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**Populism in Europe  
An Overview**

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# Populism in Europe An Overview

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## **Preface**

Populism as such is not new in the dictionaries of political and cultural sciences. The history of humankind is relatively rich in people and movements trying to convince people that simple and simplifying answers on complex questions may work. But in the last five or so years, there is a resurgence of populism across continents, societies and traditional political cleavages. As Brexit, the current U.S. administration and many other events demonstrate, populism is shaping and influencing the political processes in Europe and far beyond.

Against this background, the Center for Global Politics ([www.global-politics.org](http://www.global-politics.org)) of Freie Universität Berlin organized a roundtable event for the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) which took place last fall (2017) in Chicago. The topic of this event was „Populism in Eastern Europe“. The idea was to analyze empirical examples of populism in Eastern Europe and beyond, to discuss with the attending audience definitorial questions, possible reasons for the populist success, advantages and limits of comparing populism in different contexts, and to highlight the possibilities to make a broader comparison of the phenomena cross-regionally.

The following CGP working paper is a follow-up result of the roundtable initiative. Some of the roundtable participants decided present their updated papers to a broader (not only) academic public. We hope that the research endeavors evolving around the topic of populism will prosper in the upcoming years. and we hope that this CGP working paper can contribute to this evolving discussion.

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Berlin, September 2018

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## Introduction 'Populism in Europe'

This introduction offers reflections on causes of populism; about its core messages; about the forms of populist agitation; about the effects of populism, and about its future. Certain dimensions of the current debate on populism are particularly interesting because they are not (yet) as inflationary as other features of populism. These dimensions will be presented below, before we move on with four studies on the more concrete dimensions of populist policies and trends in (mostly) Eastern Europe.

1 There is considerable *heterogeneity* when it comes to defining populism. As always when there is a concept debated intensely and emotionally (see totalitarianism, autocracy, globalization, civil society, democracy, social capital ...), there are those who suggest concrete definitions - but, unfortunately, there is an abundance of definitions. Others say that there is 'nothing new' and that the respective issue has always been around. Still others argue that there is 'nothing new' because the issue at hand is a sub-concept to something else (as, in our case, to democracy, or right-wing extremism).

I do not share these attempts to downplay the relevance both of the phenomenon of populism and the term. The issue as we are facing it now is relatively new, it is relevant, even powerful, and worthy of academic consideration. But we should accept the observation that we are rather facing populisms, using the plural form (Grzymala-Busse 2017, 54).

While there are plenty of debates and controversies around populism as a concept, a few features that seem to be matters of consent, or at least the core differences are clearly visible.<sup>1</sup>

2 The first issue to be mentioned relates to the *demand side of the populist phenomenon*. There is a lot of thinking and writing about the supply side, i.e., what it is that populists offer, what groups and parties are involved and how they act, and the role of charismatic individuals. But all this is mostly about changing frames for enhancing visibility and support, and as such is not that interesting. The other side, i.e. why are growing numbers of the electorate longing for what the populists offer, is less researched - and, as is argued here, much more relevant.

The answer is well known, but not so well documented. The current wave of populism most likely correlates with the increasing uncertainties felt by many people across different types of societies, fueled by various effects of globalization. Uncertainties about the prospects of educational, professional, social, cultural, economic challenges and identities in global times are on the rise. As Roger Cohen puts it, 'Disorientation spreads' (Cohen 2018a).

The monthly survey of the Allensbach Institute in Germany recently produced figures that two thirds of the respondents were under the impression that 'nothing is moving forward, and that no problem is really being solved' (Köcher 2018). Many citizens harbor 'doubts whether political decision-making processes can be accelerated significantly': 38% think that this is not possible, and an additional 17% are sure that it is not - due to 'complexity, divergent interests, and frequent crises' (Köcher 2018).

As for the U.S., especially two books make this point by giving voice to those Americans who voted for Trump and may have had a reason for it, and who probably will vote for him again in two years. Both *The Great Revolt* and *Hillbilly Elegy* provide deeper portraits of people especially from the Midwest, the rustbelt and Appalachia. In these books, they report on, or at least offer a glimpse of their

<sup>1</sup> For good overviews, see Gidron and Bonikowski 2013, and Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017

experiences of deterioration – of lost communities, jobs, hopes and values – without glorifying them. These sober and often depressing presentations of mentally displaced (but not insane) people are impressive; they lead to a disturbing question: how is it that these displaced people were unrecognized for so long by elites in general, particularly the liberal ones in the U.S. and also in Europe? There were (and are) societies in growing disarray, and liberals couldn't provide convincing and meaningful answers. They didn't even listen.

Other data corroborate these observations. American society is approaching a situation where whites will no longer constitute a majority of the population. This trend will have 'broad implications for identity and for the country's political and economic life, transforming a mostly white baby boomer society into a multiethnic and racial patchwork' (Tavernise 2018). A parallel indicator, a tragic one, concerns the suicide rate: '(t)he suicide rate for middle-aged women, ages 45 to 64, jumped by 63 percent over the period of the study (the last 30 years, KS), while it rose by 43 percent for men in that age range, the sharpest increase for males of any age. The overall suicide rate rose by 24 percent from 1999 to 2014' (Tavernise 2016). Suicide rates 'rose in all but one state between 1999 and 2016', and suicide has been identified as a 'public health issue'. While suicides were on the rise everywhere, the 'increase was higher for white males than any other race or gender group' (Ellis Nutt 2018). Also, (t)he data analysis provided fresh evidence of suffering among white Americans. Recent research has highlighted the plight of less educated whites, showing surges in deaths from drug overdoses, suicides, liver disease and alcohol poisoning, particularly among those with a high school education or less (Tavernise 2016).

At the same time, 'whites – and, in particular, less educated whites – will still make up the bulk of eligible voters in the country for a while'. They will make up 44% of eligible voters in 2020 (Tavernise 2018).

The demand for national populism is going to stay around, beyond Trump and Brexit, because it is directly correlated with globally emerging uncertainties, and simultaneously with lost images and values, and shattered identities.

3 Small wonder that at least in Western societies, we see a '*rising distrust in democratic institutions*' (Brechenmacher 2018). The degree of this dissatisfaction certainly varies, but in the U.S., Hungary, France, Italy, Spain and Greece, it is higher than 50%. In the UK and Poland, it is in the mid-40th percentile. Trust in political parties in Southern Europe is at an all-time low. The trust in media in EU societies is also very low (except in Finland and Portugal). Many citizens complain about 'partisan polarization and gridlock' (Brechenmacher 2018, 5-16).

Findings from the 2018 'Democracy Perception Index' show that an 'astonishing 64% of citizens living in democracies responded their government 'rarely' or 'never' acts in the interest of the public' (Alliance of Democracies 2018, 2). Other findings are that '(c)itizens in democracies are the most disillusioned', '(c)itizens in democracies don't feel their voice matters', etc. (Alliance of Democracies 2018, 2).

It would be a surprise if populists didn't exploit such a ripe situation of disillusionment. The traditional parties in many countries have turned from being part of the solution to emerging problems to being part of the problem – at least in the eyes of a growing number of citizens. Especially socialist and social democratic parties are threatened by extinction in many European societies.

4 Another relevant and partly overlooked issue is the *global dimension of populism*. There is surely a lot of interest in the relationship between democracy – by definition state-centered and mostly a domestic phenomenon – and populism. Questions arise about whether populism is compatible with

democracy, and whether a de-legitimization of the established democratic parties in Western countries may have assisted the rise of populism. These questions are often linked with debates on an alleged representation crisis (Mastropaolo 2017, 61 ff.).

In comparison, there is relatively little debate on populism as a reaction to trends in the international, or, rather, global context. This dimension deserves much more attention and will be addressed below.

