

The Risks of growing Populism and the European elections:

Alarming Increase of Populism,
Extremism and Euroscepticism in the
View of the European Elections

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The title of my research is called “Alarming Increase of Populism, Extremism and Euroscepticism in the View of the European Elections”. The main purpose of my research is to provide the readers a complex view on this crucial issue. This paper is structured to three main chapters which are continuously interlocked. First part is focused on the current situation in Europe and in particular Slovakia with respect to recent increasing gain for Populists. It provides also definition of key terms and historical introduction to the matter through researching dependencies that have shaped public attitude towards populism and extremism. Further progress of populism dominates in the second chapter. There will be described several scenarios of development in the light of upcoming elections to the European Parliament. Appropriate strategies at national as well as the European level are specified in the third part in order to face upcoming political, economic and social challenges in the Slovak as well as the European society. Clear appeal towards European citizens by the author is appeared in the conclusion of paper. This research has gathered relevant information from the documentation being specified in bibliography and it also compiled respective details in order to restate proposed research tasks including hypothesis and research questions in accordance with my research proposal submitted in December 2013. There are used above all the methods of analytical and logical approach in this paper. This research has intended to look at the issue from different perspectives. The result is a relatively extensive, but also comprehensive and detailed work.

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Introduction

Populism is a term that has become increasingly discussed in present modern society since recent years. Its sense is apparently broad and it depends on the field of human activity that shall be discussed. In terms of politics, populism is based on such public behaviour that is aimed at emphasizing understanding with problems of people and also providing with promises without any real background². Basically, Populists intend to impress the public at any risk, regardless of the subject itself.

Populism has increased throughout the European Union including Slovakia. In my point of view the main reason for this accrual is ongoing financial and political crisis and frustration by citizens from undischarged expectations. Due to high unemployment rate and stagnant economic growth in Europe people in the EU Member States are being faced with complex social issues. That opens chances for populist movements and nationalist tendencies in Slovak and also in whole European society. Slovakia has been tackled with populism during recent regional elections, notably in the Banska Bystrica Region (Central Slovakia).

However, we need to consider this phenomenon as a component part of democracy. Non-democratic regimes do not need any populism, once it is included directly in the official policies. Can we though deem the famous sentence of the Czechoslovak president Vaclav Havel that “truth and love will gain victory against lie and hate” as populist or even nondemocratic speech? Did he really believe in it or was this phrase used just for purely practical reasons in order to mobilize citizens while 1989? Mobilization affect was apparently enormous at that time. And what about demands of Slovak nationalists in the nineties of the last century that demanded to speak in country only in Slovak language and they wanted to force out Hungarian-speaking Slovaks over the Danube River? It helped them consequently to reach national parliament and government.

Afore mentioned facts and causalities have given me rise to write this research. I assume that we need to reflect the increasing popularity for populist and nationalist movements at the European and national level, notably in the view of the forthcoming European elections only a few months away. Therefore, I tried to better understand current situation and suggest solutions ahead. This research is focused primarily on Slovakia, although I also reflect current situation beyond my homeland, once this problem is complex and shaped by several external factors. I do hope that the following pages will help to lighten this challenging topic.

² SWOBODA, H. - WIERSMA, J. M.: Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights. Antilope, Belgium, 2008, p. 7.

1. Current situation at the European and national level

1. 1 Historical dependencies

To say that we all are equal it is one of the biggest risks for democracy in some meaning. It gives an extensive power to Populists over whole Europe who basically do not want to demolish democratic system, but they pretend to prevent democracy from any danger. Therefore, they are not therefore often considered as dangerous.

Director of the French institution Centre national de la recherche scientifique Pierre-André Taguieff said many years ago that populism is stronger the more intellectuals will criticize it³. Can the politician be successful if he does not behave as a Populist? Are not populism and democracy interlinked to each other when democracy is shaped by the people who each Populist commonly refers to? Legitimacy of Populists is based on presumption that they are directly connected with citizens and they are authorised to talk on their behalf - unlike remote and corrupted politicians⁴. That is basic common feature of Populists throughout whole European continent.

Sovereignty of people is exactly an essential factor for distinction between populism as a political style and ideology that implies a special form of critics of democratic order while saying “it does not simply work now”. Populism is currently very common in Europe and it relates to significant political, social and economic changes in Europe during last few years that have been marked with an unceasing financial crisis.

In particular, there are not any massive political parties with several affiliates and unfair organisations in the post-communist countries anymore, one-party press vanished and the cardinal role will be played by a pure political marketing. Political programmes have lost the sense, since nobody reads them anymore. Hence, brief and clear mottos and phrases have become decisive and those are being reformulated upon actual public opinion in surveys. Citizens cease from believing in traditional political parties and they intend to find the trust in new alternatives which are featured in fighting against current establishment⁵.

Long-lasting surveys in Europe have shown that people basically ascribe to politics only negative things. Therefore, they spit increasingly upon politicians. It constantly enables

³ Available at: <http://www.amerika.org/texts/from-race-to-culture-the-new-right-view-of-european-identity-pierre-andre-taguieff/>

⁴ LUKACS, J.: Democracy and Populism, Fear and Hate. Kalligram, Bratislava, 2006, p. 45.

⁵ MUDDE, C. - KALTWASSER, CH. R.: Populism in Europe and the Americas, Threat or Corrective fo Democracy? Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p. 18.

Populists to change the mind of people into a short term action. At the same time this human approach leads to a common apathy from politics.

