



Working Paper

JOSE FELIX MERLADET

## THE EU AND THE EUROPEAN ELITES IN THE FACE OF RISING POPULISMS IN THE CONTINENT

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**About author:**

**Jose Felix MERLADET** is the Deputy Secretary-General of the European Democratic Party (PDE-EDP) and he has been Professor at the Faculty of Humanities of University of Deusto in Bilbao and at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain. He had extensive and rich experience in working for the European Commission for many years. He served as Deputy Head of Delegation and Chargé d'affaires of the European Commission in Maputo, Mozambique, and Head of the Cooperation with Civil Society Section of the Delegation of the European Commission in New Delhi, India. He also worked as responsible in dealing with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and in the EU Delegation for Uruguay, Paraguay and Mercosur in South America. He previously served in the Cabinet for Relations with the European Commission of the Basque Autonomous Government, as Member of the Board of the Colegio Mayor Cesar Carlos in Madrid, as Professor of international law at the University of Navarre and as a lawyer. He regularly publishes articles and essays on international relations and economics. He is the founding President of two Rotary Clubs in Spain, the last one in his home town of Portugalete and he is engaged in social work in India. He made a LL.M Master in the Harvard Law School in the USA, studied international relations at the Institut d'Etudes politiques in Paris at the Université libre de Bruxelles and at the Spanish Diplomatic School in Madrid.

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# THE EU AND THE EUROPEAN ELITES IN THE FACE OF RISING POPULISMS IN THE CONTINENT

## INTRODUCTION

We are not anymore in an era of changes but are rather witnessing a change of Era. Who would have expected some months ago that the UK would leave the EU, that an outsider in theory critical with the Establishment like Trump would be elected President of the USA, that a critical referendum to make a peace arrangement proposed by the Government would be rejected in Colombia, that a perfect unknown with no party like Macron would be elected President of France or that the extreme right would enter in force the German Bundestag? All this is symptomatic of a fast evolution that announces more fundamental changes to come.

The big question is why. Is that a mere generational change, or something more substantial and, if so, is this transformation for good or for bad?

A few years ago, I wrote an article stating that we were living in the best of possible times: we had proportionally less deaths originated by hunger or catastrophe and more alphabetization and democratic countries than ever before in the world. Europe was also wealthier than ever and we were living in a consumer, nonchalant society. No big worries except on how to grow more and more and distribute better. Today, I would not be so sure, regardless of the apparently good statistical data that sometimes hide the deep realities under the surface of things. No need to wait to the big crisis of 2007, everything had already changed suddenly on 11/9 and accelerated after Afghanistan's, Iraq's, Libya's and (for us even more) Syria's wars of which some western countries, including some European, were also responsible. And, as we say in my country, those who saw winds collect tempests!

In parallel to all these reckless changes, the so-called populist parties and movements, mostly on the right, are becoming a powerful force in both Europe and the USA. The ascent of Trump to the US presidency is the most spectacular electoral success in American history for a militant form of right-wing populism. The gains made by Alternative für Deutschland in the recent German elections mark the first time since 1945 that a populist party of the extreme right has achieved significant representation in the German Parliament.

Why is this happening, and why is it happening now? Is it the product of exceptional events, such as the financial crisis of 2007–2008 or the mass migrations from the Middle East to Europe, caused by those wars, which reached their peak in 2015? If so, is the populist wave likely to be just a passing phenomenon? Or is it here to stay, linked to something more permanent such as the disruptions of globalization and the IT revolution, or the emergence of a more ruthless form of capitalism? I will try to answer those questions in this paper.

## THE NEW IDEA OF POPULISM

But let's go back to definitions. First of all, I feel we should try to abandon our prejudices and try to analyze the situation of the new emerging populist, radical or extremist political forces in Europe the most objectively possible. We cannot claim to be liberal only in ideas but remain Taliban in attitudes. Therefore, we should ponder carefully and rationally all possible arguments that other people believe in, even though we do not like their opinions. The situation regarding this new approach to the concept is confusing and full of passion and prejudices. When people speak about the new "identitary" parties from the left viewpoint they label them as populists, xenophobic, racists, fanatics, reactionary, traditionalist, fascists, etc. as if all of these were synonyms and thus putting all the perceived rivals in the same bag. And from the rightists' point of view, they also describe the new disliked anti-system leftist parties as populists, revolutionary, anarchists or communists, destructive, or financed by dictators.

All these are different concepts mixed together to discredit the adversary, but they should not necessarily coincide and for instance a person can be xenophobic and not racist, racist but not xenophobic with other persons he perceives as having the same ethnic origin (as it was often the case not so long ago in the so-called USA's "melting pot"). Or even one person can be traditionalist and none of those mentioned above, if he or she advocates the upholding of the valuable traditions of yore but is not refusing to integrate newcomers to participate and enjoy them, and is not rejecting measured no-nonsensical changes.

How to understand the term "populist"? There is general agreement, from their own viewpoint, that this refers to the attitude of some parties or political movements that oppose the 'elite' of the rulers, the social and economic "establishment" and the traditional or mainstream political parties. There have always been populist parties in all times and everywhere. We have heard about them in ancient Athens or in Marius' Republican Rome. Certainly, the populist should be allowed like everybody else freedom of expression, on the condition that they do not incite to hatred or violence, xenophobia or racism, and they would not be intending to overthrow democracy. A political party may be "populist" or "demagogue" or be considered as such without being particularly undemocratic. Sometimes, they are described as such just because the mainstream politicians fear that they are becoming too much "popular". In this sense, "populism" could be described as some forms of democratic challenges to the political 'establishment'. Many of the parties going in that path even have nowadays the word "democratic" written in their names. And they may not be necessarily extreme right or extreme left, neo fascist, and so on. As a matter of fact, most parties are blamed as populist when they enter politics by those mainstream parties already in power, or alternating in it, that feel threatened by them. Sometimes they are not, but most times they really are "populists" because in order to reach the pinnacle of power they promise things that they know they would not be able to do later on if they enter government.