It is clear, however, that globally induced economic, political and social as well as cultural opportunities and constraints are often too multifaceted to be comprehended in detail by many citizens. Many issues and events are too complex to be grasped easily: examples include the end of the East-West conflict (1989-91), the attack on the New York Twin Towers (2001), the financial crisis (2007-09), and the Chernobyl and Fukushima accidents (1986/ 2011). *This complexity produces uncertainties.*

Many issues on the agenda of governments, cities, corporations and NGOs cannot be understood quickly: climate change; high-frequency trading; different types of migration; the role of algorithms in social networks; the effects of sanctions; WTO rules for trading; the parameters of the conflict in the South-China Sea; the intricacies of the eternal troubles between Israel and Palestine in the Near East; the background of failing states in the MENA area; the motivation of elites in Scotland, Catalonia, the Kurdish parts of Iraq, Syria and Turkey, and many others, to 'go it alone'; the attractiveness of weapons of mass destruction; the role of media in politics today; the interrelations among demographics, social security and education; and so on. The simultaneous pressure of these and other challenges is difficult to sort out for specialists, let alone for ordinary, or not so well educated citizens.

The lack of understanding of these issues, together with the ruptures and disjunctures resulting from accelerated globalization, produce uncertainties and irritations that constitute the demand side of populism.

The more these challenges accumulate, and the higher the level of perceived uncertainties, the easier it is for populists to 'sell' their panacea solutions and their false promises.

5 While populism is a global phenomenon, the *'illiberal backlash' is an all-European phenomenon*. As in almost all other parts of the world, democracy has been in retreat since 2007. Still, Europe was and is not a 'developing' or 'emerging' area; rather it is considered to have been the birthplace democracy some 2500 years ago. Admittedly, in the 20th century it was also the location of some of the biggest atrocities in the history of humankind. A recent Carnegie study found that 'Democracy in Europe is in decline... When weighted by population, the trend is much more apparent. ... the level of democracy in Europe has fallen back forty years, to where it was in 1978' (Lindberg 2018, 4). After 2012, all five parameters – the indices of liberal democracy, judicial constraints, electoral democracy, legislative constraints, and rule of law – are going down. (Lindberg 2018, 4).

*But in this context, the backsliding is still more visible in Eastern Europe* – whatever this means today.<sup>2</sup> One piece of a possible explanation is that the citizens of EEC countries had the impression that their governments were more 'rule-takers, than rule-makers' in the EU (Tilford 2018).

Another factor is that the former 'partners', 'satellites' or otherwise designated former Soviet republics hardly had time to realize that they had finally gained formal sovereignty in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when they were swallowed by the effects of an all-encompassing, powerful wave of accelerated globalization. This was one reason (and a good one) for taking refuge in the EU. But

2 Let's pragmatically assume that this refers to the former Soviet Union minus Russia and Central Asia, and East Central Europe as defined during the Cold War.

it also meant that the 'maturing' phase of the East Central European countries, once they gained formal sovereignty (only) after the demise of the USSR in 1991, didn't last very long. Soon after, the attractiveness of the EU (financial, political or institutional) led in a couple of cases to early adoption of parts of the 'Acquis Communautaire', and not much later, to membership. Ever since, sovereignty has been constrained once more – this time by voluntarily transferring it upward to the EU. However, for many citizens, the differences in their relation to an overriding authority (first that of the Soviet Union and later that of the EU) may be perceived as a matter of degree, and not of substance.

The nostalgic longing for sovereignty, composed by compiling historical fragments, ethnic 'we-ness', real and constructed otherness, opens the doors wide for populist story telling: 'You deserve better'. And 'you can get something better'.

6 A related contextual factor is that the *strength of traditional signifiers of other collective identities is eroding*. The relative downgrading of nation state status and of social class relevance opens spaces for alternative identity markers. There are useful ones, with analytical potential, like scapes (Appadurai 1996), or problematic and rather confusing ones, like Volk (not to be confused with nation).

This erosion of the classical collective identity concepts means that people who are irritated and angry about (real or imagined) ruptures and disjunctions and challenged identities, perceived unjust distribution patterns, or threatened entitlements, are searching for new collective denominations that allow them to develop group feelings. These groups of angry disenfranchised people – with injured identities, sensing social decline and feeling abandoned by the traditional elites and political stakeholders - need to share their rage and to channel their confusion. These people are open to the allures of populist recipes and promises. And this is a mostly cultural process, though often also fueled by economic trends.

The less convincing the old identity markers become, the more spaces open up for recalibrating collective identities toward identity politics, which is exploited in turn by populists.

7 For sure, *economic conditions and experiences are important drivers on the demand side of populism*. The global division of labor, differences in wages and knowledge, the emergence of global chains of production, distribution, logistics and consumption have consequences especially for the workers in the old established industrial societies. Where this has not been anticipated in a timely way and accompanied by programs of re-training and programs of innovative diversification (as in parts of the German Ruhrgebiet and in areas of Detroit), people are sinking into despair, with many turning to opioids, or scrambling desperately to keep their dignity by redefining themselves as some special tribe. This is especially the case when they are, or feel, lectured to by media and told that their traditional habits and values are useless, illiterate, incorrect and out of sync. These facts matter, as much as do perceptions of decline and loss which arguably are even more powerful.

At this point, there is a fusion of economic malaise and cultural insistence, and it turns out that *identity issues are at least as relevant* as economic ones. This is what the Brexiteers, the Trump campaigners, the Putinistas and the AfD activists have correctly recognized. They just had to feed the hunger for a clear and dignified sense of belonging. While possible economic downgrading may trigger rage and fear, its conversion into cultural challenges produces anger and resistance. At the end of the day, economic grievances can, or could be solved or alleviated by redistributing funds; culturally founded emotions cannot.

A recent study by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, considering sets of data for both economic insecurity and cultural backlashes, concludes that '(l)ess educated and older citizens, especially white

men, who were once the privileged majority culture in Western societies, resent being told that traditional values are 'politically incorrect' (Inglehart, Norris 2016, 29) if they have come to feel that they are being marginalized within their own countries'. Their evidence, they continue, shows that 'the rise of populist parties reflects, above all, a reaction against a wide range of rapid cultural changes that seem to be eroding the basic values and customs of Western societies' (Inglehart, Norris 2016, 30).

'Overall', they conclude, there is 'consistent evidence supporting the cultural backlash thesis' (Inglehart, Norris 2016, 1). Identity politics is the crucial component of the populist renaissance, contributing more to the renaissance of populism than economic and social changes (though these also contribute, to be sure).

In a nutshell, identity politics is a concept for 'political mobilization not through a party, an ideology or economic interests, but through markers of one's own identity like skin color, sex/gender or sexuality' (Spiegel 2018, 20 (my translation)). While this concept usually is reserved for nonwhite and LGBT minorities, it very well may be applied to white workers as well. 'Black lives matter', of course. But this quickly may lead to the conclusion that 'White lives matter, too'. Both are 'right', of course; but also, both are pointless, when shouted against each other.

It turns out to be a major *mistake to assume that identity politics and tribalism can appear only in non-white societies*, or groups. In his famous New York Times article in November of 2017, Mark Lilla outlines his idea that the Democrats, by turning away from their traditional electorate, the white working class, and rather supporting entitlements for minorities – African Americans, immigrants, LGBT groups, the small number of females on corporate boards - in the end didn't collect enough support among these minorities and lost the votes of the white workers as well (Lilla 2017). This partial 'betrayal' may also be diagnosed for European Social Democrats. With a few exceptions, they find themselves caught in voting ranges under 20% or even in one-digit traps.

As a result, tribalism 'returns now as identity politics, which is the reactionary reversion to the premodern world' (Brooks 2018). From populists' perspective, their activities are a 'form of identity politics because it's based on in-group/out-group distinctions' (Brooks 2018) which brings us back to the romantic notion of the people 'that automatically ostracizes everybody who belongs to a nation but harbors different ideas about its values and rules than populist scripts are telling us' (Brooks 2018).

The more the established patterns of cultural identities are weakened or challenged, the better the prospect for populist movements.

8 The core (but delusional) promise by populists of all sorts is to *offer simplified answers to complex challenges and problems*.

Typical rhetorical assertions employed by populist figures are: there is a growing gap between the 'elites' and the 'real' people; the 'mainstream media' are lying; and they, the representatives of populist parties and movements (often with an elite background) are representing the 'real people'.