In my point of view and that was fully confirmed by regional elections in the Banska Bystrica Region in Slovakia in November 2013 and also in several European countries as for instance parliamentary elections to Bundestag in Germany, middle class have become significant supporter of Populists. This social group increased rapidly in Europe after the Second World War. It seems to be in Europe that disadvantages of globalisation start to prevail over all benefits, once Europeans are not able to compete against Asian dumping. This frustration has mostly rebounded in Western and Southern Europe that is hugely marked by financial crisis. Middle class has been formed also in countries in the Central and Eastern Europe by floaters of economic transformation after 1990⁶. Nevertheless, economic crisis and fears from job loss may bring those people to Populists.

Another visible feature of populist ideology in European scope is to face out against current representative democracy. However, they do not use any revolutionary speech as the Nazis and Communists did in the past. In the view of Populists democracy does not have to be replaced, just easily “protected adequately”. Practically, it means that several Europeans do not consider populism as danger, because the problems do exist in reality. Unfortunately, they forget that social topics are just misused for some personal profit.

Call for a „real democracy” in the second half of twentieth century was more like new political left theory that had been represented by radical social movements and the Greens in Europe. Though those Populists were considered as gifted, self-confident and progressive and they had intended to deal with politics without any principal breach of existing system. There might be included also the hippies movement in the sixties. Such approach pulled masses of people into politics. It is very different to current situation in Europe. Basically, present populism does not ask for any active participation of citizens, there is no more need for it. Contrariwise, current „revolution” against traditional political order is asked for a strong leadership. Voters of populist parties who have been obviously shaped by conquests of increasing globalisation are not willing to actively participate in politics that would be inappropriate burden for them. They simply expect that politicians will implicitly perform their unredeemed wishes. Regardless of geographical scope such people do not want to use any tools of direct democracy. They are looking only for strong leaders.

⁶ BUTORA, M. - GYARFASOVA, O. - MESEZNIKOV, G. - SKLADONY, T.W. - editors: Democracy and Populism in Central Europe: the Visegrad Elections and Their Aftermatch. Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava, 2007, p. 43.

As also proven in my survey, key point of growing popularity of Populists in Europe is based on fast social-economic changes in society. There should be especially taken into consideration high unemployment and immigration. In particular, young and some reach voters prefer such parties fighting against tangible values. Nevertheless, those factors do not necessarily suffice by itself. Person with leading skills, shiny charisma and persuasive speech who can clearly name all troubles is necessary. Moreover, media help with visualization of those politicians.

The biggest danger for democracy in Europe consists however in the fact that more and more people get convinced that all politicians are equal in terms of deception and waxing scandals. Such ambiance of society-wide mistrust leads disappointed voters into arms of Populists and Nationalists. Clear and simple arguments without any evidence, even without reflecting on the nature, are probably the most significant common feature of Populists across Europe. Any political statement becomes influential after having been repeated several times. Notoriously famous Goebbels's assertion that "if you repeat a lie long enough, it becomes truth"⁷ is particularly valid in this case.

1. 2 Current situation at the European level

Present situation in Europe is much more complex than it might seem from the first impression. Standard political systems in Europe are being faced with radicalisation of political behaviour that is visible in various modalities. View of Populists towards the functioning of national and European affairs has become increasingly radical⁸. It is obvious in the context of recent parliamentary elections in Czech Republic, Austria and Germany. For all those political parties, namely movement (ANO) of Czech billionaire Andrej Babis, Eurosceptic Alliance for Germany (AfD) or even Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and anti-European Team Stronach in Austria, they all are characterised by unreadability. Basically, we can hardly describe their political program or even ideologically define. It will be therefore increasingly difficult to persuade voters about advisability and justness of the European project in next years.

German national elections have raised particular attention of the European public, namely success of newly created party that is called Alternative for Germany (AfD). Though this

⁷ Available at: http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Joseph_Goebbels

⁸ MUDDE, C. - KALTWASSER, CH. R.: Populism in Europe and the Americas, Threat or Corrective fo Democracy? Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p. 207.

entity did not achieve hard by the five per cent threshold required to enter the Bundestag, its electoral results have been shown as a good start for further political life, notably in the view of upcoming elections to the European Parliament. Political program of this party was founded only one year ago and is based on a very deep euroscepticm. Several German media have denoted it as “anti-European party”⁹ or even “right-populist”. Nevertheless, their representatives including party’s chairperson Bernd Lucke said that AfD refuses to cooperate with any Eurosceptic parties in France and Netherlands, since French National Front and Dutch Party for Freedom are strongly against migrants. On the other hand, AfD is willing to enhance mutual collaboration with the British Conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice Party. This initiative clearly demonstrates the effort to unite populist and Eurosceptic parties across Europe by appearing shortly before the elections to the European Parliament.

There is also comparable situation in Austria where appear even more political parties with similar populist policies. Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) whose former chairman was Jörg Haider has become famous for praising Adolf Hitler. This party reached the success in 1999 in national elections. This nationalist party had got into parliament at that time which resulted in sanctions posed by the European Union. FPÖ led currently by Christian Strache reached the Austrian parliament upon the results of 22 % last autumn, however the ruling parties in Vienna have considered FPÖ as unacceptable due to its nationalist and Eurosceptic program¹⁰. Another Eurosceptic party Team Stronach participating in national elections for the first time got almost 6 % and became the fifth largest party in the new Austrian parliament. With its strong populist political agenda Team Stronach suggests that Austria would leave the euro and return to former national currency.

Another visible example is the Czech movement ANO (“Yes”) that was founded in 2012 by entrepreneur of Slovak origin Andrej Babiš. This typical populist party obtained a surprising amount of 18,7 % of votes in 2013 Czech legislation election and entered the national parliament as the second largest party. ANO relies on ideology that Czech Republic should not adopt the Euro and it also opposes any deeper European integration that is visibly counted in the Czech society.

