

The Risks of growing Populism and the European elections:

Populism in Spain: different from the rest of Europe, but growing anyway

Author: Oier Lobera Ezenarro

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Oier Lobera Ezenarro¹

Populism is certainly growing in the European Union, and some populist parties are even working together in the eve of the European elections in order to become stronger in the European Parliament. In the case of Spain, however, there are no parties that match with the image there is about populism in the European context, as European populist parties are supposed to be xenophobic and anti-European. In the Spanish case there are new parties that have been accused of being populist, UPyD being the most successful new party that has received this criticism. In this way, this paper aims to understand if UPyD is a populist party by analysing the political campaign and communication strategy followed by the party. Then, a comparison between UPyD and FN and PVV will be drawn in order to understand the main differences between these parties, as well as the direction that these parties may follow in the future and the level of success they may have.

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¹ Master’s student in Eurocultura at University of Deusto and University of Strasbourg; Trainee at the Diocesan Museum in Bilbao
E-mail: oierle@hotmail.com

Introduction

Europe is experiencing the rise of populism in many countries. Populist parties, which swear to give the power back to the “people” once they reach the government, use nowadays in Europe racist and anti-Immigration discourse in order to attract a large segment of the European citizenship unhappy with their hard economic situation. It seems that we have not learnt from our history, from the Spanish Inquisition or the holocaust, when there are still so many people who defend racist ideologies exposed by populist politicians. Unfortunately, it seems it is always easier to blame a minority group for the economic malaise of a country, although they are not the main reason for it.

The Spanish political system after Franco’s dictatorship was erected around two main parties, PP (Partido Popular/ People’s Party) and PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español/ Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party), which would represent the two main Spanish political ideologies, the conservative and the socialist. After Franco’s dictatorship UCD² (Unión de Centro Democrático/ Union of Democratic Centre) would govern the country, but only until 1982, being PP and PSOE the only parties that have governed in Spain since then. There would also be other parties, but they would not have a great impact at national level, being the only parties with any relevance apart from these two the nationalist parties, and only in their respective regions. However, PP and PSOE have demonstrated to be corrupt and not very capable to cope with the harsh economic situation that Spain is facing at the moment, reason why an important number of Spaniards are now considering voting to different parties rather than to the two main traditional ones.

As a result of the economic malaise of the country, the corruption of the two main parties and the discontent of the Spanish citizenship with the politicians that aim to represent them, new parties have seen their opportunity to be created in the Spanish political sphere. The appearance of new parties can have a very positive impact for the Spanish political system, as it offers more variety to the citizens to choose among parties, and politicians may want to try harder to ameliorate the economic situation of the country, as they see that the bipartisan system in danger, the system that has ensured the exclusive access to the Spanish government to PP and PSOE since 1982.

² UCD was a political party from the centre-right that was erected thanks to the coalition of different Spanish parties in 1977. UCD, under the leadership of Adolfo Suárez (the first Spanish Prime Minister after Franco’s death), would undertake the first necessary steps to build a democracy in Spain after the dictatorship.

Unfortunately, new political parties can use populist tools in order to attract voters and gain presence in the political sphere. They may use sentimentalist language that appeals to the feelings of the citizens, instrument that makes the citizens more vulnerable and manipulative. This discourse could include promises of giving the power back to the citizenship; condemnation of the traditional parties, blaming them for the misfortunes of the citizenship; attack to the European Union, regarded as another political elite responsible of the difficulties that Europeans are living; and blaming a segment of the people living in the country, which could be regarded as a threat to the “good working people”, such as the immigrants.

UPyD (Unión, Progreso y Democracia/ Union, Progress and Democracy) is a political party that has been very successful fighting against the Spanish bipartisanship. Since its creation in 2007, it has gained more and more voters each time they run for elections. However, although this party does not match with the general image there is about populism in Europe, criticisms from the right³ and from the left⁴ make us doubt whether it is populist or not.

Considering the relevance that populism is gaining in Europe and the criticisms done against UPyD of being a populist party, this paper aims to understand whether UPyD could be considered populist or not, and in case it could be considered populist, if this populism would be against the main principles of the European Union or if it could be harmful for the Spanish society once they would reach the government. Therefore, we will first establish what we understand by populism and we will try to figure out if UPyD has the characteristics that populist parties are supposed to have. Therefore, electoral programmes of UPyD, some articles written by components of the party and videos of politicians of the party are going to be analysed in order to observe if their discourse uses populism to appeal to the feelings of the citizens and attract voters, understanding this way the current relevance of populism in Spain. Finally, we will try to understand which may be the future developments that populism will follow in Spain and at European level, as well as the impact they will have in the European society and the relevance in the political sphere.

³ Alberto Tomé, “UPyD o el partido del Populismo y la Demagogia al descubierto”, Alberto Tomé Política y deporte, July 20, 2012, <http://albertotome.com/2012/07/20/upyd-o-el-partido-del-populismo-y-la-demagogia-al-descubierto/>.

⁴ “Unión, Progreso y Demagogia”, Al fondo a la izquierda, December 16, 2011, <http://al-fondo-alaizquierda.blogspot.com.es/2011/12/union-populismo-y-demagogia.html>.

What is populism?

Populism is definitely not an easy word to define. It is used to describe politicians, political movements and political parties of different natures, but which are supposed to share some common features. However, the “term is often used in loose, inconsistent and undefined ways to denote appeals to ‘the people’, ‘demagoguery’ and ‘catch-all’ politics or as a receptacle for new types of parties whose classification we are unsure of”⁵. Therefore, in order to avoid any kind of ambiguities, what is understood by populism in this essay needs to be explained.

Populism has been defined in many different ways, depending on the framework of the study or the academic background of the scholar who develops the idea. Many studies on populism have been focused on the populism of the second half of the XXth century in Latin America, such as Peronism. However, Peronism is very different from the populism that is being developed nowadays in Europe, having Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen as its most remarkable delegates. It is crucial, nevertheless, to note that they have some common features which make it possible to identify Peronism and the new European populist parties as populists. Therefore, before starting to discuss whether UPyD is a populist party or not, it is necessary to identify the characteristics populist parties and politicians are supposed to have.