As Grzymala-Busse (2017) and others have outlined, there are a couple with problems with this 'loose talking about the people': Mostly, this remains an abstract category, without clearly defining who this assumed entity incorporates; secondly, 'those who disagree with a populist representation of 'the people' are obviously not the 'real' nation; and thirdly, populists assume a popular rule to be 'unmediated and direct'; more often than not, populists have an 'anti-institutional predisposition' (Grzymala-Busse 2017, 53).

9 But their main argumentation is organized around the *malfunctioning of governments and states*.

Typical substantial issues are transnational trade ('killing jobs'), unregulated immigration ('killing jobs', and modifying the composition of a Volk), and (in Europe) the erosion of national sovereignty by the EU ('taking away national independence') (Grzymala-Busse 2017, 55). All these issues are linked with the blurring of borders, or the transfer of sovereignty upwards (mostly voluntary to the EU and UN and WTO), downwards (global cities, NGOs), or sideward (markets) (Pierre, Peters, 77).

The solution seems to be easy: National borders must be strengthened, international organizations weakened, and multilateralism destroyed, and everything will be fine.<sup>3</sup> While the role and performance of nation states is decreasing on a broad scale and across continents due to the power of global flows moving across borders, populists are singing the romantic song of the advantages of state sovereignty, and they promise to make good use of it. They flatly deny that the traditional model of Westphalian nation states is in crisis (and along with it, also the welfare state). And they do whatever they can to belittle, criticize, weaken, and damage the liberal international order (Luce 2018).

This corresponds with many peoples' irritation about the existing legitimacy of their governments – people go and vote on a national scale, while many challenges are emerging from transnational or global sources. Naturally, many of these governments are underperforming. The nation state cannot deliver on many counts, thus causing disappointment. This disappointment is redirected by populists against the traditional elites and individuals, disguising the fact that the core problem is a structural one, not one associated with specific elite groups or persons. The more problematic the performance of classical nation states becomes, the more successful populists' rhetoric will be.

10 Populism is *directly attacking liberalism both on a national and global scale*. Domestically, populist actors increase the pressure on 'the elites' by calling for more referenda, and they emotionalize people before elections. To the extent that this is effective, even core pillars of liberal democratic politics and institutions can be voted down, for example, the independence of the judiciary in Poland and of the media in Hungary; the lack of civility and respect on the part of the current U.S. administration for other, especially minority, opinions.

This has already happened with the referenda on the draft EU constitution in 2005 in France and the Netherlands; in the Brexit case, in 2016; by emotionalizing the American presidential elections (aided by the use of micro census data based on social networks) in 2016; in the referendum in the Netherlands on the economic association of Ukraine with the EU, also in 2016; and to some extent also with the emergence of Beppe Grillo's Five Star movement and of the Lega Nord in Italy, where in the spring of 2018 half of the country voted populist. Syriza, Podemos, AfD are phenomena along the same lines, and they also have a liking for referenda (Syriza got one, in 2015, against a new round of austerity politics, won it and ignored the outcome). Populists can win referenda and elections, and they may threaten democracy. Proponents of liberal democratic values may lose and find themselves on the defensive. And, so far, there is no response to this prospect – except improving the work of the media and educational organizations.

11 One of the most interesting aspects of the current 'domestic' and global developments is the *applicability of Robert Putnam's 'Two Level Games' to the recent rise of populism*.

Putnam's idea is basically that most international agreements achieved by diplomats representing nation states (sitting around table one) become valid only after some kind of domestic ratification, formally or informally (table two). The number of all possible agreements on table one that

3 This also may occur by the seceding of territories from former states, as in the case of Spain/ Catalonia, or possibly in Belgium.

may be ratified on table two – he calls a win-set (each country has its own, and it may vary, i.e. grow or shrink).

A country with a strong or growing veto player like a populist movement or party that positions itself against an international topic hereby decreases the win-set for this issue, making it less likely that a ratification at table two can be found, thereby deranging the whole deal.

By putting additional pressure on national governments (as well as on the EU), populists are actually reducing the win-sets their governments may have in international negotiations, thereby weakening the standing of these governments and countries even more (two-level game effects) (Putnam 1988). The focus on sovereignty and national borders works as an advantage for populists: They simply ignore the weakening of states, while actually contributing to it.

Examples are Hungary's intransigence in refusing to accept the EU quotas for refugees (under the domestic pressure of Jobbik); the last-minute delay of the EU-Canada trade agreement CETA, due to opposition from the regional parliament in Wallonia, Belgium (though in the end, the agreement was signed); the insistence of Brexiteers on reclaiming sovereignty from Brussels, President Trump's furor directed at global and international treaties, displayed in order to please his electorate; the German government's hesitance to accept a mutualization of EU bonds; the new Italian government's resistance to accept boats with asylum seekers (to name just a few).

This mechanism – the impact of domestic stakeholders on a government's external behavior – may work independently of what kind of government is in power, and even be relevant for populist regimes.

12 The expectation (or hope) that populists emerging from their movement phase and evolving into governing forces will delegitimize and disavow themselves is unfounded. They cannot easily be unmasked. More often than not, they tend to keep election promises and to disregard institutional safeguards against rule violations. This pertains to both formal and informal rules (Peters 2017; Grzymala-Busse 2017, 56; FES, 2017).

Obviously, '(t)his tribal mentality (see above, KS) is tearing the civic fabric and creates a war of what Goldberg thinks of as "ecstatic schadenfreude" – the exaltation people feel when tribal foes are brought down' (Brooks 2018). This is pretty much the opposite of a civil society and the institutional foundations of liberal (or, for that matter, all democratic) societies.

The long-range effects of this type of tribal populism, in Europe and beyond, are hard to predict, and difficult to overestimate. A review article by the Economist at the beginning of this year came to the conclusion that 'the populist tide will continue to rise'. Joist van Spanje, from the University of Amsterdam, who analyzed 296 post-1945 European elections, has found 'that, in general, welcoming formerly ostracized parties into the mainstream tends not to reduce their support' (Economist 2018, 18).

One of the sharpest critics of the current political developments under the influence of populists, Roger Cohen, saw a relation to politics that considered themselves as "without alternative" – like Angela Merkel in 2015: 'The resurgent nationalists and nativists insist there are alternatives – alternatives to openness, to mass migration, to free trade, to secularism, to Europe's ever closer union, to the legalization of same-sex marriage, to gender as a spectrum, to diversity, to human rights (Cohen 2018).

13 Behind this uncertain state of affairs, which still leaves open the option of a later return to a liberal order, waits another, even more disturbing question: namely *whether 'our liberal vision sufficiently account(s) for people's fears and passions, collective bonds and traditions, trust, love, and bigotries'*

(Zielonka 2018, quoted from Wolf 2018). Zielonka also muses on whether the 'institutional pillars of political representation have crumbled: politics have become oligarchic; and the media mere purveyors of entertainment'. In addition, 'national democracies cannot control a transnational market economy', leading to the question of '(h)ow the democratic ideal [is] to be made real in the contemporary world?' (Wolf 2018). Lilla adds some major social changes to the challenges a liberal social order has to take into account: 'We are no longer those we once were. Couples get divorced, kids are single kids, half of our existence is happening in the Internet, and we, as a community, have been fragmented.' (Oehmke 2018, 23 (my translation)).

Leaving aside for a moment the worrisome aspect of reversibility of populist gains (not only in electoral votes, but also through institutional changes), an emerging hegemony of populists (also in the Gramscian sense) in the European landscapes would have significant effects: 'One might expect more authoritarian law-and-order policies, burqa bans, greater opposition to multilateral bodies like EU, NATO and the WTO, and greater sympathy for Russia... Expect too, frequent referendums, less well integrated immigrants, more polarized political debates and more demagogic leaders emoting directly to and on behalf of their devoted voters' (The Economist 2018, 19).

