau one can argue that it tends to confuse politics with populism to the point where both lose their identity.

However, with all of Laclau's interesting contribution, one of the conceptual problems of populism remains its ambiguity. Therefore, and not only in journalistic investigations, populism or its contemporary derivatives are most often associated with extremism, especially with the right wing, but also with the left. Regardless of this, the dominating tendency is that of considering European populism as an expression of the aforementioned right wing that might explain the increase of racial violence and xenophobia, even terrorism. In fact, The Europol Report on Terrorism for 2012 (TE SAT 2012) – in which five types of terrorism are differentiated according to an ambiguous way of various forms predisposed by populism: religiously inspired terrorism, far left and anarchist terrorism, far right terrorism and single issue terrorism – privilege such a perspective that already has consequences on a practical level of maintaining public order in the European states. Although the word populism is not found *expressis verbis* in the Report, it is substituted by the reference to ideology as motivation of terrorism. On the other hand, the terrorist attacks in Oslo and on the island of Utoya from July 2011 that resulted in 77 victims indisputably demonstrate that populism built on nationalistic and extremist bases can have dramatic consequences that the preferred interest of the European public authorities towards the so-called religiously inspired terrorism have amplified. And the public policies regarding the order assumed on a European level do not aim at the efficient combat against this political orientation.

But populism is directly assumed to the left as well. In the preface to the latest 2012 edition of his book *The Genesis of Populism (Genese du populisme)*, Pierre Birnbaum shows that Jean-Luc Melenchon, the leader of the French Left Front, who placed fourth in the first round of the April 2012 presidential elections, has assumed without complex his being labelled "populist" (Birnbaum, 2012: 14). For Melenchon, populism has nothing pejorative about it, as is demonstrated by the interview in *Le Monde* from February 7th 2011 in which the communist leader declared "the construction of our political discourse opposes two categories: the people on the one hand and the oligarchy on the other" (Birnbaum, 2012: 15). Is left winged populism, in its form assumed by the Left Front, different from the one assumed by the National Front? The dilemma is not a simple one, and the joke that many use to express their ideological confusion towards the new populism assumed by the so called left is telling: "populism is like cholesterol: there is a good one and a bad one". Hence the attempts of some, Pierre-André Taguieff, to interpret populism

in a style grid: one is not actually talking about a doctrine, of an ideology or political trend, but rather about a form of political expression. For Taguieff, "as many other words or expressions of current political language, as racism or fascism, populism works as a word which produces fear, the awakens worries and painful memories, a word that eliminates or that seeks to eliminate the political individual or group to which it is applied" (Taguieff, 2002: 12).

Nevertheless, "left"-assumed populism does not appear to be as convincing as the "right" type. Neither in the first round of the French presidential elections of April 22nd 2012, nor in the first round of the legislative elections of June 10th 2012 did Jean-Luc Melenchon rank before Marine Le Pen, the president of the National Front. If in the first round of the presidential elections, the candidate of the National Front obtained 17,90% of votes, the candidate of the Left Front did not obtain more than 11,10%, in the first round of the legislative elections, where Melenchon chose to present himself in the same circumscription, the feud of Marine Le Pen, the candidate of the Left Front obtained only the third position, with 21,5% of votes, as opposed to the 42% obtained by the candidate of the National Front.

The highest risk of the theoretical trials in exhaustively defining populism – as we have previously explained through the reference to Laclau, but as also results from the quoting Taguieff – is that it labels as populist any form of social or political criticism that does not register within the mainstream. A definition that tries to take note of all the main political elements that are considered to be populist, regardless of the area in which they manifest themselves, as is the one proposed by Krastev, can be accused of such a perspective. For Krastev, populism presumes:

1. contempt and even hatred of political elites;
2. a strong anti-corruption rhetoric;
3. an anti-system discourse based on the appeal to the people as a whole;
4. cultural conservatism (or religious)
5. economic egalitarianism;
6. rhetorical anti-capitalism;
7. declared nationalism;
8. xenophobic behaviour and discourses;
9. conflicting public policies (when they arrive into power);
10. anti-system foreign policy and alliances (Krastev, 2009). Nu e citat la final!!!!!!

And even if these characteristics are pieces of a puzzle and cannot be found all within the same formula, with the same intensity and at the same time, they cover almost all forms of social criticism, mixing irreconcilable attitudes, values and behaviour.