This is why I do not like the word "populist" too much but I have to accept that I did not find any other one since the concept of "emerging", that could be more suitable, is much wider and also there could be populist parties which are not new like the National Front. And the word

“identitary” that could be appropriate for many traditionalist parties does not include all of them and in no way encompasses extreme left parties. In fact, we should not put all the new emerging parties to the same bag. And we cannot even sometimes apply the old criteria of left or right to them.

The difference we should make is between those who want to change the system, while protecting a democratic society as they conceive it, with populist promises or not, and those who want to destroy our present social order, our democratic system, by radical, quick and even violent means and we can seriously fear they would do so if they reach power. These should be called “extremists” or revolutionary, rather than “populists”.

For instance in Spain, unlike many other European countries, there is now no relevant extreme right-wing party, curiously enough, because the People’s Party has managed to absorb the entire political spectrum from the extreme right to the moderate center. But unlike other European countries where protest movements have gone to the far right, there is no presence of this in the central Spanish Congress, although the present situation in Catalonia created by local nationalism could eventually provoke, as a backlash, such a contrary reaction of Spanish nationalism fervor that, if Catalonia’s independence became a fact, an extreme right nationalist movement would probably be created, blaming the present government for its incompetence in handling this issue. On the other hand, there is a relatively new but quite large extreme left populist party, Podemos, that is also extremist and revolutionary in nature. Most people think, however, that if they ever reach power they would not be able to eliminate democracy - as their role model and main financial supporter, President Chaves of Venezuela and his follower President Maduro, did in their own country - because Spain is the part of the EU. But, can we be sure of that? When they overthrew the corrupt bipartisan system there, no Venezuelan would have expected that the remedy was much worse than the previous sickness!<sup>1</sup>

## **SOME HISTORY**

The history of Europe in the first half of the 20th century experienced the dramatic success of revolutionary, terrorist - and in a way also “populist” - communism after the October Revolution that took place exactly 100 years ago and costed Russia so many millions of deaths. The backlash went to the other extreme of the pendulum during the crisis of the 1920s and 1930s and the dramatic plunge of some “populist” movements of a completely opposed nature into Fascism, Nazism and other forms of totalitarianism and perversion of democracy that led eventually to the Second World War, the bloodiest ever. It is not that Europe has been a calm lagoon all these post war years. There were the wars in former Yugoslavia of course. And in the

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<sup>1</sup> Now, we have another populist movement in Catalonia, an antisystem group of anarchist tendencies, called CUP. This extremist group is anti-euro, anti-EU, anti-NATO and even anti-capitalism and anti-property rights since there are many former squatters in their ranks but is, however, controlling the coalition and make it move towards radicalism. If they succeed, the future of Catalonia may not be as democratic as we think and the process launched by moderate bourgeois could get out of their hands. It may also have serious repercussions as we will see for the whole of the EU.

western part of Europe, there were extremist terrorist movements such as ETA in the Basque Country, the Baader Meinhof in Germany, the IRA in Northern Ireland or the Red Brigades in Italy. Nevertheless, most of them had a revolutionary leftist approach inspired by Maoism, the Cuban revolution and the urban Tupamaro movement in Uruguay.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding this long silence of decades, what is very worrisome is that the new extremists of today have again a nationalist component and are placed mostly to the extreme right like in the 1930s. Some of these trends are now being reborn in Europe and not just in some EU countries, as evidenced by the success of the populists in Norway and Switzerland. For many, we are witnessing a reconversion of the old extreme right racist fascists in the new populist and xenophobic parties.<sup>3</sup> But, like a very interesting article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* showed already in March 2014<sup>4</sup>, most of the new extreme right parties are not successors of the old ones but they are different from them in the sense that they accept parliamentary democracy although they also often have an ethnic focus like the bygone ones.

Within this historical perspective we also have to make a distinction between, on the one hand, the "sovereignism" (Gaullist concept of the independence and "grandeur de la France" and the consequent "polique de la chaise vide" in the EU institutions in the 1960s), the somehow related "Euroscpticism" of the 1980s and 1990s which accompanied the European construction since the end of the Second World War, and, on the other hand, the nationalist "populism" of the 20th century, which targets the EU with an increased vigor since the beginning of the 2007 economic crisis. This movements can be labelled as plainly "Europhobic".

"Traditional" Euroscpticism and Sovereignism (constants in a country like the United Kingdom, for example), meant that, from the outset, some wanted to go slower and less far on the path of European integration and towards a "Supranational" or "Federal" Europe or even conceived European unity in the confederal context of a "Europe of nations". Many important opportunities were missed on the path of integration such as the failure of the Treaty establishing the European Defense Community (EDC or CED in French) in 1954, rejected by the French National Assembly, the draft Treaty establishing the European Union of 1984 (Spinelli's project), the draft European Constitution of 1994 (project Fernand Herman), not to mention the Treaty establishing a European Constitutional Treaty for Europe rejected by the French and Dutch referendums. And finally, the BREXIT last year.

None of these involved political extremisms, enmity or aggressive rejection of the European integration (because even the UK respected it...although for the others). But the situation is much more serious today because many of these new populisms would not be satisfied with a slowing down or freezing integration. They want the destruction of the EU and all the "acquis" i.e. all it has successfully and painfully achieved in these decades.

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<sup>2</sup> Only the IRA and ETA were nationalist but I would dare to say that this was not their main ideological component.

<sup>3</sup>Thesis of Dominique Reynié, « Populisme : la pensée fatale », Plon 2011

<sup>4</sup> Camus, Jean-Yves « Extrêmes droites mutantes".