14 Recent trends in the programs of national populist movements and parties indicate that *leading populists are very well aware of growing social cleavages*, once more due to national effects of globalization, and accelerated by processes like automatization and artificial intelligence. There will be more disruptions in labor markets, for example. So it is remarkable that parties which were (wrongly) labelled as 'rightist' come up with quite 'leftist' social remedies in their programs (Hank 2018). This is not only the case with the German AfD, but also in the new Italian governing coalition between the ('rightist') Lega, and the ('leftist') Five Star movement (Piller 2018) (as well as in the Greek case between the 'leftist' Syriza and the far-'rightist' 'Independent Greeks'). Populists are very well able to selectively compile social, economic and cultural themes from traditional parties, for which this often is a 'kiss of death' (especially for the socialist European parties).

15 An important side effect of this is that there is *no primary difference between (traditionally) left and right populism*. Both camps are very much in favor of strengthening borders. Both harbor illusions about the strength of nation states today. Both have problems analyzing the effects of globalization properly. Both have an ideal-type vision of a nation state, meandering somehow between Karl Marx and Carl Schmidt. Globalization and global flows make states smaller and more competitive with each other. In Europe, sovereignty has been transferred voluntarily to the EU bodies so that the EU is quite well positioned to cope with global effects.

Also, in current political debates, 'right' and 'left' parties tend to overlap in their analysis and their recipes. At least those parts of the traditional left that cater more to their (literally) old voters tend to be as critical about immigration and trade as the populist right (Rooduijn, Akkerman 2017). Voters' movements between them confirm that these notions are shared.

So populists offer political recipes that converge toward traditional left and right positions. This is the reason why the classic extreme parties keep attacking each other, and hate the populist groupings.

16 A (not irrelevant) postscript is devoted to the *style that populists use in their communication*. With rare exceptions, incivility, rudeness and lies carry the day, combined with hollow promises (Peters 2017). For a graphic selection of examples, see the paradigmatic comment by Roger Cohen, 'Moral Rot threatens America' where, among other observations he juxtaposes Donald Trump and John McCain,

concluding that '(a) universe where morality ceases is the one in which Trump is most comfortable' (Cohen 2018b).

Experts, politicians and the media – none of us have short and convincing answers to the populist allures. We are unaccustomed to responding in kind, and, as a result, appear weak in public debates. In addition, social networks are amplifiers for populism.

These style-related considerations are relevant as well.

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## **Populism in Ukraine and Europe: Similar but Also Different**

The term populist has been applied to a heterogeneous group of political groups ranging from the anti-globalisation left to the nationalist right opposed to immigration, those who see globalisation as Americanisation, and advocates of a third way between capitalism and socialism.

The existence of populism on the left and right in European politics is visibly seen in Britain where open and disguised support for Brexit exists in the Conservative and Labour party respectfully. Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn opposed UK membership of the EU in the 1970s and provided weak support for the Remain camp in the Brexit referendum.

Populist political parties have moved from the margins to the mainstream since the 1990s in Europe and the US and are in power in coalitions in many EU member states. In its early years, France's Front National, the British National Party (BNP) and some other political parties were linked to skinheads and racist attacks but in the last two decades this has become less frequent. Modern-day populist nationalist parties have become more successful because they have adopted a more respectable image; the UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) has been described as 'BNP in suits.' Front National moderated its image under the leadership of Marie Le Pen in a similar manner to the transition of the neo-Nazi SNPU (Social National Party of Ukraine) to the populist-nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) party in 2004 under the leadership of Oleh Tyahnybok. Violence is occasionally used by populist nationalist parties today in Europe, such as during anti-migrant rallies in August-September 2018 in Germany, but not as frequent as in the past. The Party of Regions never could shake off its criminal roots and penchant for violence. During Yanukovich's presidency in 2010-2014, violence in the Ukrainian parliament and through the use of vigilantes on the streets were the precursor to the massive use of state-led violence against protestors during the Euromaidan Revolution of Dignity (Shukan, 2013, Leshchenko, 2014, Kuzio, 2014b, 2015).

Ivan Krastev (2006) identifies four key areas for populism. These include anti-corruption rhetoric, anti-elite sentiments, hostility to privatisation, and efforts to reverse the social inequalities arising from the transition from a communist economic system to a market economy. All four of these factors are to be found in Ukrainian populism, especially the first two factors. Social inequalities have dramatically grown since 1991 in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states, coupled with in a decline in average life expectancy, visibly high levels of corruption and stagnating standards of living. All of these factors have mobilised support for Ukrainian populists (Protsenko, 2018).

The first section of this article will discuss populism from a theoretical and comparative perspective. The second section will discuss how Ukrainian populism is both different and similar to populism found in Europe. Immigration, nationalism, Islam and the EU are important factors found in European but not in Ukrainian populism. Ukrainian and European populists have similar traits in being anti-globalist, their radical rhetoric against corruption, elites and the 'establishment,' their undemocratic nature, weak support for reforms, being economical with the truth and chameleons on ideology and keen to instrumentalise crises as a way of securing power.

## 1. Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives on Populism

There is a diverse scholarly literature on populism that has attempted to grapple with a vague concept that encompasses the left and right of the political spectrum. Most of the scholarly work on populism has focused on Latin America and more recently on Europe with little written on the former USSR and barely no comparative work between Eurasia and Europe. There is little study of populism in Ukraine in its own right (Kuzio, 2010, 2012).

Cas Mudde's (2004) definition of populism is the most cited and focuses on, 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.' Anti-elitist and anti-establishment rhetoric permeates all forms of populism in Europe and Ukraine. Nevertheless, contradictions exist between this anti-establishment rhetoric and elitist leaders as practically all political parties in Ukraine are financed by oligarchs.

Ideology is a factor in European populism but not in Ukraine where political parties are weak, rarely ideologically driven and many of them are oligarchic-funded election projects (Kuzio, 2014a). Populist parties with charismatic leaders have greater chances to be electorally successful but these are rarely found in Ukraine. In the US and Europe, previously marginal and extreme right parties and ideologies have taken over the center-right or come to power in coalitions with them. Opposition to immigration and multiculturalism has spread from the far right to mainstream centre-right political parties (Kaufmann, 2018, p.224). In Ukraine, the nationalist right remains unpopular and the leaders of Ukraine's center-right political parties have repeatedly changed.

Pierre Ostiguy (2017) writes that in dividing the population into 'corrupt' elites and the 'people,' populists often accuse the former of being controlled by foreign powers. The IMF and EU are both viewed as undemocratic international organisations which threaten the national sovereignty of states.

Paul Taggart (2017) has discussed how crises lead to an increase in the popularity of populists. Ukraine has experienced economic, political and military crises since becoming independent in 1991 and each of these have been used by populists to mobilise votes. Ukrainian populists are adept at what Benjamin Moffit (2015) points to as the instrumentalisation of perceived crises and their exaggeration without the hard evidence to back up widely inaccurate claims. Ukrainian populists routinely use radical criticism of the 'authorities' without providing alternative policies and by manipulating or providing false data (Skubenko, 2017).

Populism in Europe can be seen as a reaction against rapid change with citizens feeling they are no longer in control of their destinies. Kaufmann (2018, p.224) believes it is wrong for liberals to believe that populism is supported by those left behind by globalisation because, 'populism stems, first and foremost, from ethnocultural anxiety.' Such feelings produce nostalgia for an earlier 'golden era.' 'The ideology of the moment is nativist nostalgia' (Polakow-Suransky, 2017). Populists in Ukraine and post-Soviet states promote nostalgia for the stability that existed in the USSR. Masha Gessen (2016, p.383) reminds us that the Nazi's and Soviets promised stability to camouflage their intention of 'creating a state of permanent instability.'

*Batkivshchina* (Fatherland) and Party of Regions and Opposition Bloc play on the frustrations and anger of 'transition losers' who are the basis for the support of both political forces. Yet, both political forces were and remain funded by 'transition winners' (oligarchs, tycoons) who used political office to become 'gentrified' (Kuzio 2014b). The poorest twenty percent of Ukraine's population will vote for Yulia Tymoshenko in the 2019 elections. These include Ukrainians with low incomes or who receive

the minimum wage, live in rural areas and small towns, and receive social welfare. (Bekeshkina, 2018).