Populism is also very sensible in Dutch politics. The Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid - PVV) is considered constantly as Eurosceptic. PVV openly advocates withdrawal

⁹ Available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-euroskeptic-party-afd-could-unravel-after-election-a-924498.html>

¹⁰ HOKOVSKY, R. - KOPAL, J.: Politics and Policies of Integration in Austria, Hungary, Czechia, Denmark and at the EU Level: League of Human Rights & European Values Think-Thank, Praha, 2013, p. 28 - 43.

of Netherlands from the European Union and his party leader Geert Wilders even ordered the analysis from British institute to remunerate such decision. This extreme Eurosceptic party exists since 2005 and it is still supposed to be the third largest political entity on Dutch political scene with amount of 10 % votes during the last legislation election (2012). Alike good results for PVV are expected also in election to the European parliament, although the party lost several voters in comparison with the previous national election. According to political agenda this party insists in abolishing the European Parliament and restricting on immigrant labour from new EU Member States.

Wilders's party have found ideological supporters and allies in France and UK. From political perspective the French National Front (Front national pour l'unité française - FNUF) belongs equally to extreme right and has a close relationship with PVV. Both of them use populist terminology in order to attract voters. FNUF gained the best results in 2012 legislation election in the whole party's history and it is the third largest force in the French National Assembly. Its stance on the European Union has grown increasingly as nationalist and Eurosceptic one. FNUF is traditionally against the European enlargement, friendly immigration policies and the party leader Marine Le Pen has proposed that France should leave the Euro area and also reintroduce the customs borders within the Schengen zone. Almost the identical issues dominate also in political agenda of the UK Independence Party (UKIP). The party under the leadership of the member of European Parliament Nigel Farage has surprisingly increased the amount of members since 1993 when it was founded in the United Kingdom. UKIP like FNUF attacks the European Union from various perspectives and advocates withdrawing from EU treaties and leaving the EU that has become a very favorite topic among the British citizens in last years. Farage has raised the issue to create a Commonwealth Free Trade Area without participation in EU trade agreements. Though UKIP resulted in 3 % of the vote, the party received the larger support in comparison with electoral results in the 2005 general election. Moreover, UKIP consistently strengthens mainly in the European elections. They got more than 16 % in 2009. Alarming growth of popularity is apparent also in case of the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset, previously known as the True Finns), Danish People's Party, Left Party of Sweden, Law and Justice Party in Poland, etc.

Populist parties appear practically almost in each European country. Very know example is The Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle, M5S) in Italy that launched by popular comedian Beppe Grillo. This populist party is a simple result of economic and social crisis in Southern Europe and is linked to ongoing disillusion of Italians with elitist nature of current democracy. In this case it is particularly evident that economic crisis causes the frustration

that is very sought for Populists. In addition, people are depressed by modern technologies that have been brought by current technological progress in the world. Those technologies, mainly social networking on internet, reduce political life and create ideal space for complainers and political adventurers as this former Italian comedian is. Thus, this party was very successful in recent national election in Italy and similar electoral results are allegedly expected also in election to the European Parliament scheduled for this year.

This political insight may be rather defined as „unrestrained populism“¹¹, once such political theory is not consistently anchored. In some way it is therefore even more perfidious than extreme right-wing populism which is characterised in Europe through neo-Fascist parties as Jobbik in Hungary or Golden Dawn in Greece. From the view of political science Neo-Nazi and xenophobic populism is featured by concrete political strategy, although it is extremely depraved and condemnable. Neo-Nazi and other extreme right politicians still belong to some kind of ideology, because their program is clearly defined and they are foreseeable. That is why we can respond to them in advance. Racism, neo-nazism and xenophobia as extreme forms of populism are apparently a large menace for the European society, however this is a fact that we know. In contrary, unrestrained populism that is currently noticeable in Italy, but also in other European countries including Slovakia, it is hardly possible to estimate behaviour of those political entities. Italian Five Stars Movement or the Slovak party “Commons” do not seem extreme. Therefore, they are used to be underrated which can have very serious consequences. Populist elements are undoubtedly contained also in extreme right-wing parties. This causality is mutual and populism determines the ideology of Ultranationalists and neo-Nazis.

As extremism is dependent on the populist statements¹², populism includes also extremist elements, although not necessarily in the radical form. Populist elements have appeared in the authoritarian and neo-Nazi movements several times. Current Nazis and far-right Extremists use socially sensitive issues in the most extreme way. It involves demagogy, finding of scapegoats and various conspiracy theories. It does not matter which European political system is thought. Basically, there is no significant difference between populism from one side and extremism, even including fascism and neo-nazism, on another hand. Hence, we should not remain indifferent what is happening in Europe now.

¹¹ Available at: <http://www.scotsman.com/news/gerald-warner-conservatives-damned-by-principles-1-2819087>

¹² SWOBODA, H. - WIERSMA, J. M.: Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights. Antilope, Belgium, 2008, p. 157.

The greatest danger for democratic order in Europe seems to be currently in Greece that has been mostly affected by financial crisis. Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή – Chrysi Avgi) entered the national parliament upon the almost 7 % gain in last legislative election. Though this extreme right-wing party exists formally already since November 1993, Golden Dawn has become especially popular in recent years because of persistent social and economic problems in Greece¹³. Its political goals are clearly against basic democratic values. Party's chairperson and founder Nikolaos Michaloliakos was even arrested by police and accused of forming a criminal organisation in consequence of anti-Fascist Pavlos Fyssas's brutal murder. Party members are associated with a deep hate against immigrants, political opponents and also any ethnic minorities. Those themes find a good ground among Greeks who are being frustrated by enormous unemployment and increasing poverty. Several Golden Dawn's favourers also support anti-Semitic views. Common slogans from 2012 parliamentary campaign as "yes, we can rid this country of dirt" or "Greece for Greeks" have sent us a clear message that Europe must take heed of this danger.