## RECENT SITUATION

But coming back to the 'populist' movements that exist today in some countries of the EU, what do we see in the EU today? There are many new parties hostile to some of the policies of the EU, such as the single currency, the post crisis austerity or the immigration policies. We may think of many different movements going from the ones on the extreme left to the ones on the extreme right of the spectrum. In Italy, for instance, we had the leftist ecologist movement *Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)*, offering direct democracy and led by Beppe Grillo and, on the other extreme, another strong and durable rightist regional movement, *Lega Norte*. In Spain, for reasons too complicated to be explained, there is almost no extreme right: maybe because the anti-system forces have gone to the far left; maybe because the Franco dictatorship souvenir is still there; possibly because it is a more open society and the Catholic Church supports strongly immigration; or perhaps because Spaniards were till recently emigrants so they understand this phenomenon better than the others and feel greater solidarity towards the newcomers. Also, when coming from Spanish speaking Latin-American countries seem to be integrating better than those coming from the Maghreb. Who knows? What is certain is that the pro-immigration position of all parties represented in the Parliament is fundamentally important. On the extreme left, there is Pablo Iglesias's Podemos. But in Spain all the main parties declare themselves to be pro-European and even the Catalan separatists would like to become a sovereign State, but within the EU (except of fringe but vociferous CUP).

Elsewhere, the traditional 'Euroscepticism' inclines to the right and gives way, within this new political class, to a declared "Europhobia". In France, Le Pen's National Front got to the second round in the Presidential elections and the system found Macron as an almost last-minute containment. If they had a better prepared or more charismatic leader and /or if Macron made too many mistakes, the NF could win and this could be a deadly coup for the EU. The former President Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic or the Kaschinski brothers in Poland, and the current Polish Government formed by *Law and Order*, have offered not very distant examples of this growing anti-Europeanism. Probably, the same can be said of the parties such as *Golden Dawn* in Greece, *True Finns* in Finland, *Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs or FPÖe)* that got close to reach the Presidency in Austria, *ELAM* in Cyprus, *Danish People's Party (FDD)* in Denmark, *Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)* in Hungary, *Dutch Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid or PVV)* in the Netherlands, the *People's Party-Our Slovakia* led by Marian Kotleba in Slovakia, *Sweden Democrats (SD)*, *SVP or Swiss People Party*. Last but by no means least, now much more influential *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* in Germany, created only four years ago, has just become the third force in the Bundestag and it will dispute to the social democrats the role of real opposition against Chancellor Merkel. There are the main parties of this tendency but there are many more local or smaller nationalist parties that can be somewhat associated with this group.<sup>5</sup> Their growth is a contradictory and appalling

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<sup>5</sup> Albanian National Front Party in Albania, Alternative Democratic Reform Party in Luxembourg, Armenian Nationalist party in Armenia , Attack, BNU-ND and National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria, Belarusian Popular Front in Belarus , British National Party and United Kingdom Independence Party in the UK, Brothers of Italy – National Alliance, New Force and Tricolour Flame in Italy , Centre Party in Norway 1920, Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic–Liberty, Hope and Congress of the New Right, Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland and National

phenomenon since the only sovereignty we can have and we should endeavor to defend in the current complex multipolar world is the European sovereignty.

Most of these parties have in common being nationalist, anti-Islam, anti-immigration, anti-globalisation, either Eurosceptic or Europhobe. Nevertheless, in some cases their economic policies lean more to what was historically known to be left, i.e. supporting a strong welfare state. Thus, in this new populism there are many different categories. Ruth Wodak<sup>6</sup> spoke about four distinctive reasons that would explain their rise in different countries: "Parties [that] gain support via an ambivalent relationship with fascist and Nazi pasts" (e.g., in Austria, Hungary, Italy, Romania, and France), parties that "focus primarily on a perceived threat from Islam" (e.g., in the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland), parties that "restrict their propaganda to a perceived threat to their national identities from ethnic minorities" (e.g., in Hungary, Greece, Italy, and the United Kingdom) and parties that "endorse a fundamentalist Christian conservative-reactionary agenda" (e.g., in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria). I think, however, that this classification is over-simplistic since many of these reasons overlap or fluctuate in time and there are several parties that are at the same time traditionalists, anti-Islam, and fear that their national culture and identity are threatened. Besides, the fact of being Christian today does not necessarily mean to be reactionary or even conservative.

Meanwhile, the traditional "sovereignism" is still alive and translates to a growing extent, to nationalist reactions (e.g. the friction between Hungary - also headed by a man who for many disturbs authoritarian nationalist tendencies and for others is a champion of faith and tradition.

To complete the picture, we could still evoke and would also reflect upon the separatist and nationalist trends occurring in several countries of the EU: Catalonia, Scotland, Flanders, North of Italy or Padania, to cite just a few examples that could lead to the quick and possibly violent disintegration of some old and large states. This separatism, if unilateral and based on racial or xenophobe intra-state prejudices, and not based on a mutual agreement (like it was fortunately the case between Czechs and Slovaks), could "open a melon" that can lead to an endless process of fragmentation in many more units. It is very worrisome that there are links between some of the above-mentioned state-level Europhobe nationalist parties and some of these regional nationalist ones. We should not forget that national minorities' "irredentism" in Europe led to the First and Second World Wars.

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Movement in Poland, Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and Svoboda in Ukraine and Ukraine 2014, Conservative Party of Georgia, Conservative People's Party of Estonia, Croatian Party of Rights and Croatian Pure Party of Rights, Danish People's Party and Party of the Danes in Denmark, España 2000, Spanish Falange of the JONS, National Democracy and Falange in Spain, Estonian Independence Party, New Flemish Alliance and Flemish Interest in Belgium, Greater Romania Party, Bulgarian National Movement , Russia 1991, Lithuanian Nationalist Union, National Alliance in Latvia, National Democratic Party in Germany, National Liberal Party in Moldova, National Popular Front in Cyprus, National Renovator Party in Portugal , Order and Justice in Lithuania, Progress Party in Norway, Serbian Radical Party in Serbia, Sinn Fein in Ireland, Slovak National Party in Slovakia, Slovenian National Party, Swedish Resistance Movement in Sweden, Swiss People's Party in Switzerland , United Romania Party, VMRO-DPMNE in Macedonia, Workers' Party in Czech Republic, Young Lithuania , etc.