For the Party of Regions, while the transition from gold chains, sports suits, and leather jackets to expensive suits and ostrich skin shoes took place, old habits of mass corruption and the wonton use of violence could not be so easily jettisoned. The Party of Regions relied on Soviet paternalism to mobilise voters who prioritised the economy and 'stability' over democracy. Patrimonial political culture in the Donbas and Crimea, and in other parts of eastern and southern Ukraine, perpetuated a paternalistic dependency of the working classes on elites and in so doing elevated collectivism over individualism and personal efficacy. The Party of Regions combined left-wing paternalism, Soviet nostalgia, and big business into a successful political machine (Kuzio, 2015, Kudelia and Kuzio, 2015).

For Eurasian authoritarian leaders, such as former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and Russian President Vladimir Putin, stability represents discipline and the ability to get things done. The Party of Regions abhorred 'chaos' and described Viktor Yushchenko presidency as 'orange lawlessness.' Stability is a key element of 'democracy,' Yanukovich adamantly believed. The Party of Regions 2006 election program prioritised 'stability, well-being, and development perspectives' and Prime Minister Yanukovich promised he would install 'order' in the country. The Party of Regions 2007 pre-term election programme was titled 'Stability and Well Being' and during the campaign, Yanukovich emphasised his party's principles as the 'renewal of justice and victory to the political forces which work for stability.' A U.S. diplomatic cable from Kyiv reported, 'Yanukovich repeated again and again that the priority for the Party of Regions is stability' (Ukraine: Yanukovich Suggests Regions Won't Accept Orange, 2007). Party of Regions parliamentary coalitions were called Stability and Well Being (2006–2007) and Stability and Reforms (2010–2012). In the 2012 election campaign, the Party of Regions used billboards with 'From Stability to Prosperity,' 'Stability Has Been Achieved!' and 'Chaos Has Been Overcome. Stability Has Been Achieved!'

Scholars have emphasised the anti-democratic nature of populists (Berman, 2016). Jan-Werner Müller (2015) writes it is, 'crucial to understand that populists are not simply anti-elitist: they are also necessarily anti-pluralist.' Stefan Rummens (2017) adds that the most dangerous feature of populism is a firm belief only they are right and a disrespect for alternative opinions.

Populists are often derisive about formal politics and parliaments believing them to be 'corrupt,' controlled by an unaccountable elite and not reflecting the will of the 'people.' Ukrainian populists are weak on parliamentary attendance and voting. The Committee of Voters of Ukraine calculated that in May 2018, Tymoshenko and Opposition Bloc MP Yuriy Boyko attended only one and six percent respectively of parliamentary proceedings (Committee of Voters, 2018).

## **2. Populism in Ukraine and Europe**

Populism in Ukraine, and the former USSR, displays characteristics that are commonly found in Europe as well as those that make it different. This section first discusses how populism in Ukraine does not possess four characteristics commonly found in European populists (Mylovanov, 2015). These include hostility to immigration, electorally popular populist-nationalists, anti-Islamic xenophobia, and the EU viewed as a threat to national sovereignty.

Nostalgia in Europe and the US for the white nation-state that allegedly existed before the influx of Asian and Islamic immigrants is different to the nostalgia for the Soviet Union. Although both are based on a longing for the past, nostalgia for European populists and nationalists is a throwback to the pre-immigrant era when their countries were more ethnically homogenous, coloured and

Islamic minorities did not exist, men were in charge and women knew their place in the social and family hierarchy. In Europe, this nostalgia is found among the older generation and 'globalisation losers.' Nostalgia for a more ethnically homogenous nation promoted by populist nationalists is often a counter-reaction to multiculturalism and immigration that are seen to be weakening the bonds of the nation-state. None of the above factors are applicable to Ukraine.

Immigration is not an issue in Ukrainian elections because the country is a transit route for migrants seeking to travel to Western Europe. Those fleeing wars, conflicts and socio-economic hardship do not view Ukraine as a place to settle as asylum seekers travelling from Asia use the former USSR and Ukraine as transit routes to reach the EU. Ukraine has 1.7 million Internally Displaced Persons from the Donbas who have fled the war and resettled in other regions. Ukraine is not a member of the EU and has no quotas for refugees and asylum seekers of the kind that have led to the growth of support for populist nationalists in Italy, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Austria and Germany. Racism against Roma exists, and racist attacks do occasionally occur against black and Asian people, but these are rare.

European populist nationalists, fascist and neo-Nazi parties, as well as the far-left, are pro-Russian and pro-Putin which is not the case in Ukraine even prior to 2014. Pro-Russian sentiments are especially pronounced in Austria (FPO [Freedom Party of Austria]), France (Front National), Germany (AfD [Alternative Germany]), Italy (Northern League), Belgium (VB [Flemish Block]) and Greece (Golden Dawn). Italy's Northern League, which has been described by Anton Shekhovtsov (2018, p.141) as a 'Russian front organization in Italy' came third in Italy's 2018 election and polled the highest number of votes in their four-member election coalition. European populist nationalist political forces came to power because of frustrations with established political parties support for high levels of immigration and failure of multiculturalism to integrate immigrants.

Pro-Russian political forces in Ukraine have different roots to those in Europe. Following the 2004 Orange Revolution, the pro-Russian camp was monopolised by the Party of Regions and Communist Party of Ukraine with their bases of support in Russian speaking eastern and southern Ukraine, particularly, the Donbas and Crimea. Their reasons for being pro-Russian had nothing to do with the factors driving pro-Russian orientations of European populist nationalists and were a product of three factors. These included Soviet nostalgia, Soviet and Russophile views of history and corrupt business and energy ties between Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs.

In Ukraine, nostalgia has a different reference point, that of the Soviet Union. As in the EU, it is also prevalent among the older generation and 'transition losers' but only in some regions and primarily among ethnic Russians. Nostalgia for the USSR was mainly found in the Donbas and Crimea where a Soviet identity remained popular. 21 percent of Ukrainians would like to see the revival of the USSR with the highest proportions in the east (26 percent) and south (29 percent) with a greater proportion in the above 60 age group (40 percent) and among ethnic Russians (36 percent) (Kulchytsky and Mishchenko, 2018, 187-188).

Ukraine has one of the lowest levels of electoral support for ethnic nationalist parties in Europe. In Russia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania nationalist political forces are highly popular; the only neighbour of Ukraine which is an exception is Belarus. In Poland the populist nationalist Law and Justice party commands 40-50 percent support while xenophobic populist nationalists swept the Hungarian elections in April 2018.

Many Ukrainian political parties pursue populist policies, but few are ethnic nationalists. In seven parliamentary elections held since 1994, nationalists have only been elected on a single occasion

in 2012 when the *Svoboda* party received ten percent, far lower than for populist-nationalists in many EU member states. During the midst of Russian aggression against Ukraine nationalists did not win electoral support in the 2014 elections when the *Svoboda* party, the most active and oldest of Ukraine's nationalistic parties, came seventh with 4.7 percent thereby failing to cross the five percent threshold to enter parliament. Nationalist candidates have never entered the second round of presidential elections. Patriotism rather than ethnic nationalism is more prevalent in Ukraine with popular opinion showing high levels of negativity to Russian leaders but not to Russian citizens (*Perspektyvy Ukrayinsko-Rosiyskykh Vidnosyn*, 2015).

Hostility to Islam and migrants from Islamic countries is not an issue in Ukraine as migrants do not seek asylum in Ukraine and there is no large Islamic community. Ukrainian dissidents in the Soviet era and contemporary democrats and nationalists have long been allies of Crimean Tatars in what they perceive as their common anti-Russian struggle. Crimean Tatar leaders have been elected to parliament in *Rukh* (abbreviation for Popular Movement for Restructuring), *Our Ukraine* and the Petro Poroshenko bloc. Since Russia's annexation of the Crimea and repression of Crimean Tatar leaders and institutions their alliance with Ukraine has grown stronger (Kuzio, 2018a, c).