Another strong anti-European and ultranationalist movement is Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom or shortly as „Jobbik“) that was founded in the summer 2009. Jobbik is currently the third strongest party in national parliament with almost 17 % support and according to actual public surveys the party is supposed to keep this percentage also in upcoming parliamentary election that will be held in Hungary in April 2014. Jobbik was also quite successful in the European elections in 2009 when gained approximately 15 % of votes and 3 seats in the European Parliament. Like Golden Dawn, Jobbik also established associated organisations and paramilitary forces that are called the Hungarian Guard¹⁴.

This similarity with SS units from Hitler's Nazi regime is more than just bewildering. This populist and extreme right-wing party said is willing and continuously pushes to abolish the Trianon Treaty and Eduard Benes decrees and herewith also current borders in Central Europe that incurred after the First and Second World War. This requirement means to restore initial territorial scope of Hungarian state before 1914. That would obviously mean inter alia cessation of the Slovak Republic. Such political goals were used by Jobbik several times¹⁵,

¹³ Available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Dawn_\(political_party\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Dawn_(political_party))

¹⁴ PETOCZ, K.: National Populism in Slovakia and Slovak-Hungarian relations. Forum Institute for Research of Minorities, Samorin, 2009, p. 199.

¹⁵ BUTORA, M. - GYARFASOVA, O. - MESEZNIKOV, G. - SKLADONY, T.W. - editors: Democracy and Populism in Central Europe: the Visegrad Elections and Their Aftermatch. Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava, 2007, p. 119.

notably during national and European elections as a flashy propaganda. Party representatives consider the reunification of the Hungarian nation as the main political objective that was allegedly unfairly distributed during the twentieth century. Furthermore, party chairperson Gábor Vona said during election campaign in March 2010 that other parliamentary parties will disappear in a few months after Jobbik's entry to the parliament. That is a clear initiative to demolish democratic constituency establishment in Hungary. Jobbik is also characterised by pertinacious antisemitism¹⁶. Member of the European Parliament for this party Krisztina Morvai advised Jews to leave immediately her homeland and she branded Israelis as dirty murders. Jobbik considerably influences the political situation in Slovakia, deteriorates mutual relations between both countries and paradoxically strengthens populist and nationalist movement in Slovakia.

1. 3 Current situation at national level

Populism in Slovakia should be viewed from two options. On the one hand, in the light of ongoing financial crisis in Europe and therewith related social and economic problems Slovaks, on the other hand, also in the context of ethnicity in Slovakia¹⁷ and particularly due to complex Slovak-Hungarian relations that have been pointed out already above. Therefore, it is better to differ between two kinds of populism in Slovakia - national and social or commonly social nationalism and social-national populism¹⁸.

Basically, populism is more or less a feature and working manner of all relevant parties across the political spectrum in Slovakia disregarding whether it relates to the right or the left. Even in Slovakia as in other parts of Europe, elements of populism are not identified only in extreme right-wing parties, but also in rightward and leftward entities which are anchored in traditional European political formations. However, they differ in methods of interpretation and rate of exploitation of populism towards their constituencies. Therefore, it suffices to mention regarding the forthcoming European elections some parties, namely the Slovak National Party (SNS), the movement "Commons" (OĽaNO) and party called "Freedom and Solidarity" (SaS).

Those aforementioned parties focus above all on lower and middle class, maybe except SaS that counts also a plenty of entrepreneurs among the voters. They all soundly criticize

¹⁶ Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisemitism_in_Europe

¹⁷ MESEZNIKOV, G. - GYARFASOVA, O.: National Populism in Slovakia. Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava, 2008, p. 12.

¹⁸ SEBEJ, F.: About Blaze and Nocturnal Butterflies. Kalligram, Bratislava, 1996, p. 114.

decisions of their political opponents and suggest very simple and at the same extremely radical solutions for existing complex issues. They prefer to use very expressive wording and speech and they like being frequently recorded by television and newspapers. Those politicians are fully aware of the importance of media today. Role and position of party leaders in the party hierarchy is typically unshakeable. Ján Slota (SNS), Igor Matovič (OLaNO) and Richard Sulík (SaS) are considered by voters as “saviours of the land” and attract the largest part of party electorate. Though their voters are different from several perspectives, they all tend to social populism and euroscepticism. Moreover, SNS is also regarded as a nationalist entity ideologically closed to national populism.

Attributes of national populism are visible in connection with minorities¹⁹. In particular, Roma people and Hungarians haven been used by Nationalists and Populists in order to improve their own reputation in major society. For instance, some opposition parties proposed in 2000 farmer’s law that would have had roughly penalised robberies of agricultural crops. They wanted even to allow using own guns for protection of personal property. Adoption of such law was reasoned by high criminality rate among Roma people. The Slovak National Party presented recently at its website²⁰ also interview with its former chairperson who said that there should be established new state which would be eligible for Roma people because they can best understand to each other only there.

However, SNS is not at all the only party in Slovakia that have used populist statements towards this ethnic group. Restriction of financial support and social benefits for Roma people was initiated and pushed ahead by representatives of the Slovak Christian Democrats (SDKÚ-DS) as well as Social Democrats (SMER-SD). This issue apparently dominated during recent regional elections in Slovakia and contributed to the success of Marián Kotleba in Banska Bystrica Region. He is a leader of the People’s Party - Our Slovakia (ĽS-NS) that replaced its predecessor “Slovak Commonalty” (Slovenská pospolitost’) which had been officially dissolved due to Fascist and Racist ideology. This party is extremely nationalist and known for its extreme opinions towards the Roma communities and Hungarians living in Slovakia. Though this party had gained just 1,58 % and did not reach the national parliament, Marián Kotleba won the first and consequently second round of regional elections in the Banska Bystrica Region and became new president of one of eight regions in Slovakia. This

¹⁹ MESEZNIKOV, G. - GYARFASOVA, O.: National Populism in Slovakia. Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava, 2008, p. 20.