<sup>6</sup> Wodak, Ruth (4 March 2014). "Right wing populist parties on the rise". Cyprus Mail



## THE CAUSES

We should try to identify as objectively as we could the causes of the rise of these new emerging forces before considering the possible responses we could adopt to face them.

What can be the causes of these shifts in public opinion?

### I. The psychological and sociological context

There is a fundamental reason that arises from the fact that populists take advantage of the discontent and frustration of the people. As professor Michal Vašečka stated,<sup>7</sup> the sociological research shows that an economic crisis or other kinds of crisis becomes only a trigger of various deep tensions inside European society that have a long-term character. Among these factors he rightly mentions the following: ontological insecurity, panic of the middle class, lack of trust, alienation from society, fragmentarization of social cohesion, rise of anomy, surge of ethnic tensions, personal insecurity (e.g. feeling unsafe when walking in local areas after dark), a certain growth of authoritarian personalities and a growing distrust in the mainstream media.<sup>8</sup>

The disorientation caused by all these dynamics, coupled with the contagious and irrational fear proper to collectivities, makes masses to act irrationally, being completely prone to believe in any simplistic solution it is told or to blame any scapegoat that is presented to them. The crowds made up by persons in disarray are very easy to handle, something which the unscrupulous demagogues accomplish quite well and cunningly manage so as to appear as “saviours”.

A key breeding ground, in my modest opinion, is the loss or the ignorance of moral and religious values. Healthy, solid Christian beliefs and ethics are not the problem, as someone has said, but the solution. They are not just a question of sick attachment to the past but a reliable instrument to organize the present and to prepare for a stronger, stable future. We have at our disposal precious values serving as trustworthy and stable instruments to cope precisely with these shocks and crisis that cause extremism. As far as I know, Nazis or fascists were not religious people. This was very well prophesized by André Malraux: “the 21st century will be religious or will not be”<sup>9</sup>.

Our civilization in its present state has become materialistic and relativist in excess, and thus, it has become subjected to changeable winds without the foundation of any firm beliefs or religions. Neither it is any more concerned to cultivate and fix ethics and set values that would have helped it. Political ideology cannot be a lasting substitute. Post-war vote in the western

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<sup>7</sup> Michal Vašečka, “Determinants of a Rise of Extremism in Times of Economic Crisis within the European Union”, Conference of the Institute of European Democrats, Košice, October 6, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. That means: Ability of extremists to convince followers not to follow mainstream media; Focus on young generation without civic skills and historical memory; On-line radicalization - polarization of population through social media.

<sup>9</sup> Followed by other very different French thinkers like former communist and later converted to Islam Roger Garaudy. See also: [http://protestantedigital.com/magacin/10874/La\\_cuestion\\_religiosa\\_en\\_el\\_s\\_XXI](http://protestantedigital.com/magacin/10874/La_cuestion_religiosa_en_el_s_XXI)

Europe to the main bipartisan forces on the left (social democrats) and right (Christian democrats) has played a guiding role for some but cannot work as a cohesive force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century any more. The annoying appearance of words like “post-truth” is ontologically linked and as a direct consequence, in my view, of our relativist and purely subjectivist mind frame that rejects any existence of absolute truths.

Therefore, if we mix together ignorance, fear, lack of self-confidence, absence of values or strong wish to retrieve them, insecurity and perceived absence of horizons, you will get the perfect recipe for populism. The masses become eager to believe what they want to hear, the populist illusionists just have to promise with a fake conviction and will manage to guide them like the Hamelin flutist of the tale did with the children. Sometimes, leading them into extremism which means a further step including violence and aggressiveness towards the others. Thus, the recent economic crisis and uncontrolled globalization have led to the loss of work, massive immigration, the fear of the loss of rights and privileges of the middle and lower classes and the resentment in face of the enrichment of the wealthiest few so well shown by Piketty<sup>10</sup>, all of it coupled with this tremendous lack of those values and beliefs that used to serve as a compass in bad times. The result has been a blend of frustration, anxiety and irrationality. You just need a match to make an explosion.

In Europe, populism also has grown because the new generations have forgotten that there was a bloody world war that was won only thanks to intense solidarity, sacrifice and the willpower to fight. The solution is more culture, knowledge, critical spirit, higher values, to emerge from materialistic low-sighted positions, to have long term goals and pursue them, to foster self-confidence and ultimately find the best within the people. That means to give a better education to people both in childhood and in adulthood.

## **II. Populism as a reaction to large scale immigration**

Nowadays, most people, even those who tried to deny it, recognize that immigration is one of the main causes of this phenomenon. Immigration is a complex reality that covers refugees and asylum seekers, illegal immigration, political immigration and economic immigration, high and low qualified immigration, easily and hard to integrate immigration and so on. There are many sensitive issues involved as the perceived (rightly or wrongly) loss of security reinforced by rising and previously unknown terrorist attacks in Europe, the right to vote for foreigners in certain countries, the replacement of nationals for hard or risky jobs that most people do not want to do anymore or the subsidies and aids obtained by foreigners.

Immigration is the main amalgam that maintains the phobias of populism. It is evident that the policies in place at both national and European levels should better regulate the exponential arrival of foreigners escaping from hunger or violence in war torn countries from Congo to Afghanistan. It is obvious that our authorities should ensure better integration of immigrants

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<sup>10</sup> Piketty, Thomas, *Le Capital au XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 2013

respecting local culture and related obligations. But it is also obvious that the EU countries should help refugees and we are committed to do so by the binding international agreements.