Despite significant differences in behaviour and discourse, there is a defining hard core that allows keeping into account the multiple forms that populism can embody. Following Canovan's perspective (1999), I will define this common core as "an appeal to the nation against the established structures of the ruling power, as well as against the society's dominant ideas and values". And the other definition is that of Cas Mudd (2005) which aims to synthesize populist discourse - he defines populism as an ideology with a thin center which considers that society must finally be divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "pure people" versus "corrupt elites", and argues that politics must be the expression of a general will of the people. (...) In the populist democracy nothing is more important than general will, not even constitutional guarantees.

The increase of scientific interest around this issue reflects a presence in the growing empirical reality of the populist discourse in the global political landscape. And that is because this phenomenon occurs in the most unexpected forms in areas that seem to have nothing in common with each other. However, the identity elements of populism seem to unite different social and political areas. In general, there is talk about three types of populisms largely considered to be different from each other - the Latin American, the Western European and Central East European. But as we are trying to show there are ties of discourse and political action between these areas, which shows that political discourse has globalized as well.

European populisms: a phenomenon with a variable geography?

2.1. The short way from populism to neo-populism in Western Europe

As regards Western Europe, the success of the populist parties, especially those which are usually labelled as right-winged radical parties such as the National Front in France or the Liberty Party in Austria, which stabilized at around 10% in the 80s, has awoken researchers' interest. They have constructed theories and analyses on this subject, theories that no longer applied to the Central and East European populist parties, which did not mean that in essence the parties from the CEE did not have similar discourses, but rather adapted to other political and social realities. Parties such as the Socialist Labour Party or the "România Mare" (Greater Romania) Party from Romania, Vladimir Meciar's People's Party in Slovakia etc. had a discourse so nationalist and xenophobic that they divided society between the "right people" and the "corrupted elite", the same case as in the West, but related to different situations and receptors.

The vote against the elite – not just political, but also economic or intellectual – depicts a state of mind that the economic crises managed to bring to the surface and to legitimate in the case of many Europeans. The interest of the grand system-parties towards the named popular categories – from the unemployed to the lower middle class – has been minimal, especially because the fall of communism and "the end of history" does not leave any room for alternatives. The effect of this illusion proves to be devastating today. Although those who vote for the extremists or for the new populists are generally a minority, their increase to 25% in Austria, but especially to 18% in the first round of the French presidential elections is worrying. In France, ever since the 2002 presidential elections the alarm had been triggered by the qualification in the second round of the elections of Marine Le Pen's father, Jean-Marie, against Jacques Chirac. The latter's victory with 85% of votes and the fall of Jean-Marie from 17% in the first round of 2002 to 10% in 2007 created the illusion that the problem of extremism had been solved. It was only an illusion. Slowly, but surely, the Vichy electorate, hidden for six decades behind the general welfare, was born again. The furious attack against the social policies from which it benefited was awoken it. A cautious France, scared by immigration and by globalization, turned towards itself and passive, found in the crisis the opportunity to express itself. And after the shock of the first round of the presidential elections, Nicolas Sarkozy, placed second – a situation without precedent in a France in which a president in office had never placed second – interpreted the vote for Marine Le Pen as an identifying and xenophobic message. Thus, in the first day of the new electoral cycle, an electoral assault was started against "straining Europe" with the announcement that "if Europe cannot protect

its borders, France can and will!" Sarkozy goes the same way with the nationalist part of voters of the National Front that were chanting "On est chez nous" ("We are at home") at the traditional manifestation on May 1st in Paris just a few days before the second round of the presidential elections of May 6th 2012.

For politicians such as Sarkozy, Europe seems to be fortress threatened by foreigners that pass without a problem beyond the first barriers. It is not by happenstance that in the campaign speech for the second round of the elections the fortress was transformed into a central element of the discursive strategy of Sarkozy, proving how a populist discourse can be inserted into the language of the system-politicians. In his speech held in Toulouse on April 29th, a week before the second round of the elections, Sarkozy developed a veritable theory of the frontier as a barrier against immigration and to protect "national identity". This is an act that proves that Sarkozy is not only "obsessed with frontiers" but also that he had adhered to a nationalistic interpretation of history. On the other hand, Sarkozy's 'secure' speech took the form of supporting "the presumption of legitimate defence" for police officers using their weapon against presumed delinquents of Maghreb origin after on April 25th 2012 a policeman was placed under arrest for voluntary homicide, and his colleagues organized a spontaneous protest on Champs Élysées. Marine Le Pen, who had this measure stated in her program, immediately saluted an "ideological victory".