²⁰ Available at: <http://www.sns.sk/aktuality/jan-slota-s-konkretnymi-navrhmi-na-riesenie-ciganskej-otazky-inspirujeme-nimi-spiaceho-podpredsedu-vlady-chmela-ktory-ma-cigansky-problem-v-naplni-prace/>

party established hereby successfully at regional level and got the access to present itself and its policy also in media that has enormous importance in respect of upcoming European and national elections.

The entire agenda of Kotleba's party is based on revolving the Roma issues which should be resolved drastically by obtaining a total power. There are several dubitable persons and precarious criminals among the ĽS-NS members including drug-users, neo-Nazi store-keepers, organizers of Nazi events and speakers from abroad. ĽS-NS seek to set people against each other, mainly in regions with a large number of the Roma people. Its members systematically seek the social conflict in society and they try to link criminal cases with racist undertone. Minorities should be responsible for all social and economic problems. Hence, there is almost no difference between Kotleba's party and familiar extreme radical movements like Jobbik, German NPD or Golden Dawn.

National populism is also apparent towards Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Moreover, bad-neighbourliness with roots in a long common history should be taken also into consideration. Hungarians were and still have stayed regarded as a traditional enemy of nation among Slovak Radicals and Nationalists who criticise politicians representing this minority in Slovakia for alleged intention to integrate the Southern part of country to Hungary. However, Slovak Hungarians have always declared their loyalty to the Slovak Republic. This negative campaign has even deepened after the adoption of the Act on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries. Hungarian minority was unjustly accused by Slovak Nationalists from collaboration with official authorities in Hungary. Ruling parties on the left and the right wing also followed up this argumentation. They assume that rights of minorities, especially Hungarians in Slovakia, are above any European standards and therefore there is no need to adopt further measures in the field of education or culture²¹.

Populist approach of some Slovak parliamentary parties to Hungarian community haven been also shown in connection with cause Hedviga Malinova when politicians entered into investigation of this serious case and tried to get out popularity in major public. Comparable trend resulted from the Act on double citizenship that was adopted by Hungarian parliament. Politicians representing Slovak majority used this theme for own political purposes by capitalizing popularity among nationally oriented voters²². This situation does not help to

²¹ MESEZNIKOV, G. - GYARFASOVA, O.: National Populism in Slovakia. Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava, 2008, p. 46 - 48.

²² PETOCZ, K.: National Populism in Slovakia and Slovak-Hungarian relations. Forum Institute for Research of Minorities, Samorin, 2009, p. 287.

improve relations between majority and other nationalities in Slovakia and equally between both neighbouring countries.

Populism is undoubtedly linked also to euroscepticism in terms of Slovak political life. Analogously to other European countries, attacking the European Union and blaming Brussels for social and economic troubles has become very popular in Slovakia. In consequence of ongoing financial crisis in Europe and uncertain future of the Euro currency some parties get opposing the European integration and federalisation. Once the Slovak Nationalists are not represented in the parliament anymore, eurosceptic ideology has been taken over by another party Freedom and Solidarity (SaS). This party does not reject the European project as a whole, however it is against any further political integration of EU Member States.

Paradoxically, SaS belongs to liberal political formations and is also a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) that is considered at the European level as the main political force striving for unification of the EU. The party strongly opposes the EU authorities including the European Parliament when denoting them as the bureaucratic machinery. SaS led by Richard Sulik has also opposed the Lisbon Treaty and economic harmonisation in the European Union and was also against the ECB emergency plan for Greece during the debt crisis and Eurozone bailout that thereafter resulted to the fall of Iveta Radicova government in October 2011. Party leader Richard Sulik proposes drawing up the plan to leave Euro and re-establish crown in Slovakia again or at least exclude troubleshooting Mediterranean economies from the Eurozone. Following the ideology of eurosceptic forces he supposes that several common European policies harm the Slovak economy and suggests therefore reversing in the European integration process and handing back to Bratislava substantial powers of financial, fiscal and monetary policies. This rhetoric gets attractive for a quite large group of voters in Slovakia.

Social populism appears in terms of Slovak politics for many years and is a part of official party ideology of all relevant parties, regardless of their political affiliation and nature. There are notoriously known sayings of leading government politicians about the Swiss pensions in Slovakia (Vladimir Meciar), double salaries (Mikulas Dzurinda) or ten thousands of jobs in the country (Robert Fico). Living standard and employment clearly demonstrate how social topics might be in fact diverted to presentation of politicians. Those parties compete to each other who will put forward more innovative and generous social package for citizens regardless of such impact on the state budget and public debt. On the one hand, the politicians know that social policy is one of the main components of economic policy. On the other hand, it is also a very alluring message by communicating with citizens, notably for opposition

politicians who are not responsible for decision-making at government level. However, each form of social policy must or at least should be based on pragmatism that is determined by a fiscal framework of the country. Therefore, various measures of social policy proposed by Slovak right and left wing parties would be considered in the context of pure social populism²³. Recently, Social Democrats enforced in the parliament the withdrawal of 50 % contribution of the individuals in social services facilities that experts consider the populist step. Another remarkable suggestion came up from the conservative SDKU who had restricted the financial aid of the state for marginalized families that was actually targeted to Roma people. It caused consequently plunderers in stores in the Eastern Slovakia.