Following the definition used by Albertazzi and McDonnell, populism is:

*An ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice.*⁶

This same idea is shared by other scholars, such as Francisco Panizza⁷. In his view, “populists are well aware that politics always consists of the creation of an ‘Us’ versus a ‘Them’”⁸. Although phrased differently, these scholars refer to the same idea. Populist parties appear when a large part of the citizenship feels disappointed with the status quo of their country. Generally, they appear in moments of economic crisis, when already established parties start to lose their credibility in their ability to rule the country and the political malaise starts to be more visible than ever before. These traditional parties represent

⁵ Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2008), 2.

⁶ Albertazzi, *Twenty-First Century Populism*, 3.

⁷ Francisco Panizza, ed., *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (Verso: London, 2005).

⁸ Idem, 5-6.

the political elite for the populists. In a period of crisis, when the common citizen is the one who suffers the most, populists can easily blame the established parties for not paying attention to the needs of “the people”. Le Pen and Wilders have gone further, not only blaming the political parties of their own countries, but also blaming the EU, the big elitist “other” that has taken the power from the “people” of their own country, to whom it should be given back by the populist party.⁹

One way of blaming the traditional parties is claiming that they are all corrupt and that the populist party is the only clean one. This is a strategy that populist parties tend to follow during their whole campaign. Taking into account that new parties that have not been successful to reach the government yet have not had the possibility to be as corrupt as those which have, it is easier for the new party to claim that they are the only non-corrupt party running for the elections. Unfortunately, it is true that many traditional parties have been linked to corruption, showing the weaknesses of the current democracy the fact that populist parties can use this card to discredit traditional parties in so many countries.

This “otherification” is not only done in an upward direction, blaming the political elites, but also in a downward direction. These “dangerous others”¹⁰, as described by Albertazzi and McDonnell, deprive the “good people” from their rights and well-being. They are often identified as immigrants, who obtain social welfare in dispense of the good working men and come to the host country in order to steal jobs from the natives of the country.

The creation of an “other” is an instrument used by all populist parties, so we need to be able to find this “other” in order to claim that a party is populist. However, populists share other common features that need to be identified if we want to properly understand what populism is. One of these common features is the appeal to the already mentioned “people”¹¹. These “people” represent the good working citizens, whose position is harmed by the incapability and corruption of the government elites, and the threat of the “ dangerous other”, who appropriates public money thanks to the “unfair” redistribution system of the status quo and suppose a danger for the security of the “good people” because they increase criminalization¹². This last blame to the other is made especially when the other is identified

⁹ Albertazzi, *Twenty-First Century Populism*, 4-5.

¹⁰ Albertazzi, *Twenty-First Century Populism*, 3.

¹¹ Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, 5.

¹² Hajo G. Boomgaarden and Rens Vliegthart, “Explaining the rise of anti-immigrant parties: The role of news media content”, *Electoral Studies* 26 (Elsevier, 2007), <http://dare.ubvu.vu.nl/bitstream/handle/1871/39494/202708.pdf?sequence=1>, 413.

as a poor immigrant, who travels to richer countries in order to find a better living, a very common experience all over Europe and especially in the West. In this way, the populist leader appears like the representative of the good “people”, as the defender of their rights, and claims to be the solution of the decadence of the country because of the corruption of the government and the threat of the other.

The leader of a populist party is an emblematic figure that is always present in the image of its party or movement, even after his or her death. The best example would be Peronism, which survived the death of its creator Juan Domingo Perón. His successor would be a person very close to him: his widow. Who could be a better substitute of a populist leader rather than his widowed wife? Better maybe not, but a daughter could also perfectly take the place of a retired populist politician. Marine Le Pen took the place of his father as the leader of the Front National in 2011. The figure of the leader is so important for a populist party that the person substituting him or her needs to be a very close person of the creator of the party. Thus, many populist parties have been identified as “personal parties” because of the great importance of the leader. Knowing this, it is necessary to recognize the characteristics that populist leaders share.

The leader tries to underline his or her “commonness” in order to make himself or herself seem more approachable to the “people”. Bucaram, former president of Ecuador, would narrate about his humble social origins in order to show he was part of the “people”. However, he would also underline the fact that his social origins did not stop him from becoming rich and powerful, despite the opposition of the status quo¹³. In this way, the populist leader represents himself as part of the “people”, but at the same time better than this “people” he or she represents¹⁴, capable of returning them the political power under his or her leadership.

Last but not least, the language and symbolism used by the populist politicians is another characteristic of populism. The language used tends to be more direct than the one used by traditional politicians¹⁵. In this way, they manage to approach the common citizens in a more efficient way, making it easier to claim they represent the “good common people”, showing they are part of the group. Moreover, they tend to be more passionate than mainstream

¹³ Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, 22.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Albertazzi, *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 7.

politicians, “using sentimentalism in order to manipulate the crowds”/”que manipula a las masas, mediante el use del sentimentalism”¹⁶.

As it has already been mentioned, many populist parties could also be named “personal parties”. The most remarkable example would be *Forza Italia*, personal party led by Silvio Berlusconi since 1994¹⁷, a party that has always been linked to its leader, making it unthinkable to talk about the party without referring to the leader himself. An “ideal” populist party would also be a personal party. However, there are parties that having populist characteristics and charismatic leaders, their existence is not necessarily linked to one particular politician, which could be the case of SVP/UDC (Schweizerische Volkspartei/ Union Démocratique du Centre/Swiss People’s Party). The party shares crucial characteristics with populism (such as the criticism against the elite and the condemnation of immigration) and it does have strong and charismatic leaders, which is the case of Christoph Blocher¹⁸, who “gained a great reputation within its ranks as leader of the radicalization process.”¹⁹ However, the party’s existence was not linked to this person in particular, and he remained as just one of the different leaders of the party. Thus, a personal party would be a populist party that is so strongly linked to its leader that the sole existence of the party would be unconceivable without the leader or a very close substitute (remember the case of Marine Le Pen or Eva Perón). However, although not all populist parties can be identified as personal parties, the politicians of populist parties need to have the other characteristics of populism, such as the use of sentimentalism in their speech or the connection with the people they represent.