The result of the 2012 presidential elections show a France which is more complex than previously indicated by the classic right-left cleavage. The urban-rural cleavage or the one between employees and employers are in the foreground, while the cleavage between the church and the state is in the background and, more discrete but able to explain better the nationalist outburst, the cleavage between centre and periphery, can explain the diversity of the French vote of April 22nd. Sarkozy's obsession for identity does not seem to have anything in common with the electoral map of the departments in which the candidate of the National Front won the most votes. These are not exactly those rural departments and suburban areas where the crisis struck at its worst, where unemployment in among the workers has risen exponentially and the delocalization of the industrial production towards Asia has affected the popular strata. The known researcher Nonna Mayer explained in an interview for Liberation published the following day after the first round of the elections, on April 23rd, that the inverse ratio between the degree of instruction and voting in the case of NF voters was constant after 1984: the weaker the instruction, the bigger the probability of voting for NF. And the barrier is constituted by the baccalaureate exam: 30% of those that are not baccalaureates are NF voters as opposed to the under 15% of those who have passed the baccalaureate. However, centrist voters do not fit at all to this model: they are mostly university graduates that pertain to a middle class that is not permeable to the message of identity and xenophobia.

So the replacement of negationist Jean-Marie Le Pen as leader of the NF with his daughter in 2011 did not change the structure of voters or the main message. Marine Le Pen has stressed certain social and secular trends but without interfering with the doctrinal foundations of her party. And the fact that she obtained a better score than her father did ten years ago on April 21st 2002 – 17,9% as opposed to 16,8% - this was due to a discursive strategy which was focused more on the social dimension. This tendency of her campaign has been criticised by senior members of the Front, colleagues of Jean Marie, but in the end, given the conditions of the economic crisis, it has proven to be successful.

Even if the topic of immigration was again the first one to be mentioned in the discourse of the Front, the problem of purchasing power shortly followed. A social problematic was attached to xenophobia that would have been more suitable to the fears that ordinary French citizens experience. For professionals and medium qualified workers that were among the first victims of the crisis, the strong resentment against Nicolas Sarkozy, considered to be responsible for all of this, also played a significant role.

However, beyond the false surprise, the vote in favour of the far right wing must not be overvalued: still, 82% of French voters did not vote for the National Front. After all, the score achieved by the extremists from the True Finnish in the far more tranquil Finland in 2011 was 19,1% (the same score was obtained by the social democrats, the second party in the ranks and only a percentage away from the Party of the National Coalition, which obtained the first place), and in the liberal Holland in 2010 the Freedom Party ranked 3rd with 15,5% of votes. Not to mention Austria or Hungary. The most important risk in France, if Sarkozy will lose in the second round of the elections, is the possible implosion of the UMP that might transform the NF in the number one right wing party. Moreover, parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place in June in France that are already said to be disputed. And the entry of a negationist and neo-populist party in the National Assembly would be more than an event. It would be a warning against the social risks of the crisis.

The crisis is the opportunity and not the cause of the revival of extremism of all kinds. In France or Greece, to take the example of two countries where test elections were held in the spring of 2012, the trends that have manifested themselves during the elections were in a larval state since the end of the Second World War. In France the problem of extremism will not be solved because Marine Le Pen did not qualify to the second round of the presidential elections and the National Front lost 5% on June 10th in the legislative elections as opposed to April 22nd. For those that voted against the elites on April 23rd will have already changed French political life. The xenophobia and racism expressed by Nicolas Sarkozy during rallies and debates on the second round of the presidential elections prove a drift towards the far right that will leave traces in the legislative elections of June 10th and June 17th 2012.