The problem of the Roma or Gypsies regularly appears in several countries (but not in others more racially mixed, like Spain, where they seem to be better integrated). And the drama of Lampedusa (Italy) reminded us of the urgency of working much more at the European level than in the past. The decision by Ms. Merkel to open the doors to hundreds of thousands of immigrants of whom not all, not even a majority, were from civil war stricken Syria, but a mix of economic immigrants and asylum seekers that came to the EU in a rush, worsened the situation and inflamed the spirits. It made even more acute the reaction of many autochthone Europeans and paved the way for populist movements, as the AfD case clearly shows.

Very recently, last September 6, the European Court of Justice has ruled that the European Commission has the right to order EU member States to receive refugees and, conversely, that EU member states have no right to resist those orders.<sup>11</sup> There was the clear opposition to the court coming from Slovakia and Hungary. The Polish Prime Minister said defiantly that she would not accept such imposition. It seems that the whole Visegrad Four group is in a similar line<sup>12</sup>. And there are risks of a very dangerous division looming within the EU. These countries,

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<sup>11</sup> The European Court of Justice (ECJ) rejected a complaint by Hungary and Slovakia over the legality of the bloc's mandatory refugee quota program, which requires EU member states to admit tens of thousands of them from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Opponents of the relocation scheme say that decisions about the granting of residence permits should be kept at the national level. The dispute dates back to September 2015, when, at the height of Europe's migration crisis, EU member states narrowly voted to relocate 120,000 "refugees" from Italy and Greece to other parts of the bloc. This number was in addition to a July 2015 plan to redistribute 40,000 migrants from Italy and Greece. Although the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia voted against the agreement, they were still required to comply. Poland, for example, has a quota of 6,182 migrants, not one of whom has been admitted. The Czech Republic has a quota of 2,691 migrants, of whom only 12 have been taken. Hungary has a quota of 1,294, none of whom has been admitted.

Hungary and Slovakia, backed by Poland, argued that the European Union broke its own rules and exceeded its powers when it approved the quota system with a "qualified majority" — two thirds of the bloc's members. The ECJ ruled that a qualified majority vote was sufficient because the EU "was not required to act unanimously when it adopted the contested decision." And that: "The mechanism actually contributes to enabling Greece and Italy to deal with the impact of the 2015 migration crisis and is proportionate."

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto called the court ruling "outrageous and irresponsible" and "contrary to the interests of the European nations, including Hungary." He added: "The decision puts at risk the security of all of Europe and the future of all of Europe as well." "The real battle is only just beginning," he concluded. Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico said that, while he "respected" the court's decision, his government's opposition to the relocation plan "has not changed at all." He added: "We will continue to work on having solidarity expressed in different ways other than forcing on us migrants from other countries that do not want to be here anyway."

Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło also said that "this absolutely does not change the stance of the Polish government with respect to migration policy."

The European Commission has already initiated legal action against the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland for failing to take in their quotas of migrants which could lead to massive financial penalties." See "European Court Orders EU Countries to Take Migrants", by Soeren Kern, Gatestone Institute, September 7, 2017.

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10956/european-court-migrants>.

<sup>12</sup> See the Joint Statement by the Prime Ministers of V4 Countries on migration on 19 July 2017 in Budapest stating that: "The migratory pressure on Europe represents an unresolved challenge... We stand united in our resolve to address the migration crisis; we reiterate our determination to continue actively contributing to a common European solution, based on functional and effective measures addressing the root causes of the current migratory pressure. While the illegal flow on the Western Balkan route - thanks to our common efforts - was stemmed we are confronted with the situation that despite all efforts the pressure on the Central Mediterranean route even increases; therefore the pressure on Europe persists. The Visegrad countries believe that the EU has to

some of which have been governed for many years by the same parties, cannot be any more simply considered as governed by populists but by nationalists, traditionalists or "sovereignists". Their position can be summarized by the best known of their leaders: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated on September 3 campaign rally in the town of Kötcse, that more than 60 million people are expected to make their way from Africa to Europe in the next 20 years - thereby pushing Europe's Muslim population to above 20% by 2030. "The Islamization of Europe is real," Orbán warned.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, it was no coincidence that President Trump, who aligns himself with this way of thinking, chose Poland, in a well-known speech to a Polish crowd before the last meeting of the G20 Summit leaders, to describe the battle of West against "radical Islamic terrorism" as the way to protect "our civilization and our way of life". Trump asked if the West had the will to survive. There has been a growing tendency of Visegrad leaders to depict Islam as a civilizational threat to Christian Europe. If, in Western Europe, Christianity has been dramatically cast aside by governments and mainstream media, new polls in Eastern Europe reveal that Christianity is robust, much more than what would have been expected only thirty years ago and constitutes a serious political instrument pretty much related to their idea of patriotism<sup>14</sup>. Let's not forget that religion was the backbone that permitted countries like Poland to survive while invaded during centuries by her powerful surrounding neighbors.

A big problem here about which very few people talk about is that the policies of multiculturalism as tried by the UK, or national and cultural "republican" integration tried by France or Germany and their policy focusing on the *Gästarbeiter* figure (guest and temporary worker that supposedly will return to his original country) have all failed for the populists, with

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review the principles and the proposed modalities on which the current European migration policy is built upon...We believe that the precondition of any efficient strategy related to mixed migratory flows is to distinguish between genuine asylum seekers and economic migrants. The necessary assessments have to be completed outside the territory of the EU in administrative centres protected and supplied with the assistance and contribution of the EU and its Member States... We believe that the migration crisis must be primarily dealt with at its roots[ in the most affected Third Countries of origin and transit including improving their living conditions]. instead of at its endpoints in Europe. In that sense, further improvement of the rates of effective returns and readmissions must be achieved and strict conditionality must be applied...We need to recognize at the same time that mandatory and automatic relocation has not contributed to the migratory pressure on Europe...Almost two years after the adoption of the debated decision, which is still challenged at the European Court of Justice and is going to expire in September 2017, the overall rate of implementation by Member States as a whole is only 13%. The Visegrad countries are of the view that the general EU strategy has to be reviewed and has to be built on consensus based actions...At the same time we refuse any unfounded allegation that rejecting mandatory relocation could be regarded as a lack of solidarity. In this context, the Visegrad countries are ready to...exercise solidarity with those in need."