UPyD

The leader: Rosa Díez

A populist party is always built around a charismatic leader, the greatest symbol of the party. In the case of UPyD the name of this leader is Rosa Díez. In order to understand the position of her party, it is very important to know about the most important moments of her political trajectory before the creation of UPyD.

¹⁶ Sergio Salvador Aguirre Sánchez, “Algunas notas sobre el populismo”, *Entorno Político*, 2005, <http://www.aguirre-consultores.com.mx/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Algunas-notas-sobre-el-populismoEntornoFebrero20061.pdf>, 24.

¹⁷ Albertazzi, *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 53.

¹⁸ Albertazzi, *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 106.

¹⁹ Idem.

Political trajectory before the creation of UPyD

Rosa Díez, born in 1952 in Güeñes, in the Basque Country, started flirting with politics in her mid-twenties, joining the labour union UGT in 1976 and the socialist party PSOE in 1977. Since then, she would undertake different political positions as member of the socialist party, such as Counsellor of Trade and Tourism in the Basque Government and Parliamentary of the EU. Because of her antinationalist attitude, some members of her party wanted to distance her from having political positions in Spain, as the PSOE aims to act like a unifying party between nationalists and non-nationalists in the Basque Country, reason why she was sent to Brussels as Euro-parliamentary.²⁰ In Spain, it is quite a common procedure to send politicians who have earned enemies in their party or whose statements do not match with the interests of the party to send them to Brussels.

Be it because she found herself discriminated in her own party or because she realized that PSOE did not respond to her political ideology any more, she decided to create her own party, UPyD (Unión, Progreso y Democracia/ Union, Progress and Democracy) in September 2007, the eve of the economic crisis, the perfect moment for the creation of a new political party.

A charismatic leader

The populist leader is recognizable thanks to certain characteristics: the identification of the leader as the main symbol of the party, the connection with the “people”, the direct language used to communicate with this “people”, and the use of sensitive statements that appeal to the feelings of the citizens.

In order to understand the level of popularity of Spanish politicians and parties, the CIS (Centro de Investigación Sociológica/ Centre of Sociological Research) realizes some questionnaires to randomly chosen people. Among other aspects, they ask Spanish citizens about their personal opinion on certain political parties or politicians. In this way, in the last research undertaken in October 2013, Rosa Díez scored the highest grade on the question about the value the respondents gave to each politician, scoring 4.28/10²¹. It may not seem a very high score, but it is still the highest grade that any politician got, especially in comparison with the leaders of the two main Spanish parties, PSOE and PP, scoring 3.13

²⁰ “Rosa Díez”, Buscabiografías, <http://www.buscabiografias.com/bios/biografia/verDetalle/9747/Rosa%20Diez>.

²¹ CIS, *Barómetro de octubre. Distribuciones marginales*, nº 3 001, http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/3000_3019/3001/Es3001.pdf, 11.

and 2.42 respectively²². These in average low grades demonstrate how discontent the Spanish citizenship is with the politicians that are representing them.

However, this same grade of popularity is not met by the political party itself, as when the interviewed people were asked to which party they would vote if there were elections the following day, only 4.8% replied they would vote for UPyD, while the 11.4% said they would vote for PP and 13% for PSOE. A similar result was obtained when the participants were asked about the party that they thought was closer to their ideologies²³. To this question, 14.6% replied that they preferred the ideology of the PP and 19% the ideology of the PSOE, while only 4.7% said that they considered their ideology was the closest to the one of UPyD²⁴.

These results show how dependent the party is on its leader, and that it would not have many chances to survive without her. The case of the two main parties is totally contrary, as although their politicians' popularity level is very low, most of the Spanish citizens prefer to vote for the "old parties" rather than for UPyD.

In order to observe whether Rosa Díez identifies herself with the "people", it is suitable to analyse some of her interviews and speeches. Esteban Martín, freelance journalist, interviewed Díez in her own office, and he described her way of approaching him as one of "the mother of a friend"/ "la madre de un amigo"²⁵ because of the direct and approachable way in which she treated him. In a speech she gave about the Basque Economic Agreement, which she criticizes, she claimed that she should pay as many taxes as the rest of the Spanish citizens, that she should not be privileged because of being Basque, as we are all equal.²⁶ The aspect of UPyD's attack to nationalism and the privileges of certain Spanish autonomous communities will be analysed later in this paper. However, this speech also shows her identification with the "people", with the Spanish citizenship, as she portrays herself as part of the whole group, not wanting to be different from them. These examples, together with the clear and always comprehensible language that she uses demonstrate how she establishes herself as part of the "people" that she wants to represent in the government.

²² Idem.

²³ CIS, *Barómetro de octubre. Distribuciones marginales*, 13.

²⁴ CIS, *Barómetro de octubre. Distribuciones marginales*, 14.

²⁵ Esteban Martín, "Rosa Díez: 'La sociedad tiene un papel de control sobre los partidos políticos'", July 2011, <http://www.blogsdepolitica.com/entrevista-a-rosa-diez/>.

²⁶ "Rosa Díez habla claro sobre los privilegios de Navarra y País Vasco", Youtube, February 9, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJDayJ_oudc.