The radical right winged populist parties had scores relatively comparable on both sides of the Iron Curtain in Europe at the beginning of the 90s. Despite this common feature, most authors tend to focus their analysis on Western populism, avoiding both the pan-European perspective and a thorough examination of populism in post-communist countries. The little specialized literature that has attempted comparative studies on populism in this regard is deeply divided, as some authors focus on the intrinsic difference between populism in the CEE and Western Europe, while others emphasize the risk of making artificial distinctions between East and West and to generate categories and different realities, as the phenomenon is pan-European. This last tendency considers that the growing success of populist discourse in both parts of the EU is generated, in essence, by a common frustration of Europeans in relation to democracy.

Focusing on defining populism as pointed out earlier, these two approaches are not necessarily contradictory. In other words there is a "common analytical core" (Panizza, 2005) or a structure that can be found in the discourse of populism both in the East and West. However, because populism is in two fundamentally different political environments, well-established Western democracies and post-communist democracies of

Eastern Europe, one needs to analyze the different forms on both sides of the former Iron Curtain.

Before analyzing the various expressions of populism in Europe, it is necessary to define more precisely the "common analytical core" that Panizza Francisco (2005) uses to connect together various forms of populism. According to this approach, populism is "a speech against the status quo, which simplifies the political space, by symbolically dividing society between "the people" and "the others". "The people" in this perspective, is not the necessary abstraction in any democratic theory, but a uniform and homogeneous organism, defined by opposition to its enemies. The latter consists primarily of the political and economic elite, which usurped political power and that of minorities, threatening the identity and homogeneity of the nation.

Defining for this feature of the populist discourse is what Paul Taggart called the "intrinsic chameleonic quality of populism" (Taggart, 2000), which varies depending on the specific realities in which the populist discourse appears. In other words, they are "empty signifiers" that can take many forms. According to Canovan (1999) the power structure of the State (or region) is essential in forming this specific populist discourse as populism is above all a reaction of the elite to power and to the dominant political discourse. Starting from here, the ability to identify specific forms taken by populist speech in CEE and Western Europe appears.

Depending on the definition of "the Other" we can find differences between the populist discourse of the East and West: while in the Western populist rhetoric "the Other" is described as an external threat, an invasive structure that threatens the homogeneity of the nation, a category that includes immigrants and those who are calling for economic or political asylum, "the Other", in Eastern populist rhetoric is often an insider set for a long time in the respective society, but not part of the nation itself, such as Roma populations, Jews or Hungarians (in Romania or Slovakia for example). More specifically, in Eastern Europe the populist discourse tends to be more inclined to exclusion, racism and xenophobia with open accents. As indicated in the Cas Mudde (Mudde 2005), anti-Semitism and racism are more widespread and accepted in CEE countries, and therefore, they are more obviously part of the radical political discourse as "populist political parties and even main stream (...) are less willing to act against racist or nationalist extremism than in the West". On the other hand, the arguments for exclusion of radical right winged parties in Western Europe is based on an economic discourse ("immigrants steal our workplaces") or a sociological one ("they refuse to integrate"), as a form of the political correctness of xenophobia.

The path from communism to a well tempered neo-populism: Central and Eastern Europe

While in Western Europe has a long tradition of populist discourse anti-establishment, the elite being defining for those holding political power - according to the theory by Vilfredo Pareto - and economic power, in the CEE the discourse against the elite is often associated with national-communism. In most cases anti-elitism in Central Europe is often directed against the main party to the left of the political spectrum, especially the one who is regarded as the successor of former communist party. The case the Polish Order and Justice party of the Kaczynski brothers is extremely relevant, because it came into

power with a profound anticommunist discourse a decade and a half after the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. From here stems another fundamental difference between post-communist and Western populism. Generally, and perhaps with the exception of Forza Italia (currently Popolo della Libertà) in Italy, Western European political parties recognize the political legitimacy of their political opponents, or, in other words, take into account political pluralism as a necessary component of a functioning democracy. In the perspective of Chantal Mouffe, "The monopoly of the opposition on the established order" (Mouffe, 2005) confers Western populist parties an aura of adolescent rebels against the democratic order but without really being taken into account to a significant extent. But they are forced to respect the democratic order, which they claim and consider it the heart of their ideology. Precisely because they appeal so much to the people they cannot afford to question democracy, although they want it changed according to their principles. As shown by Michael Shafir (2011) "the image that non-populist politicians strive to propagate is that of a reluctant politician whose entry into politics is a necessary evil which requires self sacrifice. Thus, results the fact that non-populist politicians are "systemic" at least in appearance. [...] they no longer aim for objectives that focus on destroying the current political system, but, on the contrary, they pretend that this objective is safeguarding genuine democracy".