<sup>13</sup> He has also said: "Let us not forget that those arriving have been raised in another religion, and represent a radically different culture. Most of them are not Christians, but Muslims. This is an important question, because Europe and European identity is rooted in Christianity. Is it not worrying in itself that European Christianity is now barely able to keep Europe Christian? If we lose sight of this, the idea of Europe could become a minority interest in its own continent." See Sogren Kern, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Zoltan Balog, Hungary's Minister for Human Resources, declared: "Islam is a major culture and religion, which we must respect, but Europe has a different identity, and it is clear that these two cultures are incapable of coexisting without conflict... The greatest difference is that in Europe, politics and religion have been separated from one another, but in the case of Islam it is religion that determines politics". See from the same rightist Gatestone Institute: "Eastern Europe Chooses to Keep Western Civilization", by Giulio Meotti, July 7, 2017. <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10631/eastern-europe-islam-civilization>.

regard to the most noticeable and growing minority of all: Muslim minority. The proof of the cake for these new parties are the criminal terrorist acts perpetrated by the euphemistically called “Jihadists”. They cannot accept that the problem is not Islam but some few extremist people.

I would like to remind the words of Libya’s leader Gadhafi in 2006: “We have 50 million Muslims in Europe. There are signs that Allah will grant Islam victory in Europe - without swords, without guns, without conquest - and will turn it into a Muslim continent within a few decades”.<sup>15</sup> This is regularly quoted on the internet. This situation would mean that we have learnt nothing from history. The whole of Europe could breathe after the naval battle of Lepanto and after the Turks were also stopped two times at Vienna by the Roman Germanic Empire led by Charles V firstly and lastly by Leopold I and the allies at the battle of Kahlenberg. Thereafter, the continent entered in a time of unstoppable scientific, philosophical and industrial flourishing. Therefore, for these new parties, to reject foreigners that the local population feel will never adapt is not necessarily racism or xenophobia. You may like them a lot but living as neighbours in their original countries and helping these to develop in their homelands with the right commercial and development policies.<sup>16</sup> In the case of many Muslim people there are the countries like Saudi Arabia, Dubai or Qatar that have plenty of money and of land to take people of the same religion and mind framework but still refuse to do so.

In a nutshell, it is interesting to notice that these parties usually manipulate in a Manichean way the concepts of “us” and “the others” that are seen as a menace. While antisemitism<sup>17</sup> was a unifying factor for far-right parties at the beginning of the 20th century, a strong rejection of a sizeable presence of Islam in Europe has become their unifying factor in the early decades of the 21st century.<sup>18</sup>

### III. Populism in the face of the EU enlargements

Up to Europe of the 15th century, successive enlargements included countries with comparable wealth and economies (with the exception of Spain, Portugal and Greece that were helped very efficiently with European funding in their efforts to catch up the others). The "Big bang", namely the enlargement to twenty-eight (now soon again twenty-seven Member States),

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<sup>15</sup> Speech (10 April 2006) retransmitted by Al Jazeera and in YouTube) and other words attributed to him like “we shall conquer Europe with the wombs of our women”

<sup>16</sup> You do not invite -they claim- a neighbor to live in your house and stay there forever just because he is troublesome or has some kind of problem. If you are a Good Samaritan you host him temporarily –as the Visegrad Group put it- or give him the money to live in a decent accommodation.

<sup>17</sup> The experts state that there is still a certain Antisemitism in Central Europe but is primarily not any more about the Jews. It plays a role in the political battle over open society and liberal-democratic regime and serves a function of exclusion and disqualification of liberal elites fostering liberal pluralism and multicultural society. See Vašečka, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> This is what their opponents define as “islamophobia”. The slogan of AfD is “Islam does not belong in Germany”. As the Interior Ministers of Slovakia put it: “Lower migration of certain people there is from certain cultures to Slovakia, lower chance of having terrorism in a country there is.” (Minister of interior Robert Kaliňák, 2014); “Migrants are like guests. And there is a condition how to be a good guest - unconditional acceptance of culture and traditions of Slovakia.” (Minister of Interior Daniel Lipšic, 2011). Cited by Professor Vašečka, Op. cit.

aroused the concerns within the populations of the 'old Europe'. There was unjustified fear, more or less politically manipulated, concerning the relocation of companies to these countries, or the 'social dumping' (the "Polish plumber" syndrome), caused by the influx of cheaper labor from the new Member States. The launch of the first version of the draft directive on the indiscriminate liberalization of services (the 'Bolkestein directive') at the same time of the referenda on the 'European Constitution' was not the happiest initiative of the Commission of that time. Add the quick start of the negotiations for the accession of Turkey to the EU is the same case. If that had followed the intended course, as I wrote in an article in 2014, that would have meant a very big shock and maybe the end of the EU as we know it for a wide variety of reasons<sup>19</sup>. And European peoples, who were not consulted about this decision compromising their future and that of their children because "they would not understand" the questions at stake, have started to revolt.

#### **IV. Populism in the face of globalization**

Globalization, accelerated by the fast and almost completely free opening of the world trade, the development of new technologies of information and of the internet, and above all, the global unchecked movement of finance, and the upsurge of emerging countries like China or India, caused the anguish of the workers and other segments of the populations like the middle classes at the increase in social inequality and the diminishing of their income in absolute terms (one of the main reasons for the victory of Trump). At the same time, the multinational giants restructured their plants at will and played tax competition between the EU countries and imposed their logics of social, environmental and fiscal dumping on strikingly helpless States.