Moreover, the direct and often harsh language used by her and other representatives of her political party is very clear both in written documents and speeches. However, this language is not used all the time; it is very carefully chosen when it has to be utilised, especially in written documents. While in official documents the language generally used could be described as neutral, in polemic aspects they decide to use a more direct language. For instance, in the electoral programme of the general elections of 2008, it can be observed that in relation to teaching religion in public schools, they literally say that:

It is illogic (...) to pay a teacher to explain the children of Muslims that the woman is inferior. It is absurd (...) to pay a teacher to explain children of Jehova's Witnesses that the donation of organs is immoral. It is crazy to (...) pay a teacher to teach Catholic children that homosexuality is a defect.

Es ilógico (...) pagar a un profesor para que explique a los hijos de los musulmanes que la mujer es inferior. Es absurdo (...) pagar a un profesor para que explique a los hijos de testigos de Jehová que las donaciones de órganos son inmorales. Es disparatado (...) pagar a un profesor para que explique a los hijos de los católicos que la homosexualidad es una tara.²⁷

As the UPyD claims to be a laic party, the fact that they defend that public schools should not have as part of their compulsory curricula the subject of religion is completely comprehensible. However, the language used is very harsh and direct comparing to the one used in other articles of the electoral programme which are not so sensitive for the public opinion. As it is a topic that deeply touches the feelings of the citizens, like abortion could be, the language used is harsher than in other issues in spite of being written documents and not speeches. Example of this harshness and directness in written documents on the issue of abortion can be found in the text written by Antonio Lozano Burgos, Local Coordinator of UPyD in Toledo:

*What has been imposed to us by the government in collaboration with the religious hierarchies, more than a law is a **Manifest of the Inquisition** so unfair and unacceptable as if it was imposed a decree that obliged mothers who are going to give birth to children with the Down syndrome to abort.*

²⁷ UPyD, *Programa electoral. Elecciones generales* (Consejo Político de UPyD: Madrid, 2008), <http://www.upyd.es/fckupload/file/Programa%20electoral%202008/Programa%20Electoral%202008.pdf>, 52.

*Lo que nos ha colocado hace unos días el Gobierno en connivencia con las jerarquías religiosas, más que una Ley es un **Manifiesto de la Santa Inquisición** Tan injusta e inaceptable como si se regula por decreto la obligación de practicar aborto en todos los casos de Síndrome de Down.*²⁸

A large part of the Spanish citizenship, most of the political parties and even some politicians from PP do not agree with the new law imposed by the party in the government, the PP, and UPyD demonstrates its disagreement as many others do. However, this sentence perfectly exemplifies the use of direct and harsh language that a populist politician would follow, because not only does he condemn the new law, but he also compares it with the Spanish Inquisition, one of the darkest periods of the Spanish history, touching the feelings of the Spanish citizens. This direct language is not only visible in documents, but also in speeches of Rosa Díez and other members of her party. In the parliament, Rosa Díez does not doubt to call the Spanish president corrupt or to tell him to leave office directly²⁹. Her use of sensitive issues is also very smart, because she knows how to use them and in which contexts. In the interview done by the freelance journalist Esteban Martín she was asked to tell him which the hardest moments of her past were. Rosa Díez replied to this question by claiming that the hardest moments of her life were when ETA murdered some of her acquaintances.³⁰

I do not want to claim that those times were not hard for Rosa Díez and the rest of the Spanish and Basque society, since they really were. However, it cannot be forgotten that condemnation of terrorism and hostility to ETA is a crucial aspect of UPyD's political campaign, a characteristic that makes the party more appealing for a big part of the Spanish citizenship. In this way, answering that way to the question, Rosa Díez gave an emotional response that could also touch the feelings of many Spaniards.

Hence, it can be argued that Rosa Díez, as well as other members of the UPyD, shares some characteristics with populism, namely the crucial presence of the leader for the existence of

²⁸ Antonio Lozano Burgos, "El aborto debe ser regulado por una Ley basada en la Libertad y al servicio de todos los ciudadanos", UPyD, December 28, 2013, http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/noticias/108/108061-El_aborto_debe_estar_regulado_por_una_Ley_basada_en_la_Libertad_y_al_servicio_de_todos_los_ciudadanos.

²⁹ "Rosa Díez UPyD: 'Sr. Rajoy, tenga un gesto de patriotismo y dimita'", Youtube, August 1, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5I82KVXH0>.

³⁰ Martín, "Rosa Díez: 'La sociedad tiene un papel de control sobre los partidos políticos'".

the party, the connection with “the people”, and the use of a very direct and sometimes harsh language often accompanied with sentimentalisms.

The appearance of UPyD and the economic crisis

The political party UPyD was founded in 2007, before the severe economic crisis hit Spain. They defended the need of the creation of a new political party that did not represent itself as a left wing or a right wing party. The party wanted to unify all the Spanish citizens, fight for the progress of Spain and advocate for the rights of all the citizenship, focusing in the need to abolish any regional rights that would treat Spaniards differently³¹. It aimed to catch as many voters as possible, both from the right and from the left.

Soon after its creation, the economic crisis severely hit Spain, dramatically increasing the unemployment level of the country. Under these circumstances, the traditional political parties and their actions were criticized by contrary politicians, journalists and other members of the Spanish society more than ever before. The UPyD, party that has not had the chance to govern yet because of its youth, strengthened its criticisms towards the traditional parties, criticisms that in most of the cases cannot be described as ill-founded. Consequently, these criticisms became a core aspect of its political campaign.

As soon as one enters the website of the political party, we can see the latest news and videos the party wants to show to the visitors of the website in the middle of it. It is not a coincidence that the editorial visible is titled “The Spanish Reality According to Rajoy” / “La realidad de España según Rajoy”³², editorial that strongly criticizes Rajoy’s position that the economic situation of Spain is ameliorating. This example demonstrates how necessary it is for UPyD discrediting the party in the government. Moreover, between the news that are also available in the homepage there is one titled “Rosa Díez rejects the aim of psoe of ‘satisfying’ nationalism for being ‘suicidal’”/ “Rosa Díez rechaza por ‘suicida’ la pretensión del psoe de ‘contentar’ al nacionalismo”³³. In these two examples, three of UPyD’s main political enemies are presented: PP, PSOE and nationalism.