²³ SEBEJ, F.: About Blaze and Nocturnal Butterflies. Kalligram, Bratislava, 1996, p. 208.

2. Future perspectives of development

2. 1 Future perspectives at the European level

It is hardly possible to predict further progress of populism in Europe as well as in Slovakia. We can just assume upon previous experience and upcoming events that are supposed to shape public opinion at the European and national level. Nevertheless, we can allege that polarization and radicalisation in European society will further deepen and politicians will increasingly use populism in political combat against their opponents. European institutions and pro-European movements loose real popularity in the eyes of citizens, whereas view of political parties on national and European affairs has been gradually changing to become more radical. The most relevant factors are currently global financial crisis and oncoming elections to the European Parliament. We may consider a couple of scenarios that are determined by the ability of European leaders to settle up public debt in Europe and growing unemployment, notably in the age category of youngsters. Authority of the European Union is straight dependant on further development in fiscal policy. Prospective bankruptcy in whichever EU Member States would hit assuredly the entire European area. That would provide populist movement a quite strong reasoning against the European integration.

The worst scenario is based on assumption that radical political change will occur in largest EU economies as Germany, France and partially also Italy. It would mean that Nationalists (FNUF) and Populists (AfD) in those countries receive a significant gain in next legislative period and they could consequently compose the government. These concerns are supported by surprisingly good results of the FNUF led by Marina Le Pen in presidential election in France in 2012. She gained almost each fifth vote. FNUF has kept a significant support in French society in the long term. At the same time, 5 Stars Movement and its leader Beppe Grillo may also enjoy a high popularity rate according to recent public surveys. Their prospective vote gain would weaken not only the position of respective country within the EU framework, but also the EU itself while fighting against the crisis. However, such scenario is not probable, since elections have recently taken place in France and Germany and success of Populists has not been affirmed by electoral results. On another hand, those parties will push forward without any doubt to breaking away from any budget-wise measures by the European Union. Hence, we can say that upcoming EP elections will not be a political struggle between

classic left and right, but the match between those who are willing closer European integration and Europe for people or who wants Europe controlled by Populists. From this perspective the EP elections are undoubtedly viewed as a real menace for democratic European community.

Many observers said that Eurosceptic parties are supposed to get a large number of seats in the EP upon the 2014 election results. Right-wing Extremists could have approximately 90 or even 100 deputies provided that the crisis will escalate yet. That would make them a quite strong political force in the European Parliament. French Eurosceptic FNUP and Geert Wilders may surely count with support of Austrian FPÖ, Swedish Democrats, Flemish Block (VB) and Italian League of the Nord. Those all parties are characterised by an anti-European, nationalist and populist attitude. They also intend to form an independent political formation in the European Parliament.

However, Europhobic parties are not a homogenous group at European level. Neither ideologically, nor formally. Independence Party in UK and Polish conservatives are against French National Front. Marina Le Pen refuses to cooperate with the Greek Golden Dawn as well as Jobbik in Hungary, though they have offered her the cooperation. She stands also divided with her closest partner Geert Wilders due to the gay rights and Israel despite the stance on anti-European and migration policy is almost united. Those ideological variances are evidentially cardinal and have restrained any attempts to shape an effective alliance in the past. Equally, far-left extremists are not supposed to get more than 70 seats. That group includes e.g. the Left (die Linke) in Germany, French Communist Party (PCF) and some other communist and extreme socialist movements in Europe. In each event the total number of anti-European MEPs should not exceed 180 seats.

Eventual success or failure of Eurosceptics depends now mainly on the turnout of voters in the European elections in May. The tendency is crucial in this regard. Average turnout in the whole EU has dropped down from 62 % in 1979 up to 43 % in 2009²⁴. Pools are supposed to expect even lower turnout in the upcoming elections despite the information campaign that has been launched by the European Commission. Previous experience is saying that as the turnout declines, so populism rises consecutively. Practically, it demonstrates the fact that the antipathy towards the European Union and related issues increases. It is also visible in Slovakia where the lowest turnout within all EU Members states happened in the recent EP

²⁴ Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/000cdcd9d4/Turnout-\(1979-2009\).html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/000cdcd9d4/Turnout-(1979-2009).html)

elections. Slovak citizens consider the European Parliament too far from day-to-day sorrows and this institution has not been ingrained in their awareness²⁵.

Another scenario is based on the presumption that the European elections will be won by integrationist and federalist parties. Nowadays, this pro-European approach is mostly represented by the European Liberals (ALDE) and the European Greens/EFA, partially also by the European People's Party and the Socialist Group in the EP (S&D). It would open the doors for deeper integration in Europe and the European Monetary Union might be supplemented also by enlarging fiscal and political union. However, powers of the EU would have to be more democratic and transparent. Confidence of citizens to the European Union could grow under such circumstances. Stronger participation of national parliaments to decision-making process at the European level would be also beneficial.

Clear majority for standard European political entities would ensure stability and sustainable progress of the European Union. Basically, European Liberals, Greens, Socialists and Christian Democrats share and believe in the same values. Europe is and will stay based on solidarity, good neighbourliness, cohesion policy and social justice according to their ideology. These European formations advocate economic growth, creation of new jobs and food self-sufficiency. Fights against terrorism and climate change belong also to their main political goals. All of them seek to refresh European economy and prevent from any future crisis in the continent. In general, they would appraise strong single European voice in global politics. The content of political goals of traditional European parties is in principle similar. These parties just differ in methods, communication tools and form of expression.