Not necessarily so is the case of post-communist Europe, where the center-right parties tend to have a populist discourse similar to their national extremist counterparts, such as Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary, or the "Greater Romania" Party in Romania. In this speech that left "part" becomes the main political adversary of the people is often regarded as the illegitimate representative of the nation, because it is associated, at least symbolically, with communism. Viktor Orban, leader of the ruling party at present in Hungary, has been exemplary for such a trend. For example, after losing the 2002 elections in Hungary, he said: "Those of us who are here today, we are not and will never be in opposition. The Motherland cannot be in opposition." (Tamas 2009). Thus although declared to be a right-center party, Fidesz adopts, increasingly more populist perspectives, using the concept of nation with an extensive sense, even totalitarian, in which the principle of representative democracy - a legitimacy that is represented by every elected representative - is abandoned. Also, because of this trivialization of the link between populism and nationalism in the CEE, the center-right parties do not distance themselves (and they never actually distanced themselves) or do not condemn populist radical right hand parties, and are more open to forming coalitions with them (again the Hungarian case, but also in Slovakia by 2012).

According to Panizza (2005), populism thrives in "times of crisis and mistrust", as a consequence of "the failure of existing social and political institutions to limit and regulate political issues in a relatively stable order". In other words, populism is the most seductive ideology (or alternative) when the institutional system is unable to resolve the imbalances caused by the change or crisis in the political, economic or social spheres. This is because unsatisfied demands and expectations grow in times of crisis and populist parties provide an explanation for problems in the figure of "the Other", and a solution to this problem by truly restoring the popular sovereignty.

In this sense, populism, also offers to perform a vital function of representation, to "bridge the gap between the representative and the represented" (Panizza, 2005), at a time when traditional parties fail to do so. Populism is therefore not only an effective requ-

est for a change at an economic or social level, but also a fever revealing a "democratic malaise" (Surel, 2002).

Most Central and Eastern European societies have adopted the multi-party democratic system rather suddenly, after a long military dictatorship or single party state (the case of Poland), which led to the reproduction of the one-party model to competing political parties, each of them being more interested in playing political games rather than building public policies adapted to the society accordingly. Moreover, by adopting European programs for EU integration, the parties have "forgotten" to make programmatic politics, being only interested in accessing power. Thus society seemed to be taken "hostage" by the populist discourse, the only one that directly addresses them. Hence the democratic malaise which appeared as soon as the mainstream parties could not perform for the benefit of society, but only in support of the interest groups around them.

In this analytical framework, the rise of populism in Western societies and in the post-communist ones can be at least partly linked to the accelerated social and economic changes that they had to face in the last 30 years. All EU states - newer or older - have had to cope with an increasing opening their economies to international competition, Europeanization, the transition to a post-industrial economy and to population aging. Not only have these changes generated high social costs, but they also represented severe constraints on the state's capacity to address these costs, which led to a considerable reduction of welfare. In this context, populist parties were able to build their discourse on grievances arising from these changes by appealing to "the losers" of globalization, in the West, and to the "losers" of transition in post-communist countries. But the populist discourse did not propose solutions to economic crises, but only looked for the guilty in the "profiteering political elite" (Mudde 2007). Generally, especially in the CEE populist parties are adepts of the ultra-liberal economic model similar to the U.S., while the western populist parties undertake similar economic insights.

Of course, the economic differences between East and West continue to be extremely important, even though both areas face similar economic and social situations because of the economic crisis. But the political changes between the two parts of Europe are increasingly more different. Populism appears in Western Europe in a time of redefining the gap between party systems operating within the well-known democratic benchmarks. On the other hand, populism appears in the CEE at a time when democracy and political identification are in the process of invention, rather than in process of re-definition. This difference can be defined by using the concept of legacy: while most Western European political systems are based on fundamental democratic heritage, Central European countries are based on an authoritarian legacy often called "communist" or "national communist". But through the concept of inheritance, beyond the specific elements, we can speak of a "crisis of representation" in both parts of Europe.