Anti-EU sentiment in Ukraine was low and has dramatically fallen since 2014. Antipathy to the EU was found among supporters of Ukraine joining the CIS Customs Union (since 2015 the Eurasian Economic Union) but support has collapsed to under ten percent as a consequence of Russia's military aggression (Kulchytsky and Mishchenko, 2018). Support for Ukraine to adopt the 'Russian model of development' is very low with 69-71 percent opposed to this throughout Ukraine, including 56 percent of Russian speakers (Kulchytsky and Mishchenko, 2018, pp. 184, 183). Ukrainian nationalists are negatively disposed towards LGBT rights which they see as being imposed upon Ukraine by the EU. Nevertheless, they do not attack the EU or Ukraine's path of European integration.

Ukrainian nationalists differ from their European counterparts in being pro-NATO and not anti-American. In Ukraine, support for NATO membership has grown since 2014 after Russian aggression became a trigger for unprecedented changes in public attitudes to foreign policies. Russia's military aggression showed to Ukrainians they could not protect their sovereignty singlehandedly and needed powerful allies. Since 2014, proponents of NATO membership - politicians, civil society activists and journalists - are in the driving seat while their opponents are disillusioned and disheartened by Russian aggression. Resistance to NATO membership is therefore passive while supporters are active and supported by President Poroshenko, Ukrainian parliament and government.

Until 2014, support for NATO membership was opposed by a powerful constituency and had very little support in Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine, the Donbas and Crimea. Russia's military aggression changed this by increasing support for NATO membership to 60-70 percent of those taking part in a referendum. The biggest change has been in the east where support has grown from 12 to 32 percent and south where it has increased from 7 to 33 percent. Even in the Donbas, support for NATO membership stands at 12 percent in a region where it had practically no support prior to 2014 (Kulchytsky and Mishchenko, 2018).

Anti-Americanism was insignificant in Ukraine and was only present in the Donbas and Crimea where it was linked to the prevalence of Soviet identities, nostalgia for the USSR and a pro-Russian foreign policy orientation (Gessen, 2017, pp.270, 361, 468-469, Kuzio, 2011).

For Ukrainian democrats and nationalists, the threat to their country's sovereignty comes from Russia, not the EU (*Perspektyvy Ukrayinsko-Rosiyskykh Vidnosyn*, 2015). The ideological divide

in Ukraine was not between defending national sovereignty and EU membership, as in Europe, but between integration into Europe or integration into Moscow-led and Russian-dominated Eurasia.

Russia's aggression in 2014 changed Ukraine's political landscape by removing the dichotomy of choosing an orientation between Eurasia or Europe. Polarity in Ukrainian foreign policy integration is no longer a feature of Ukrainian politics with support for EU and NATO membership above 60 percent and that for Eurasian integration below 10 percent. The pro-Russian and pro-Eurasian vector of Ukrainian foreign policy has collapsed while public support for EU and NATO membership has risen. The collapse of Russian soft power is particularly noticeable among Ukrainian youth, representing the future of the country, two thirds of who believe Ukraine and Russia are in a state of war (Zarembo, 2017, pp. 53-54). Similar views of Ukraine and Russia at war can be found among all age groups in Ukraine with the highest among young people and lowest among the over 60s. Widespread opposition to Ukraine adopting the 'Russian model of development' is an outgrowth of Russia associated by Ukrainians with 'aggression' (65.7 percent), 'cruelty' (56.9 percent) and 'dictatorship' (56.9 percent) (Razumkov, 2018).

The EU's Eastern Partnership, launched in 2009, offers six former Soviet republics integration without membership, or 'enlargement-light' (Popescu and Wilson, 2009). Of these six countries, only three – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova – are pursuing Association Agreements with the EU. In addition, Ukraine has signed a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) and a visa free regime with the Schengen zone.

Six issues commonly found in European populists are also found among Ukrainian populists.

First, anti-globalisation has not yet been an election issue for post-Soviet countries such as Ukraine (Ostiguy, 2017). Populists in Ukraine and Europe often accuse the authorities and 'liberal establishment' respectfully of being controlled by foreign powers. 'Pro-Western' (Tymoshenko, Anatoliy Grytsenko, Oleh Lyashko) and 'pro-Russian' populists (Vadym Rabinovych, Boyko) criticise the IMF for imposing heavy demands on the government in return for financial assistance. Tymoshenko's *Batkivshchina* party, Radical Party (led by Lyashko) and the Opposition Bloc (former Party of Regions) routinely attack the IMF. 'Today global financial clans have infiltrated our National Bank of Ukraine, ministries and departments, and have usurped at least 60% of Ukraine's sovereignty. This external management is taking place through Ukraine's puppet leadership' Tymoshenko (2018a) said. Typically, Tymoshenko is vague about who these interests are in order to maintain her 'pro-Western' image she has to stress she is not anti-American or anti-EU.

Second, radical rhetoric against corrupt elites and the 'liberal establishment' (Mudde, 2004). Tymoshenko, who is often described as Ukraine's leading and long-term populist, has always used radical rhetoric against 'corrupt' authorities and oligarchs. Tymoshenko said during the XII National Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC that, 'we should love God and love people. It's a simple answer' (Tymoshenko, 2018d) with presumably her understood as being God fearing and all other Ukrainian politicians as Godless.

Anti-corruption rhetoric is central to European and Ukrainian populist discourse. While Ukraine's politicians routinely attack corruption and oligarchs the weakness of Ukrainian political parties has ensured their only source of funding is big business. This has produced low levels of public trust in the anti-corruption claims found in programmes of presidential candidates and political parties. Tymoshenko, for example, has only participated in 55 per cent of votes on corruption and as low as 34 per cent on banking reforms and 13 per cent on energy, two sectors in Ukraine traditionally rife with corruption.

In a June 2018 vote (Ukrainian Parliament, 2018) the Popular Front and Poroshenko Bloc voted unanimously for the law creating the important Anti-Corruption Court which is aimed at breaking the bottleneck in criminal prosecutions of elites hitherto blocked by Ukraine's corrupt judicial system. Only 2 (out of 21) Radical Party and 14 (out of 20) *Batkivshchina* MP's voted for the law while the Opposition Bloc unanimously opposed it. Tymoshenko said, 'The adoption of the law on the High Anti-Corruption Court is deception, just like the pathetic reform of the judicial system, health care system and pension system' (Tymoshenko. 2018e).

Third, scholars have emphasised the anti-democratic nature of populists (Müller, 2015, Rummens, 2017). The Economist (2018) asked, 'Is Donald Trump above the law?' Populists in Poland and Hungary have been criticised by the EU for undemocratic practices.

Populists in Ukraine threaten democracy in three ways. The first is their lack of transparency, use of deception and being economical with the truth which reduces public trust in state institutions and increases cynicism. The second is their penchant for a 'strong hand' and authoritarian road to 'stability.' The third is through their nostalgia for the Soviet Union and authoritarian paternalism. Ukrainian populists, both 'pro-Western' and 'pro-Russian,' hold authoritarian and undemocratic traits commonly found in European populists. These include making decisions without listening to advice, believing everybody else is wrong, and using populism for the goal of attaining maximum power.

The Party of Regions promoted nostalgia for the Soviet Union, was authoritarian and sought a monopolisation of power. Until 2004, the Party of Regions maintained a monopoly of power in the Donbas where politics resembled the 'managed democracy' found in Putin's Russia (Kryshchanovskaya and White, 2009). From 2005, the Party of Regions expanded its 'managed democracy' model from the Donbas throughout eastern and southern Ukraine and the Crimea and from 2010, when Yanukovich was elected, attempted to expand its monopolisation over Ukraine.

Two potential populist presidential candidates have emerged from the Opposition Bloc – gas lobby tycoon Boyko and oligarch Rabinovich. Rabinovich has created yet another election project, the For Life party with funding from Viktor Medvedchuk, a rather odious oligarch with close ties to Russia and implicated in Yushchenko's poisoning during the 2004 elections. The Godparents of Medvedchuk's two children are Putin and Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev.