2. 2 Future perspectives at national level

In Slovakia, the worst scenario threatens with success of radical far-right People's Party - Our Slovakia (ĽS-NS) that is especially radical in the comparison with other extreme parties in Europe. This party may benefit from the long term aversion of Slovaks towards the Roma people. Upon the recent racist incidents Slovak society will further polarise and radicalise. The Neo-Nazi youngsters attacked students in local pub in Nitra (South-West of Slovakia) and elite police troops entered brutally into Roma settlements in Moldava nad Bodvou (Eastern Slovakia). These events help to visualize ĽS-NS ideology based on an anti-Roma propaganda. Increase of popularity is visible even now, although not dramatically yet. Last

²⁵ LUKACS, J.: Democracy and Populism, Fear and Hate. Kalligram, Bratislava, 2006, p. 168.

public opinion pool has shown that ĽS-NS might reach almost 8 % at national level. Thanks to targeted media interest the party has actually cost-free promotion campaign. As the result of unresolved Roma issue it is obvious that diverse populist trends will experience the increased support in Slovakia.

This tendency will further heighten, with Marian Kotleba or even without him. Basically, this party and its leader represent simply a frustrated and considerable part of population. For those people Marian Kotleba symbolises a persistent effort setting the thing in order that includes stricter sanctions for public nuisance, duty to work for social and other purported benefits. Anyway, this approach to solving Roma issues is apparent in terms of Slovakia at least since 2010 when all parliamentary parties have started to use people's sentiments towards Roma ethnic group in official speech. Hence, we may predict that further restriction of essential social benefits and reinforcement of repressive measures by police will be sooner or later included to official strategies of parties, even those democratic ones, in next elections.

However, this serves advantageously for Marian Kotleba who has not had any chance to practically prove his intention and political program yet. Slovaks do not consider current political elite as successful. Therefore, chance for ĽS-NS to reach the national election are more than presumed as long party chairperson will not make a huge blunder as president of the Banská Bystrica Region. At least one mandate might be expected for ĽS-NS also within the European Parliament election. Finally, growing Kotleba's popularity is also linked to current situation in the Slovak National Party (SNS) which itself is struggling with its own internal problems. New SNS leadership has failed to reach radical voters after the former popular leader Jan Slota resigned. These voters simply intend to shift to ĽS-NS.

Anti-European approach would also manifest ruling coalition where Party of Freedom (SaS) and movement of Commons (OLaNO) dominate. Both parties expressly oppose the stabilizing mechanisms in Europe, common warranty or deepening integration and they will obviously emphasize this stance during the EP elections campaign. They would certainly cease any Slovak payments to common European financial framework after the victory in European and national elections. Their ideology may increasingly develop provided that crisis will deepen. Position of Slovakia would be then weakened within the European Union and endanger also the future existence of Eurozone and Euro. This stance of both aforementioned parties cause that all Slovak opposition parties are currently disunited and that is why is opposition not able to join against social-democratic government in Slovakia.

With this regard the analysts say that the key role will play government policy of Social Democrats (SMER-SD) and current prime minister Robert Fico who has decided to run in

upcoming presidential election that will take place just two and half months prior to European vote. As the only party in government Social Democrats have exclusive responsibility for governance. Party and its leader are challenged by public opinion, because people expect results. If SMER-SD wants to be successful also in further elections, party needs to raise more attractive²⁶, however irrational issues. It will necessarily bring Social Democrats more closely to Populists. Another way are systematic measures in order to sustain social cohesion in Slovak society, as for instance implementation of progressive taxing or reform of social and pension system. Nevertheless, each unpopular decision made by government will logically reflect to decreasing vogue of the government. Robert Fico who is supposed to win presidential election in March and its maternal party do not desire such development. However, he is with Slovak Social Democrats aware of the need to keep the European Union unified and that Slovakia should strongly advocate sustaining euro and the Eurozone unharmed.

²⁶ Available at: <http://hn.hnonline.sk/slovensko-119/fico-arogantny-populista-ci-zastanca-ludu-383384>

3. Political objectives and relative strategies at the European and national level

While considering current situation of populism in its all forms in Europe, one natural question gets raised. How should we face to increasingly strengthening and growing populism in Europe? What means should be used when confronting the Euroscepticism outwards? Should we prioritize a radical manner and accede to prohibition of any extremist and antisocial political movements activities including criminal sanctions against the politicians of far-right and far-left? Or rather prefer milder forms through permanent media criticism and information campaigns focused on explanation of reverse side of this issue? And who should take care of this task at European and national or even regional level? These questions have not been answered yet, once there are consistently different views. European elections and campaign that will forego them is considered as an opportunity for Populists and Eurosceptics across Europe. However, this event might be regarded also as a challenge for pro-European movements and individuals to join closer together and fight for Europe united.

The most effective weapon how to reduce popularity of Eurosceptic politicians is for sure common effort of European leaders for taking off economic growth and creating new jobs. The European Union should be more associated with promoting economic growth than unpopular austerity measures. Furthermore, European leaders including those at national level should declare a clear political message when asking for more integration in Europe, notwithstanding that United States of Europe as proposed by several politicians in the past. It would practically mean to support the idea of the EU with the European Commission as real pan-European government and two chambers representing one European nation (European Parliament) and EU Members States (European Council). Basically, national parliaments and governments would play less political role than at present time because Commission would overrule the executive power at national level and members of European Parliament would be more important than national parliamentarians. Such political goals would be an obvious respond to all critics of the European integration.

Equally important objective of this strategy should be based on historical heritage of the European Union. This community was founded more than 50 years ago for purpose of restoring and keeping the peace in the continent after the worst war conflict in human history. This message should resound especially this year when we all commemorate the centenary of the First World War beginning. People should be aware that euroscepticism, extreme right and

left radicalism and populism are phenomena that may bring Europe back into the war²⁷. It is strongly necessary to emphasize that no another political construction was found better for organising our life and reducing hate than the integrated Europe. Provided that European spirit will disappear in the world, the same will happen also with European values as democracy, solidarity, respect to human rights and peaceful foreign affairs and security policies.