However, not only the economic crisis has acted in favour of the rise of UPyD. Undoubtedly, the cases of corruption have also contributed in the discrediting process of PP and PSOE. The Bárcenas case, which has recently been discovered, showed how

³¹ UPyD, *Manifiesto Fundacional*, http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/secciones/366/Manifiesto_fundacional.

³² “UPyD Website”, accessed January 15 2014, <http://www.upyd.es/>.

³³ Idem.

politicians from the PP and construction companies linked to them received large amounts of money that were not declared in the Treasury³⁴. The PSOE has also proved to be a corrupt party, mainly in Andalucía, where 171 socialist mayors have been accused of being corrupt³⁵. Thus, the UPyD shows itself as the only non-corrupt political party in Spain, claiming that the rest of the parties mock the democratic system by sharing the pieces of the cake between themselves, like Gorka Maneiro (representative of UPyD in the Basque Government) argued in the Basque Government, by claiming that the PP and PSOE approved the proposition of the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco/ Basque Nationalist Party) so they could share the benefits of the budget between the different old parties³⁶.

The tendency to consider itself as the only “clean” party is a strategy that populist parties use to discredit the political elites or “old parties” as UPyD calls them. This criticism becomes more legitimate when there is an economic crisis in the country and the political malaise becomes more visible. The citizens’ discontent with their personal economic situation and with corruption cases, makes them look for other possibilities that promise a better future and appear to be less corrupt than the traditional parties.

Representation of the “people” and condemnation of the “other”

Populist parties represent themselves as the advocates of the “people”. The UPyD also envisages itself this way, but generally uses a different term rather than people. Their favourite word to design the group they aim to defend is “citizenship”. Thus, they claim that “the political power has to be given back to the citizenship”/”se trata de devolver la política a la ciudadanía”³⁷. This is the word they generally use in order to describe to whom they want to give the power back. The UPyD claims to be a progressist party, so it is very understandable that they use the word citizenship, a word that aims to include all the people living in Spain, no matter their origin or religion. However, they also use the term “Spanish

³⁴ Fernando J. Pérez, “El juez Ruz corrobora que el PP tuvo una cuenta b “continua en el tiempo”, *El País*, November 22, 2013, http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/11/22/actualidad/1385125293_612649.html.

³⁵ “El mapa de corrupción de Andalucía salpica 171 alcaldes y exalcaldes socialistas”, *ABC Andalucía*, November 12, 2013, <http://www.abcdesevilla.es/andalucia/20131111/sevi-mapa-corrupcion-andalucia-tiene-201311111308.html>.

³⁶ “Gorka Maneiro, UPyD, a PP y PSE: ‘Ustedes se han convertido en las comparsas del PNV’”, Youtube, December 20 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G10Aw6jx13k>.

³⁷ UPyD, *Programa Electoral 2008*, 4.

people”/”el pueblo español”³⁸ in their discourse, a more passionate and traditionally populist word.

The fact that UPyD is not a racist party makes it problematic to describe it as populist, as nowadays, and especially in the European context, racism and mainly anti-Islamism are considered crucial characteristics of populism, together with the self-identification of the party as enemy of the European Union³⁹. None of these requirements are met by UPyD. However, including these characteristics within the general definition of populism is quite a recent phenomenon. What is a characteristic that populist parties are supposed to share is having an enemy not only in the established political parties, but also within the society in which they are living. Le Pen and Wilders, among other European populist politicians, identify as the “other” the Muslim immigrants, despite they often claim not to act against Muslim people, but against Islam itself in the case of Wilders⁴⁰ or against the Islamisation of France in the case of Le Pen⁴¹.

On the contrary, UPyD invites immigrants to Spain, as they bring economic benefits to the Spanish economy. However, they have also found their “other” against whom it is necessary to combat: the nationalists. One of the main aspects connected to nationalism that UPyD criticizes is the existence of the Basque Economic Agreement and the Navarre Economic Agreement, thanks to which the Basque Country and Navarre enjoy more liberty in the establishment of their tax system. According to UPyD and their leader Rosa Díez, this right endangers the equality of all the Spanish citizens, as when some regions enjoy a right that others do not have, it stops to be a right to become a privilege⁴².

Not only do they criticize the economic rights of the Basque Country and Navarre, but also the linguistic policies developed in the Autonomous Communities where they have two official languages, mainly in Cataluña and the in Basque Country. In both regions, education policies are aiming to increase the use of the regional languages both at school and

³⁸ UPyD, *Programa Electoral 2008*, 9.

³⁹ “Europe’s Tea Parties”, *The Economist*, January 4th 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21592610-insurgent-parties-are-likely-do-better-2014-any-time-second-world>.

⁴⁰ Geert Wilders, “Speech Geert Bilders Berlijn (Engels)”, Partij voor de Vrijheid, <http://www.pvv.nl/index.php/component/content/article/36-geert-wilders/3586-speech-geert-wilders-berlijn.html>.

⁴¹ Russel Shorto, “Marine Le Pen, France’s (Kinder, Gentler) Extremist”, *New York Times*, April 26, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/magazine/mag-01LePen-t.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

⁴² “Entrevistas digitales: Rosa Díez”, *El País*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.elpais.com/edigitales/entrevista.html?encuentro=9820>.

university levels in order to improve the level of Catalan and Euskera among their citizens. Catalan and Basque were severely attacked during Franco's dictatorship, and therefore, a strong promotion of these languages is necessary for them not to disappear, especially in the Basque Country, where the number of the people who spoke the language had been diminishing not only during Franco's regime, but in the last centuries.