Tymoshenko's authoritarian leadership was revealed to US Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor by Viktor Pynzenyk (2010) who resigned as Finance Minister from her 2007-2010 government. Pynzenyk said that Tymoshenko had poor leadership skills, made decisions without listening to advice and, 'She also was overly confident in her own decisions and believed everyone else is wrong.' Pynzenyk added, 'Tymoshenko simply wanted to consolidate power in her own hands;' that is, populism was a means for her to achieve maximum power. This view of Tymoshenko as an authoritarian politician is commonly held in Ukraine and worked against her in the 2010 elections when she received three million fewer votes than Viktor Yushchenko in December 2004. Some three factors accounted for this. First, disillusionment with 'orange' political leaders after five years of public squabbling by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. Second, Ukrainian voters saw her as a bigger threat to Ukraine's democracy than the authoritarian Yanukovich. Third, some agreed with Yushchenko's call to vote against both, which hurt Tymoshenko more as his advice was listened to by 'orange' voters.

On 15 June, Tymoshenko launched her 2019 election campaign with a 'New Deal for Ukraine' congress in which she called for the creation of an All-Ukrainian Civic Association (Tymoshenko, 2018f) that would have, 'strong influential status so that it can influence real processes in the management

of the state' (Tymoshenko, 2018b). Proposals at the 'New Deal' congress included five true statements as well as five manipulations, one exaggeration and two lies (Slipchenko, Krymeniuk, Zhaga, Batoh, Skubenko, Stelmakh, Zhyharevych, Rasumkova, Fedorenko, Hatsko, Chernenko, Shkarpova, 2018). The 'New Deal' proposals resemble those introduced by Nicolás Maduro, successor to military officer and President Hugo Chavez, a socialist populist who ruled Venezuela from 1999-2013. Chavez and Maduro are anti-democratic leaders who have ruined the country's once strong economy. The proposal to create an All-Ukrainian Civic Association resemble that of the Constituent National Assembly created to bypass the Venezuelan parliament whose members were elected in a fraudulent vote condemned by forty Latin American and Western countries (Kuzio, 2018b).

Referendums do not enhance democracies and can actually lead to chaos, political instability and uncertainty. Britain's referendum on Brexit was a disaster leading the country into the unknown. 52 percent, a bare majority of only 4 percent over the Remain voters, are deciding the future of Britain's relationship to the EU putting the economy, people's lives, travel and trade all at risk. Netherlands is an even better example of a country having the mechanism to hold referendums promoted by Dutch citizens. The April 2016 referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement was won by opponents with a vote of 32 percent - only 2 percent above the minimum threshold for turnout to allow the results to be valid. Referendums in Ukraine could be used by Russia and its Ukrainian proxies to call for 'special status' for the Donbas, membership of the Eurasian Economic Union and elevating Russian to a second state language. Added to this is the possibility of Russian hacking the referendum results to change them in Moscow's favour, as it is feared Russia hacked the Brexit referendum.

Former Defence Minister Grytsenko often appears in public and on television in military uniform which he associates with 'order' and 'stability' while others view it as his penchant for authoritarianism. In a recent interview Grytsenko (2018) praised former dictator Augusto Pinochet for his accomplishments in Chile confusing 'authoritative' with 'authoritarian' (Kuzio, 2018b).

Former Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili's Ukrainian citizenship was revoked, and he was deported to Poland. Saakashvili had turned his personal conflict with President Poroshenko into an attempt to create a populist alliance with Tymoshenko and military veterans to foment political instability and revolution ahead of the 2019 elections. Saakashvili has a mixed political reputation and legacy in Georgia and Ukraine. On the one hand, he has been praised for reducing corruption in Georgia while at the same time, his democratic record is poor. US President George W. Bush turned a blind eye to Saakashvili's authoritarianism because of geopolitical reasons as Saakashvili was a strong supporter of NATO membership, US-led liberal internationalism, colour revolutions and the US-led invasion of Iraq. Saakashvili's presidency was marked by authoritarianism in five areas (Levitsky and Way, 2010, pp.227-228). These included:

1. Media freedom: the media were harassed with tax raids against opposition television channels, he pressured the judiciary to open criminal prosecutions against journalists and attempted to close television programmes critical of himself.
2. Judicial system: the judiciary was packed with his own cronies.
3. Fighting corruption: there was selective application of anti-corruption laws.
4. Political repression: extreme police violence was used against anti-presidential protestors.
5. Election fraud: state administrative resources were abused during election campaigns.

*Svoboda*, *Pravyi Sektor* and National Corps support exclusive Ukrainian ethnic nationality policies and at the same time, similar to populist nationalists in Europe, back leftist socio-economic policies on

issues such as privatisation and state management of the economy. *Ukrop* and the Radical Party are the latest in a long line of fake nationalist parties created by the Ukrainian authorities and oligarchs to poach voters. Oligarch Ihor Kolomoysky's Dnipropetrovsk clan established the fake nationalist party *Ukrop* to attract veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war and nationalist firebrands. The Radical Party was originally established by the 'gas lobby' to counter Tymoshenko. As this kind of party funding is opaque it is impossible to fully determine the ties between the Radical party and oligarchic groups. The latest financier of the Radical Party is oligarch Kolomoysky who has formed an election alliance with Tymoshenko against President Poroshenko. Pryvat bank was nationalised in late 2016 after which an investigation revealed Kolomoysky and his oligarchic allies had laundered \$5.5 billion through the bank.

Fourth, populists provide weak support or are opposed to reforms, particularly those 'imposed' by the IMF and EU. Vox Ukraine ranked the Popular Front loyal to former Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Poroshenko Bloc with providing the highest number of votes for reforms. Vox Ukraine writes that without the support of these two factions, 'there could not be in practice the adoption of any laws' (Nis do Nosa 2018). *Samopomich* (Self-Reliance), led by Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyy and traditionally viewed by Western scholars as the most pro-reform faction in the Ukrainian parliament is ranked third by Vox Ukraine, a Ukrainian think tank and NGO (Nis do Nosa, 2018).

Vox Ukraine ranked Tymoshenko a low 38 per cent on their Index of Support for Reform (Nis do Nosa, 2018). Vox Ukraine calculates that over the four years of the current parliament, Tymoshenko has participated in less than a third (30 per cent) of votes and her average support for reformist policies is only slightly higher at 36 per cent. *Batkivshchina* is ranked fifth in parliamentary factions voting for reforms, lower than the Radical Party and just above the 'pro-Russian' Opposition Bloc (Nis do Nosa, 2018).

Of the five ostensibly 'pro-Western' parliamentary factions, two populist *Batkivshchina* and Radical Parties have the poorest attendance record and their votes for reforms are by far the weakest. *Batkivshchina* and the Radical Party did not support judicial, pension or healthcare reforms. *Batkivshchina* led the way calling for the resignation of (Ukrainian-American) Minister of Health Ulana Suprun who has been successful in reducing corruption in the purchasing of medical supplies and reforming this sector (Tymoshenko, 2017a).

Ukraine is the only country in central-eastern Europe with a land sale moratorium that has produced a corrupt grey economy in land sales. In May and August 2018 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled the moratorium violates the property rights of farmers. The World Bank (2017) believes the lifting of the moratorium would boost agricultural output by \$15 billion. Of Ukraine's parliamentary parties, *Batkivshchina* is by far the most vocally opposed to land reform and its 2017 brochure was headlined 'Halt the Theft of Land!' that linked land privatisation to crime and corruption. Tymoshenko leads a campaign to collect signatures for Ukraine to hold a referendum on land reform (Yaremko, Lukomska, and Nizalov 2017).

Land privatisation is opposed by Tymoshenko/*Batkivshchina*, Opposition Bloc and leftist forces, such as the Socialist Party of Ukraine. Of these three populist forces, Tymoshenko has been the most vocal Ukrainian politician calling for an extension of the existing moratorium on land sales, warning otherwise 'there will be a huge civil war by the agrarian mafia against farmers' (Tymoshenko, 2017b). A *Batkivshchina* brochure entitled 'Halt the Theft of Land!' plays on all the traditional myths and stereotypes linked to an open land market through an association with crime, corruption and Russian aggression

against Ukraine. A land market is at times equated with an approaching famine or worse. There are no pros and cons listed for voters to decide the merits or disadvantages of a land market and instead, 'society receives a subconscious negative emotional link to the subject' (Shkarpova, 2017).