Populism in Western Europe was often seen as a side effect of de-politicization of public action and of the growing importance of consensual politics in contemporary democracies. According to Mouffe (2005), Western populism comes from the predetermination of the liberal democratic values and from the end of adversative politics in Western democracies. The crisis of representation is key here, because those who disagree with the consensus of main parties' establishment feel that they have the ability to influence representatives according to their wishes. Citizens feel that politicians have a different agenda, driven by political correctness and multiculturalism, while their problems are to-

tally different. In this sense, populism is a symptom of a dysfunctional democracy - occurs because the principle of popular sovereignty was neglected, and that, in the words of Canovan (1999), this principle "reaffirmed in the form of populist challenge".

On the other hand, depoliticizing political action cannot explain the specifics of populism (especially since there is no such depoliticizing) in Central Europe, in particular its mass and its open character more towards excluding "undesirables". First, politics in the new EU member states can hardly be described as consensual. Although there was consensus undercover, at least in foreign affairs and economic policy in the 90s, most Central and Eastern European party systems have rapidly become polarized in a very adversative way around socio-cultural values. Communist-anticommunist cleavage remained a principle driver of Eastern European politics, to which was added the element of exclusion of minorities. For example, in Poland, where the Kaczyński brothers held power, communists, Jews and homosexuals played approximately the same role of "enemies" of the people.

If in Western Europe populism is understood as an anti-system discourse (Pauwels 2010), in Central Europe this discourse is rather adversative to the "common policy". Central European populism cannot be anti-system because the system has not stabilized in the western form, being constantly under anti-consensual and nationalist pressure. But rather, the analysis of cultural heritage from the communist period can give convincing explanations of specific forms of populist discourse in Central Europe. As shown by Cas Mudde (2002), post-communist societies are strongly prone to populism because of strong anti-political and anti-elitist feelings that were familiar with and formed under communism. The dissident elite, which in most countries of Central Europe had an important role in the immediate political transition at the beginning of the 90s, was socialized in a political environment in which politics could be conceived only in a non-political way. In this context, in the terminology of Mudde, "anti-moral people" could be also called "civil society", which was united against the "corrupt communist elite" strongly identified with the state structure, in general. During the transition, this "anti-political discourse" enjoyed great popularity, especially since some former dissidents joined some "post-communist political actors" out of which some were "opportunists and anti-democrats". Few dissidents and intellectuals joined the newly emerged political parties, preferring associations or groups of dialogue, leaving politics in the hands of people who just cautioned them ideologically.

Populism was a really seductive rhetoric for a population that, without at first and being strongly anticommunist and anti-elitist (against the communist elite) was taught to be in this way. The ideology that was imposed was a quickly revengeful one, which explained all the social dystopia through the communist legacy and denationalization. But this ideology was not capable to teach society to cope with new situations of national emancipation - where it was the case - or to learn self collective governing and personal autonomy. Thus, economic and political transition has not also produced a process of learning the rules of democracy and economy but has generated only frustration for a huge majority of "the losers" of transition. On this fertile soil, were born the populist-nationalist currents that were rapidly adopted by the mainstream parties.

It must be said that nationalism as a politic principle is not the same in Western Europe and in Central and Eastern Europe. R. Griffin (2003) is the one who introduced the term of ethnocratic liberalism to describe this form of paradox of European populism that

embraces enthusiastically the liberal system of political and economic competition, but considers, at the same time, only the members of an ethnic groups as being full members of society. The nationalism assumed by the National Front from France, the North League in Italy, the Flemish Block and, recently, the New Flemish Alliance in Belgium imply a rejection of the ideas of multiculturalism by proposing a type of nostalgia for a mythical world of racial and cultural homogeneity. In other words, right winged populism brings again into the discussion a form of nationalism focused on the ethnic community and on tradition, being many times an advocate of xenophobia and authoritarianism as regards immigration or freedom of movement of persons. For example, the Flemish Block proclaims everywhere the sympathy for the former Southern African system of the apartheid by upholding the principle "eigen volk eerst" (the indigenous must be the first), which leads to a complete separation from Belgium – Flanders of the Flemish, Wallonia of the Walloons (the Francophones), Europe of the Europeans (whites). And the Flemish model is not a singular one, because similar principles were promoted by Jörg Haider in Austria and Umberto Bossi in Italy in the past decade. Thus, we see that the reaction of populism is not only towards the ruling elite, but also towards those that are – in one way or another – considered to be foreigners.