Focusing in the Basque case, the knowledge of Euskera⁴³ is regarded as necessary to be able to undertake many positions of the public sector, mainly public-facing jobs, promoting this way the language and giving the people the opportunity to interact in Basque in the public sector if they wish to do so. This policy has been criticized for being discriminatory against people who do not speak the language or that do not have the certificate that proves they have the sufficient Basque level (EGA: Certificate of Sufficiency in Basque). This policy is heavily criticized by Rosa Díez and Gorka Maneiro especially, being from the Basque Country both of them. Thus, Rosa Díez criticizes the fact that having the EGA is compulsory in order to be able to work in the public health-care of the Basque Country⁴⁴, while Gorka Maneiro claims that some people are not selected to undertake a public position because of not knowing Euskera, while (according to him) the use of the language is not necessary to fulfil their task efficiently⁴⁵.

Criticism is also done in the field of education, as the possibilities to study in Spanish are disappearing in these regions, development that UPyD considers that does not respect the rights of all the citizens. They want a public education system that respects the equality of linguistic rights⁴⁶ for both Basque or Catalan and Spanish speakers. The case of the Basque Country is more controversial than the case of Cataluña, because the amount of people who speak Basque is much smaller than those who speak Catalan. In the Basque Country there is

⁴³ Euskera or Basque is a non-Indo-European language that has been spoken by the natives of the Basque Autonomous Community, Navarre and the three historic provinces of the Basque Country in Southern France (Labourd, Low Navarre and Soule) for centuries. In Ancient times, the use of the language was spoken throughout a wider territory, and although it resisted the Roman invasion and did not disappear as the rest of the languages of the Iberian Peninsula, the use of the language has been diminishing since then. Franco's regime would directly repress the use of the language, as it was regarded as a threat for the Spanish unity.

⁴⁴ "Rosa Díez ve 'vergonzosa' la valoración del vascuence para lograr una plaza en Sanidad", Libertad Digital, May 7, 2008, <http://www.libertaddigital.com/sociedad/rosa-diez-ve-vergonzosa-la-valoracion-del-vascuence-para-lograr-una-plaza-en-sanidad-1276329731/>.

⁴⁵ "Gorka Maneiro, UPyD: se discrimina al que no sabe Euskera", Youtube, November 5, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C73ew9SAs2E>.

⁴⁶ UPyD, *Elecciones Generales 2011 Programa Electoral*, 2011, <http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/ficheros/101688>, 7.

the possibility to choose if citizens' children are going to study in Spanish or Basque the main part of their curricula in public schools. However, the Basque Government, following the policies promoted mainly by PNV, has fostered the teaching model that is totally taught in Basque besides the subject of Spanish. The reason for this policy is that the model that teaches all the curricula in Spanish (apart from the subject of Basque) and the one that teaches half of the curricula in Basque and half of it in Spanish are not able to satisfy the need of transmitting Basque children and teenagers the ability to communicate, speak and write in Basque properly.

Taking into account that the EGA is necessary to be able to work in many fields of the public sector, people should start to learn Basque from an early age, so it will be easier for them to find a job in the future. Basque people who prefer to speak Basque when they go to the doctor or need to do some bureaucratic work in the public administration should have the possibility to do so, justifying the requirement to have the EGA in order to be able to have these jobs. UPyD, however, considers that these policies discriminate the people who do not know Basque.

For this paper, it is not so important to discuss about this debate that has been going on in the Basque Country for decades. The fact that UPyD criticizes the level of the promotion of Basque and Spanish as such would not be considered as a populist strategy. Nevertheless, it does work in the creation of an "other" that is restricting the "good Spanish citizenship" from enjoying their rights equally, identifying an enemy that has to be combated, as Basque and Catalan speakers are regarded as privileged. This "otherification" could be regarded as populist. In this way, UPyD, which claims to be a progressist party, does not attack immigrants, but the nationalist people and regions who do not want to resign to function the same way as the rest of Spain.

Comparison between UPyD and European populism: current situation and future prospective

As it has been explained previously, UPyD does not meet the criteria established in the European context to be described as populist. It is not an anti-Islamist and racist party as PVV or FN. Geert Wilders, for instance, has compared the Koran with the Mein Kampf⁴⁷,

⁴⁷ Geert Wilders, "Enough is enough: ban the Koran", Geertwilders.nl, August 10, 2007, http://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1117.

and claimed that “there is no such thing as ‘moderate Islam’”⁴⁸. Marine Le Pen, at the same time, compared the prayer of Muslim people outside mosques with the Nazi occupation:

*For those who speak a lot about World War II, if that was occupation, then we could also talk about this, because it's occupation of territory. There are no armored vehicles, no enemy troops, but it is an occupation all the same and it weighs heavily on people.*⁴⁹

Not content with only blaming the religion and its practice in their countries, they also criticize the large amount of immigrants, mainly Muslims, that enter to their countries, strategy that is obvious both in Le Pen's⁵⁰ and in Wilders' politics, apparent when he says that “more safety, less crime, less immigration and less Islam is what the Netherlands has chosen”⁵¹.

These parties use the anger flourished in their countries because of the economic crisis in order to blame not only the majoritarian political parties, but also the immigrants. Immigrants are regarded as an enemy that is “prospering at the expense of ordinary working people”⁵², and these populist parties represent themselves as the advocates of the “people”. UPyD does not use the strategy of blaming immigrants to attract voters, but it does represent the Basque Country and Navarre as regions that are prospering at the expenses of the rest of Spain, as this prosperity is achieved, according to them, thanks to the Economic Agreement that these two autonomous regimes have.

The other characteristic that most European populist parties share is the criticism that is done to the European Union, and the will to regain more national independence from the Union. Populist parties tend to see the EU as “the monster of Brussels”⁵³, a “Leviathan”⁵⁴ that steals

⁴⁸ Wilders, “Enough is enough”.

⁴⁹ “Marine Le Pen faces legal charges for anti-Muslim remark”, *Ynetnews*, June 21, 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4395263,00.html>.

⁵⁰ “Bleu, Blanc, Et Rouge: France's Marine Le Pen Fights Immigration, But Can She Ever Become President?”, *International Business Times*, June 12, 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/bleu-blanc-et-rouge-frances-marine-le-pen-fights-immigration-can-she-ever-become-president-1303939>.