Aging European population, legitimately attached to safeguard the achievements of the 'welfare state' and of the so-called "European social model" (high wages, social security and pension benefits) also reacted and in some cases identified Europe with globalization which is like throwing away the baby with the water of the bath. There should be a strong pedagogical effort to explain the citizens that it is precisely the EU, the only structure that can protect their way of living from rampant liberalization and globalization.

#### **V. The crisis and following austerity as a source of populism**

It is in this climate of anxiety and anguish that burst after the banking and sovereign debt crises, and the ensuing economic and social crises. Overall, the crisis hit the Eurozone although the countries of the North (Germany in particular) fared better than those in the South, affected by problems of public debt and competitiveness. But solidarity was very slow to play (despite the interventions of the European Central Bank (ECB), rescue funds were set up laboriously ('too little, too late' in some cases), the pooling of debt ("Eurobonds") was denied by Germany and

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<sup>19</sup> José Félix Merladet, "L'adhésion de la Turquie à l'UE, Bruxelles, 2004 and "La cuestión turca", El Correo, Bilbao, 16.01.08

austerity was brutally imposed (Greece, Cyprus, Spain...). Growth initiatives were insufficient or delayed, while the EU budget remained derisory to boost such growth and employment, especially to combat youth unemployment. All this contributed also to people's animosity against the EU. Especially with the youth that constitutes the rank and file of many of these populist movements.

## **VI. The role of the European elites in failing to cope with populism**

There are two aspects to this issue in the view of these new parties that in fact are like the two sides of one coin:

### **A. The 'democratic deficit' of the EU**

The current generation of leaders is very far from personalities like De Gasperi, Schuman, Monnet, Adenauer and others that created the European Communities. They do not seem fit to the task of solving the problems or enthraling European people for the tasks ahead. The citizens of the EU are sensitive to the "effectiveness deficit" of their institutions and their leaders to get out of endless economic, financial, social and demographic crisis.

Also, the EU bureaucracy and procedures are not really understood by the masses. As François Bayrou usually repeats, they are not even understood by cultivated people. I would say, often not even by the "eurocrates" themselves. There is no openness and real democratic control which gives ammunition to demagogues like Nigel Farage from UKIP when they criticize the nonsensical waste of time in controlling every little detail with minutiae regulations about everything. A reform of the institutions is long due and should aim at making the EU more transparent and democratic and, in particular, make the European 'decision-makers' (European Council, Commission,...) accountable for their decisions before the democratically elected bodies. There should be a "reappropriation" of Europe by the citizens, to solve the 'democratic deficit' of their institutions due to the fact that, as Amato put it, "Montesquieu never visited Brussels" <sup>20</sup>. Urgent measures that should be adopted include the universal election of the President of the Commission or the inclusion of European lists with the occasion of the European Parliament elections.

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<sup>20</sup> Giuliano AMATO, Vice President of the Convention on the future of Europe in 2002.

## **B. The suspicion about the hidden purpose of some elites that is being encouraged by the populists**

The sage philosopher of history, Toynbee<sup>21</sup> said that the falling of a strong civilization that has become a “Universal State”, as it was Rome (and 26 others he analyzed), could be caused only by the influence of two forces acting simultaneously: an internal proletariat which has a different vision of the values of the society and is conquering or weakening the established and declining power of the elites, and the invasion of external barbarians. In our European case, the populists claim, the barbarians are not only at the gates, many of them would be already inside and expect to win their 'Reconquista' or Holy War either by a violent, or by a demographic form, depending on their numbers. And who have opened the doors? This time it has not been any internal proletariat, but our own elites - the populist claim - either by neglect or by design.<sup>22</sup> Populism can be defined as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”, and it argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.”<sup>23</sup>

## **VII. And the external forces at play**

But both the populists and their foes alike should be aware of something much more dangerous concerning the foreign elites. Why all these phenomena are happening in such a short span of time? Where all these emerging forces get their initial financial support from? If the populist believe in conspiracies of the elites, those who are opposed to them may also conversely believe they are the consequence, 'the ignorant offspring' of another conspiracy!

We know well that Putin is supporting populist and secessionist parties in order to weaken its arch-enemy - the EU and possibly NATO. In the USA, during the last elections, Trump claimed to be little concerned about the EU and NATO. That was a euphemistic way to put that he gave a dam about the EU and that, furthermore, in order to put America first and "make it great again", he would not be too much concerned with EU pains and disintegration. Once in power,

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<sup>21</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Oxford University Press, 1934-61. He stated that: “When a civilization responded to challenges, it grew. Civilizations disintegrate when their leaders stopped responding creatively... According to an Editor's Note in an edition of Toynbee's *A Study of History*, Toynbee believed that societies always die from suicide or murder rather than from natural causes, and nearly always from suicide.

<sup>22</sup> The populist claim is the later as it could be seem in the space of only one generation by a sufficiently old and attentive observer. There would be millions of foreigners that do not wish to integrate and to the contrary would endeavor to impose “submission” on us, the decadent society, as the famous roman of Houllebeck put it. They have been coming for millions in a slow, almost unnoticed “invasion”, they claim. Their arrival, on the one hand, would have favored the rich businessmen that employed them as cheaper labor and, on the other hand, also came as a sort of penance for “progressists” who felt regrets for our European past and sometimes even a certain trend to self-annihilation. At first, many said: well, this is a question of anti-Christian fellows who want a fully secular Europe and to eradicate all vestiges of the Christian roots of the continent. But now it is the very Pope, who came from other land, who cries out for humanitarian corridors for numberless refugees. Charity and blindfullness at is best, claim the extreme right: It would be suicidal to support mass immigration in Europe of people of another religion that not only does not adopt the old faith of the Europeans but that they will not wish to integrate culturally and, paradoxically, could end by cutting the necks of those who opened the doors to them. They advocate that it is better that everyone stays in his own house and the good God in all of them