Deeper integration of Europe is often wrongly associated with process of centralisation of Europe what is obviously considered negatively among people. To change the mind of citizens towards the European federalisation and to refute any dogma about centralisation of power in Brussels, pro-European forces have to target the campaign before the EP elections towards the masses of people explaining the basic difference between unification in Europe and centralisation. Once the citizens understand that Europe may effectively run as a federation, each European state and European citizen will stay unique.

Therefore, the main political goal for democratic political parties and movements at European and national level should be intensive information and campaign in order to mobilize citizens to give the vote in the European elections in Mai 2014. Though the European Parliament is democratically elected by people, when turnout comes only to sheer 20 %, the legitimacy of such institution is questionable²⁸. Voters need to be faced with question “do-or-die” It does not suffice to ask citizens whether we want to do more or less. Whether we still want Europe or not. I suppose that usual education and intellectual explanation of negative impacts will not suffice already at this stage. The only way how to eliminate influence of aggressive conduct is to patently build up society where the people will not feel threatened and unimportant.

In each case, nobody should stay unconcerned towards current situation in Europe. It is said that the slower done, the worse will happen. Several political measures at the European and national level might be taken into consideration when looking for appropriate solutions in the fight against populism and extremism. For instance, specialised building-up of local authorities focused on disclosure of radicalisation attributes would be surely useful. Enhancement of resocialisation programmes for members of extreme groups would help those people to leave radicalism. In this regard it is highly necessary to share ideas between professionals from politics, academic sphere and representatives of local authorities that

²⁷ MUDDE, C. - KALTWASSER, CH. R.: Populism in Europe and the Americas, Threat or Corrective fo Democracy? Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012, p. 215.

²⁸ SWOBODA, H. - WIERSMA, J. M.: Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights. Antilope, Belgium, 2008, p. 79.

would increase common effort in fighting against extremism. Recommendations of all concerned individuals might provide important tools and concrete suggestions for decision-makers and politicians at the European as well as national level in fighting against populism and extremism.

The best eligibility in solving problems relating to populism is considered for people who have a direct contact with marginalised social groups and vulnerable individuals. There are several, even thousands of experts, researchers and teachers aiming at identifying and helping individuals who are most prone to radicalise and do wrong acts. These skilled professionals have not been involved yet in creation of anti-extremist policies and strategies on the combat against populism in Europe. Moreover, social media and modern communication tools should be used on a more frequent basis²⁹. Testimony of victims of attacks by Extremists, information on prevention or legislative should circulate through internet and social networks. Civilised society must react adequately by means of internet that has become decisive communication channel in meantime. In this regard Extremists are advanced with their aggressive campaign on Facebook, Twitter and other social media. Furthermore, role of religious communities should not be left out of our consideration. They have also “reach” experience with this issue. But not least, power of film industry is crucial as well. Movies and TV series focused on this topic may brisk up all-society discussion when targeting to various consequences.

Common European effort should involve also all-embracing aid including moral support for victims of extremist assaults. We should enable them to publicly recount own stories that demonstrate real face of this extreme and antihuman ideology. Reporting about previous experience with Extremists would be very useful instrument in terms of prevention. Moreover, we should involve former activists and members of populist movements and radical formations in down-keeping their ideology. Those people can bring us a worth testimony in order to get a better view about the structure, political goals, financing and target marketing. Populist tendencies including more radical and extreme forms are possible to damp at the level which is the closest to the most inclined people from marginalised communities.

²⁹ LUKACS, J.: Democracy and Populism, Fear and Hate. Kalligram, Bratislava, 2006, p. 161.

Conclusion

Populism and in particular its extreme forms as radicalism, euro-scepticism and even terrorism, are key challenges for the future integrity and existence of the EU. Awareness of all Europeans must therefore focus now on growing demagogic and populist propaganda across whole Europe. It is evident that political map of Europe has become more extreme in recent years and European society has got radicalised under the pressure of ongoing straits in some European economies and uncertainty of the Euro currency. This reality shapes basement for ideologically motivated violence in the European society. Furthermore, poverty and inequitable proportion of wealth occur currently in several European regions. People get frustrated by politicians who broke away from them a long time ago.

Phenomenon of populism has resulted from several factors that are similar in any European country including Slovakia. Firstly, standard political parties failed in solving social issues and citizens cease therefore to trust them. They view with a big hope towards non-standard parties, regardless of the fact that might be destructive for state and society. Secondly, media failed as well. They have just scared people, but they did not try to disclose its clear attitude and point of ideology. Thirdly, people have started to relativize core European values in day-to-day life. Freedoms and rights are supposed to be obvious and sometimes even obstacle for “public interest”.

Clear stance of highest political representatives and leaders is indispensable if we really want to stop increasing influence of Extremists and Populists in national parliaments. Social problems will not be resolved so easily, but it does not mean that we should not consider them. Countries where the constructive politicians “woke up” too late might be perhaps a good reminder. Though we have almost forgotten war in the former Yugoslavia, it is not a very long time ago. We may see comparable events in Ukraine, Bulgaria and Greece even today. Who will be the next one?

On another hand, growing populism and extremism is also a challenge for us. Each European citizen should consider this problem. Everybody should venture on kicking against populism and protect our common European values. At least for people that want to live in democratic, prosperous and peaceful Europe.

I am very glad that I could pursue this path on such important topic as populism apparently is. Knowledge that I have gained while writing this research, I would like to use further in my professional career, once I am supposed to dedicate to this topic for a long term period.

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