⁵¹ Stephen Castle, “Dutch Voters Split, and Right Surges”, *The New York Times*, June 10, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/world/europe/11dutch.html?_r=0&adxnnl=1&ref=geertwilders&adxnnlx=1389961071-4w+vLUi0UrK8RCR/aU1VZQ.

⁵² “Political insurgency. Europe's Tea Parties”, *The Economist*, January 4, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21592610-insurgent-parties-are-likely-do-better-2014-any-time-second-world>.

⁵³ “Dutch Eurosceptic Wilders and France's Le Pen unite”, *BBC News Europe*, November 13, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24924372>.

political and economic power from their countries. They want to regain the control of the boundaries because “both leaders say Europe’s political elite has been too tolerant of Islam and both want to curb immigration.”⁵⁵ Regarding economy, they both want to get the control of the money back because of the economic malaise that the Eurocrisis has brought to their countries⁵⁶.

For many European parties, the EU not only represents the unification of European countries into an international organization that aims to improve the situation of all the European citizens and increase their power in the international sphere. Great Britain has been for many years the most Eurosceptic country, but there are many rising populist parties all over Europe that regard the Union as a threat, not only the FN or the PVV, but also “Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ), Italy's Northern League, Vlaams Belang in Belgium, the Sweden Democrats or the Danish People's Party”⁵⁷.

Many European citizens blame the EU for the economic crisis and their current difficult economic situation. Therefore, these parties represent the EU, together with the traditional parties of their countries, as the political elite guilty of the misfortunes of the “good working people”. UPyD, however, cannot be described as an anti-European party, as it openly promotes the collaboration with the Union⁵⁸. Nevertheless, it is very important to take into account a specific aspect of the Spanish economy. Although a large part of the Spanish citizenship also blames the EU for their economic malaise, Spain has been receptor of many economic aids from the European Union and the accession to the European Communities helped the transition of Spain from a dictatorship to a democracy, which is not forgotten by Spanish politicians and citizens. In this way, the main opinion that is shared among Spaniards is that although Europe and the Euro may have contributed in making the economic crisis more severe, getting out of the EU would leave Spain alone in the international market and would not get any economic aid to restore itself from the crisis. It would be more harmful to fight against the crisis alone than with the help of the Union, as

⁵⁴ Geert Wilders, “Geert Wilders Letter to the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs”, *Tundratabloids*, July 21, 2012, <http://tundratabloids.com/2012/07/geert-wilders-letter-to-the-eu-commissioner-for-home-affairs.html>.

⁵⁵ “Dutch Eurosceptic Wilders and France’s Le Pen unite”.

⁵⁶ Maarten Van Tartwijk, Gabriele Parussini and Gabriele Steinhauser, “Europe Nationalist Leaders Pledge to Take Powers Back from Brussels Le Pen, Wilders Want to Drive Shared Anti-Euro Agenda in European Elections”, *The Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304243904579195792555385948>.

⁵⁷ “Dutch Eurosceptic Wilders and France’s Le Pen unite”.

⁵⁸ UPyD, *Elecciones Generales 2011 Programa Electoral*, 40-41.

Spain is economically weak and cannot be recovered without help. Hence, UPyD, as the rest of the main Spanish parties, shows a positive disposition for further collaboration with the Union.

It seems very clear that this anti-immigration and anti-European populism will have a lot of relevance at European level at least in the recent future and especially in the next elections of the European Parliament. In the case of FN we can see how the party has been gaining more ground after Marine Le Pen took the leadership of the party⁵⁹, and it is not the only case in Europe. According to Matthew Feldman, “Europe's far-right parties are definitely seeing a resurgence”⁶⁰, and Wilders and Le Pen are even working together at European level, aiming to find cohesion, and hence become stronger in the European parliament.

There is one main difference between UPyD and the French and Dutch populist parties: while FN and the PVV follow an anti-European, anti-Immigration and anti-Islamist strategy, the UPyD is pro-European and pro-Immigration. Therefore, the EU does not pay so much attention to it because of not supposing a threat to the main ideologies of the Union. Moreover, while the French and Dutch populist parties are considered far-right wing parties⁶¹, the UPyD cannot be identified so clearly as left or right, as they do not want to consider themselves either as a right-wing or a left-wing party⁶². It is a catch-all political party.

Because of the great ideological differences between UPyD and most of the European populist parties, we should not expect that UPyD will work together with Wilders, Le Pen or other European populist politicians for the European elections. Spain is not prepared at the moment for an anti-European party. It would not be successful at the elections because of the economic need of the Spanish economy to belong to the EU and the Eurogroup. Therefore, the creation of an anti-European populist party should not be expected in Spain at least in the near future. Nevertheless, we should expect that UPyD will be more and more

⁵⁹ Michelle Hale Williams, “A new era for French far right politics? Comparing the FN under two Le Pens”, *Análise Social*, vol. XLVI (201), 2011, 679-695, 680.

⁶⁰ Laura Smith Spark, “Is the far right gaining ground in Europe”, Edition CNN, April 25, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/24/world/europe/europe-far-right-austerity/>.

⁶¹ “Europe's far right. This monster called Europe. Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders form a Eurosceptic alliance”, *The Economist*, November 16, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21589894-marine-le-pen-and-geert-wilders-form-eurosceptic-alliance-monster-called-europe>.

⁶² UPyD, *Manifiesto Fundacional*.

successful in the following elections, as sympathizers of the party are increasing, mainly because of the popularity of their leader.