<sup>23</sup> Mudde 2004, cited by Vašečka, op. cit.



he might be moderating his views or maybe not. Who knows? Maybe he had agreed with his 'pal' Putin on a new sort of Yalta Agreement to share Europe again in two or three spheres of influence. In Yalta, there were also the British and although they are much weaker now and do not have Churchill anymore, they still want to preserve the financial center of the world in London. For that they need to weaken or make the EU disintegrate.<sup>2425</sup>

There must be something else in a much greater context. The conspiracy theorists say that there is an interest in the deep cenacles of power to undo or weaken Europe and everything that smacks of the old Roman Imperium. The continental integration would be no longer useful. It served just as one more step in the accelerated path to globalization. The European Union, according to these distressed "conspiranooids" would have to disintegrate further in order to advance towards achieving a European melting pot of Asiatic, African and Caucasian populations organized on the basis of some sort of religious, ethnic and cultural syncretism and ruled by a very small minority elite.<sup>26</sup> This translates to a new amorphous magma of individuals isolated and malleable without nation or family, without criteria or tradition, with no identity or capacity to resist.

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<sup>24</sup> It is not surprising that a nationalist British leader fiercely anti-European like the quintessential populist Nigel Farage has publicly criticized Spain on the Catalanian issue, thus supporting secession. Catalonia would have, in their view, a domino effect. How could afterwards Macron stop a referendum in Corsica or Bretagne? Or the Belgians stop the self-determination of Flanders or the UK that of Scotland, Italy the efforts to split of the so called Padania in the north and so on and so forth.

<sup>25</sup> Although they are not the most serious or likeable of analysts, see in that regard the last editorial of the humoristic Charlie Hebdo criticizing the new nationalist obsessions both at the right and at the left titled "STUPIDITY OR DEATH": The referendum organized in Catalonia for its independence gives the shivers to Europe. If all the European regions that have an original language, history, or culture begin to reclaim their independence, the old continent is going to fragment as the polar ice cap under the effects of global warming. Since there are some two hundred languages in Europe, why not create two hundred new countries? And why not proclaim so many declarations of independence such as cheeses and wines are in Europe? Independence, Yes, but would with respect to what? Independence is legitimate when one wants to get rid of the tyranny or oppression. Of which tragic destiny want today to get released the Catalans?...Now, when Franco is no longer, they must find another tyrant to pull down. It will be the Spanish State and, of course, the worst dictatorship ever known in the world: the EU based in Brussels. Behind that splendid word, independence, less noble concerns are hidden sometimes. As with the Northern League in Italy, always the richest regions demand it. Catalonia wants independence because it no longer wants to release money to the other Spanish regions less wealthy than her...It is as if we done again the voice of the wretched Margaret Thatcher: "I want my money back". The language, the culture, the traditions are very good for postcards, but the money is much better. The poor regions of Europe rarely come down to street to obtain their independence...

It is curious to hear some voices on the left claim the independence of a region like Catalonia in the name of a cultural identity, which, by the way, nobody is questioning. And, furthermore, why...the words 'identity' or 'culture' sound good when the left pronounce them, but become infamous when the right and the extreme right pronounce them? Obsession with identity that expands throughout Europe as a rotten fruit affects not only the far right but also the left. Nationalism on the right and the left have one point in common: nationalism.

<sup>26</sup> Thus fulfilling what they call the Kalergi *Plan* as stated in the book *Praktischer Idealismus* (Practical Idealism), written in 1925, where Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, the very same author of the 1923 Pan- Europa manifesto, founding stone of the European integration, describes the future of European racial composition with the following words: The man of the future will be of mixed race. Today's races and classes will gradually disappear owing to the vanishing of space, time, and prejudice. The Eurasian-Negroid race of the future, similar in its appearance to the Ancient Egyptians, will replace the diversity of peoples with a diversity of individuals.

## CONCLUSION

Before the rise of "populism" in several European countries, the national and European leaders had been concerned to defend the values and the EU achievements should not simply call for vigilance, or ridicule or downplay the newcomers. They would be well advised to do some soul-searching and accordingly correct their policies and how they implement them. The populisms of all kinds and their extremist progenies are at work and they are a big risk for the EU and for democracy: they prey in the fog of Europhobia and nationalism and make Brussels the scapegoat for most calamities, national or continental. Unfortunately, this fits some mediocre politicians that blame Brussels when some policy goes wrong and take the credit if it succeeds.

Nevertheless, and concluding in a nutshell, as Professor Dani Rodrik put it with his famous globalization "trilemma"<sup>27</sup>, there cannot be the three factors together at the same time: national sovereignty, democratic politics including a socio-economic advanced welfare state, and hyper-globalization. And as I wrote before, the only possible sovereignty in our old continent that can stand world's fierce competition and the Pacific surge as the economic powerhouse of the world is the EU. There should be an enormous pedagogical effort to persuade our population that we do not need to get rid of Europe but to get more Europe. But for that it should be a Europe in which they feel comfortable in and with which they can identify themselves. We have to protect both the Europe of democracy, human rights, the Rule of Law and the welfare state and also the Europe of our culture and traditions forged during millennia and strongly rooted on three pillars: the Greek philosophical rationality, the Roman approach to Law, Order and Justice and, above all, the Christian religion and its ethics.

If we renounce to that "European civilizational package", as do many populists, nationalists and extremists but also many established rulers and elites, if we bury our beliefs and abandon our principles, if we forget our history, we will repeat the mistakes our ancestors did, we will lose our soul and our civilization would vanish.

Jose Felix Merladet

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<sup>27</sup> Rodrik, Dani "The inescapable trilemma of the world economy". June 27, 2007"