The most obvious element of this form of populism is anti-immigrationism, and, in principle, is considered to be the most important. But anti-immigrationism must not be understood as having only an economic base, reducing the success of the populist formula for fear of only losing work places, higher taxes to protect the poor of other countries and so on. Certainly this subject also has a specific place in populist discourse, but the essence of this discourse is more of a cultural political invoice than of an economic invoice. The fear that tries to nourish populism is similar to that of Oswald Spengler at the end of World War I - falling under the domination of Eastern European culture, only that the actors have changed.

However, in Central and Eastern Europe, nationalism is more complex, being both endogenous and exogenous: it reacts both to internal factors (national minorities, ethnic or religious) as well as external factors (notably the "Russian threat"). In this perspective, nationalism had (and also has in some states) a positive connotation, especially in societies that have lived for over four decades in a "dissolution of the state-action in an international socialist order" (Minkberg, 2002). Therefore the call to historicism and national memory is part of the post-communist populist discourse. What is interesting is that most post communist societies still value European integration but continues to appeal to specific national characteristics and cultural religious differences of these societies. Moreover in Romania, populist-nationalist leaders such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Laszlo Tokes are colleagues in the European Parliament (valuing declaratively the European values) and at the same time build ultra-nationalist identity discourses related to a philosophy of ethnic separation.

If there is a space of total ambiguity as regards the populist discourse is that of economy. Although there have been repeated tries to find a common denominator in this field, populism immediately transforms into populisms as soon as one enters the economic area. Kurt Weyland (1999) has tried to bring together the Latin-American populism and the Central-Eastern European populism on neoliberal bases, but acknowledges beyond the common elements of the conservative neoliberalism of the completely free market and of total privatization, the discourses do not coincide on cultural and social dimensions. In

Latin America the fear of American neo-colonialism has nothing to do with the models of globalization assumed in the European space whose fears are focused towards China and Russia. Furthermore, Latin-American populism can be divided into what Robert Dix (2002) calls "authoritarian populism" (a form of chauvinism) and "democratic populism" (as was that of Carlos Menem in Argentina). From an economic point of view, the two variants are profoundly different, although both stem from Peronism. The authoritarian one comes closer to a socialist-type, planned economy, while the democratic one is profoundly neoliberal, an advocate of the completely free market.

Neither is in Europe a single model of economic populism, as populism is rather an ideology of reaction, a reason for which it reacts both against the completely free market, by making appeal to the memory of the welfare-state, as well as against the extended assistance of the state towards the categories of poor or non-European immigrants. The term used is that of producerism (Canovan, 1999) and describes a double reaction towards the great corporations and banks that, in accord with the state, enjoy tax exemptions and generous subventions, and towards the system of social assistance given to the immigrants, used as a mass of electoral manoeuvre by the mainstream political elite. This type of discourse has been used both by the National Front led by Jean Marie le Pen in France, and by Jorg Haider (Liberty Party) in Austria. But this discourse is not longer that current, as the majority of western populisms have joined the American neoconservative model or have simply abandoned any economic discourse.

Conclusions

Although it has extended quickly under the impact of the economic crisis, (neo)populism does not denote just a crisis of representation as a consequence of a passing "indisposition of democracy", but is a residual and diffuse product of the evolution of European societies before and after the Second World War. Throughout the European Union populist or eccentric parties have been experiencing an unprecedented development in the last fifty years. It would have been impossible for this current not to have reflexes in Central and Eastern Europe, especially the adversative discourse about "the People" and "the Other" is not a new one. But it has amplified following complaints provoked by the important economic and social transformations that took place in the last decade, and populism appeared as a palliative to the crises of democratic representation. Despite these facts, our papers aimed to demonstrate that populism in Central and Western Europe is not exactly the same, because populism is a discourse, a discourse that adapts to its public and feeds from its context. The populist discourse, therefore, took on different forms, as it has been presented above in the societies that have had a radically different democratic experience, and are subject to a fundamentally different process of redefinition. It is still yet to be seen if, in the words of Cas Mudde (2007), "the differences between East and West (...) will soon become irrelevant, taking into account the homogenizing effect provoked by EU integration", or if the legacy of the first two parts of Europe will prove to be more resistant than maybe we have expected

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