The fact that UPyD has little to do with the European populist parties does not mean that it is not a populist party. UPyD is following quite a smart strategy. It knows which the main aspects of the Spanish politics that are criticized by the Spanish citizens are: the corruption of the two main parties, the inequality of autonomous rights between different Spanish regions, the new law of abortion and the economic crisis. Therefore, these are the aspects that the party promises to change if they reach the power or gain more seats in the Parliament. Regarding the corruption, it is stated in UPyD's Credo that any person who has been accused of having been corrupt will not be allowed to run for elections in the lists of the UPyD⁶³. On the other hand, it promises to abolish the Economic Agreements of the Basque Country and Navarre once they get to the government, and they propose an abortion law that respects the rights of free women to decide about their maternal future, but respecting a deadline⁶⁴. In relation to the economic crisis, it also presents possible solutions to this crisis, such as avoiding "duplications, wastefulness and absurd norms" / "duplicaciones, despilfarro y normas absurdas."⁶⁵ Another reason why Rosa Díez is so popular, and consequently the party is becoming more popular, is their self-representation as the only non-corrupt party and as a party and a leader true to their believes. In the interview the young journalist Esteban Martín did to Rosa Díez, he told her that she has seemed to be more loyal to herself than to the PSOE. Rosa Díez added to this commentary that she was true to her ideas, the reason why she had to create a party more in tune with them than PSOE⁶⁶. Their strategy is working very well, it has to be said, as the party is gaining more and more ground in the Spanish politics and it is very likely that they will also gain presence in the following European elections. Hence, we can expect they will follow the same strategy as now: blaming the regional privileges and linguistic policies and criticizing the gaffes of PP and PSOE.

⁶³ "UPyD obligará a dimitir a sus miembros que estén imputados", *Público.es*, November 2, 2013, <http://www.publico.es/politica/479233/upyd-obligara-a-dimitir-a-sus-miembros-que-est-en-imputados>.

⁶⁴ "El aborto visto sin sectarismo ni hipocresía", UPyD, May 8, 2013, http://www.upyd.es/contenidos/noticias/430/97832-El_aborto_visto_sin_sectarismo_ni_hipocresia.

⁶⁵ "12 propuestas para sacar a España de la crisis económica y política", UPyD, http://www.cadavotovale.easdfs/crisis_economica.html.

⁶⁶ Martín, "Rosa Díez: 'La sociedad tiene un papel de control sobre los partidos políticos'".

Conclusions

Is UPyD a populist party? This was one of the main questions that were aimed to be answered in this paper. However, giving an answer is not so easy. As it has been argued throughout the paper, UPyD has some populist characteristics, such as the total dependency of the party on the leader, the identification with the “people” or “citizens”, and the attack to the political elite of the country. However, the meaning of the term has been transformed in the European sphere to denote parties that condemn immigration, the Islam and the European Union, characteristics that are not met by the party. Therefore, we could say that UPyD is not a populist party in the Europeanised and modern sense of the word.

This is quite an easy response, but only a partial one. It does not combat against the immigrant “other”, but it does have another enemy: nationalists and regional rights. The language used by politicians of UPyD is very direct and often uses sentimentalism as a tool to touch the feelings of the citizens, making them more manipulative, instrument attributed to populism. Nevertheless, apart from their attack to the regions with some nationalistic identities or their criticism against the strong protection of the languages of these regions, their political position could not be regarded as a threat for the Union, as they defend further collaboration with the Union and they welcome immigrants to Spain.

Because of not been racist or Eurosceptic, the UPyD is not regarded as a populist party by European journalists, and even less as a threat. It respects the general values of the EU, especially regarding the aspect of equality of the citizens. However, its persistence in the value of equality would harm the well-being of a specific sector of the Spanish citizenship: Basques and Catalans. Moreover, it would suppose a step back of the efforts that have been made to strengthen these minority languages. These languages are protected under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages⁶⁷, charter from the Council of Europe, but also embraced by the European Union, as the protection of national minorities and minority languages is also an issue of concern for the Union. We should remember that Basque and Catalan are also spoken in France, but in a much lower extent than in Spain, as French was imposed as the only official language, and minority languages have been marginalized, making them disappear little by little.

⁶⁷ Council of Europe, *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages* (Strasbourg, November 5, 1992).

UPyD proposes to treat all the citizens equally no matter the language they speak⁶⁸, what mainly means not to take into consideration if an individual knows Basque or Catalan to be able to work in the public sector, and to stop the wide spreading of the education model that teaches in the regional languages all the curricula. They also aim to satisfy the demands of the Spanish citizenship who regard the Economic Agreements as unfair privileges by saying that they would abolish them if they get to the presidency.

These policies would respect a very crucial democratic principle: the equality of the citizens of a country. However, the protection of minorities and their cultural heritage should also be taken into account, and finding the perfect balance between equality and protection of minorities is not always easy. Spain has a vast cultural and linguistic heritage, having between themselves one the oldest (if not the oldest) languages spoken in Europe: Basque. It has strongly been promoted, but not everybody is content with this promotion. UPyD would be the perfect example, as it criticizes their economic privileges and the linguistic policies that have been developed.

The UPyD is likely to continue gaining ground in the elections of the following years, as their popularity is increasing, especially the popularity of their leader. However, it does not seem very probable that they will be able to turn the bipartisan system up-side down and to reach the government, at least in the near future, although this system is already showing its problems. However, as the European populist parties, its relevance in national and European politics is becoming stronger. Nevertheless, we should not expect that UPyD will work together with other European populist parties in the campaign of the elections of the European Parliament because of the great ideological differences between the parties.

To sum up, it can be argued that UPyD certainly shares many characteristics with populism, although it demonstrates to be different from the mainstream European populist parties. Besides, it cannot be forgotten that other parties or politicians also use populist tools to attract voters. The most visible populist characteristic they may have is their great dependence on their leader, dependency that is not visible in other Spanish political parties. On the other hand, we should be concerned about their anti-nationalist position, as if they succeeded to reach the government, the nationalists and the regional languages would be those that would suffer the most, supposing a step back of the efforts that have been undertaken to improve the situation of these languages and satisfy regions of Spain which

⁶⁸ UPyD, *Elecciones Generales 2011 Programa Electoral*, 7.

are not so happy belonging to the country. Do we really want to make independentism stronger by abolishing these rights?

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