Tymoshenko is opposed to any foreign investment in gas pipelines, Western or Russian. Vox Ukraine wrote that Tymoshenko's hyperbole portrays European management of the country's gas pipelines as a major defeat for Ukrainian national security (Shist mifiv pro ukrayinsku HTS, 2018).

Tymoshenko claimed that the pipelines were being transferred in secret to an unknown foreign entity. In reality it is the Ukrainian government that decides on the outcome of the tender by foreign companies (ten European companies have already expressed an interest) who seek to manage 49 percent of Ukraine's gas pipelines. This is then ratified by parliament. *Batkivshchina* voted unanimously for the law on the gas market (although Tymoshenko missed the vote). The foreign company chosen by the government can only be a member of the Energy Community or the US. As Russia is not a member of the Energy Community, and has always been strongly opposed to it, no Russian company can participate in the tender. Therefore, Tymoshenko's claims that there is no guarantee the pipelines could not be transferred to Russian state gas company Gazprom's control is unfounded. Ukraine's legislation and the Energy Community requires the splitting into separate parts of the state gas company *Naftohaz Ukrainy* to de-monopolise the gas sector; meaning gas pipelines would no longer be managed by *Naftohaz Ukrainy*. Ukraine's gas pipelines will continue to remain in state hands, but their management would be undertaken by a foreign company. There is no plan for the Ukrainian government to privatise the pipelines to foreign owners and pipelines managed by a foreign company would remain in state hands.

Tymoshenko obfuscates the difference in the pursuit of a populist agenda portraying herself as the 'defender' of Ukrainian sovereignty and national security facing down nefarious corrupt elites ready to betray Ukraine. Her economic nationalism on energy issues contrasts with her low attendance rate in only ten percent of votes on legislation related to energy independence (KKD Deputata, 2017). While opposing the 'pro-Russian' gas lobby, Tymoshenko has long been an ally of oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyy and when prime minister permitted the Pryvat group to take control of the state oil refining company *UkrNafta*. This allowed the *Pryvat* business group to cream off huge profits that should have gone to the Ukrainian government budget. (Leshchenko, 2015). State oil refining company *UkrNafta* was taken back into Ukrainian government control in 2014-2015.

Fifth, populists are chameleons and draw on different ideologies to mobilise electoral support, as clearly seen during Britain's Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential elections. This is especially prevalent in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries where political parties are weak, or oligarch election projects and ideology is fluid. Ukraine's populists are labelled 'pro-Western' or 'pro-Russian' while sometimes supporting similar populist policies.

Real political parties do not exist in Ukraine or throughout the former USSR (Kuzio, 2014a), with the possible exception of the three Baltic states. Political parties in Ukraine are short-term election projects (e.g. *Ukrop*), insurance clubs for business and criminal leaders who fear criminal accusations (Party of Regions), leader's fans clubs (e.g. *Batkivshchina*) or fake technical parties (e.g. Radical Party) aimed at poaching voters from others (Wilson, 2005). Ukrainian political parties which are electorally successful receive state funding, but the majority are reliant for the bulk of their financing upon big business and oligarchs. Membership dues play a minimal role in party financing in Ukraine.

*Batkivshchina* is a member of the center-right European People's Party, yet her rhetoric and party platform are populist rather than conservative and the party's niche policies often resemble

Ukraine's now moribund Socialist Party. In half of parliamentary votes, *Batkivshchina* and the Radical Party have voted the same as the Opposition Bloc and both appeal to similar voters at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder (Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2018). Only half of Fatherland's 20 MPs have consistently voted for reforms (Nis do Nosa (2018). The Opposition Bloc were and remain financed by Ukraine's wealthiest oligarchs while at the same time they and their Party of Regions predecessors espoused a Soviet-style populist paternalism. The political face of corrupt tycoons (Party of Regions) financed the ostensible face of the proletariat (Communist Party) (Kuzio, 2015).

Outright lies, deception and exaggeration are commonly found in populist rhetoric with the most extreme case of this phenomenon the twitter rantings of US President Donald Trump. Vox Ukraine ranked Ukrainian politicians by their willingness to be truthful in its 'liars' and 'manipulators' survey (Skubenko, 2017). Vox Ukraine ranked the top five as Tymoshenko in first place, followed by Opposition Bloc MP's Rabinovych, Boyko and Oleksandr Vilkul and, surprisingly, leader of the *Samopomich* parliamentary faction Oleh Berezyuk (Shkarpova, 2018).

Sixth, crises are used by populists to mobilise public sentiment against elites and the 'establishment' (Taggart, 2004, Moffit, 2015). Ukraine has experienced multiple economic, political and military crises since becoming independent in 1991 and each of these crises has been exploited by populists to mobilise votes. In 2010, voters elected Yanukovich after five years of crisis and political instability when Yushchenko's presidency was dominated by his bitter and public quarrels with Tymoshenko.

### 3. Conclusion

Since 2014, Ukraine has been at war with Russia while at the same time seeking to overcome a deep economic crisis and implement unpopular reforms. The extent of the unpopularity of these reforms introduced since 2014 can be gauged by the collapse of support for Yatsenyuk's Popular front which led to the decision to not participate in local elections held in 2015. Populists, both 'pro-Western' and 'pro-Russian,' have sought to capitalise on public disgruntlement over unpopular reforms and frustration at the lack of end in sight for the on-going war with Russia. Tymoshenko and Grytsenko have criticised the low number of high-ranking elites who have been criminally prosecuted - which the Anti-Corruption Curt is meant to rectify and Tymoshenko criticised. They have also claimed, without producing evidence, that President Poroshenko's team are financially benefitting from the prolongation of the war through corruption in military orders. Neither Tymoshenko or Grytsenko have put forward realistic alternatives to the president's policies towards Russia's military aggression. Tymoshenko's long association with Russian President Putin is seen as a reason for her willingness to compromise with Russia (Arel 2008). In both Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia and Ukraine's on-going war with Russia, Tymoshenko has been reluctant to criticise Putin. Meanwhile it is feared that Grytsenko, because of his military background, would pursue a more aggressive attempt to forcibly re-take the occupied territories in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine leading to an all-out Russian-Ukrainian war.

Populism in Ukraine is different in four ways to populism in Europe. Immigration is not an issue in Ukrainian elections as migrants do not seek to stay in Ukraine. Ethnic nationalists are electorally unpopular and the political parties that exist are anti-Russian – unlike their European counterparts. Islam is not an issue in electoral politics as there is no large Islamic minority in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Crimean Tatars aligned with Ukrainian groups in the Soviet and contemporary eras. Ukrainians support EU membership and see Russia, not the EU, as the threat to their country's sovereignty.

At the same time, populists in Ukraine are similar in six other ways. Populists in Ukraine and Europe are anti-globalist, directing their venom at the IMF and other international financial organisations. Populists everywhere use radical rhetoric against corrupt elites, the 'liberal establishment' and authorities. Populists in Ukraine, Europe and the US are authoritarian and a potential threat to democracy. Populists provide weak or no support for reforms which they believe are unfairly imposed by outside powers. Populists in Ukraine, Europe and the US are prone to using untruths, exaggerations, manipulations and are ideological chameleons. Finally, populists instrumentalise crises to mobilise voters.

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## **Rethinking the Incumbency Effect. Radicalization of Governing Populist Parties in East-Central-Europe. A case study of Hungary**

In spite of their immanently outsider character, during the past fifteen years populist parties became an organic and mainstream part of both Western and non-Western democracies, as did populism research become a key issue of political science as well. The Brexit referendum, Donald Trump's electoral success, or the shocking political perspectives being at stake at the 2017 French and Dutch elections certainly confronted both the broader public and the still sceptical scholars with the rising populist challenge. However, it remained rather in the background that couple of European countries have long experience with populist parties being not only represented at different levels of the legislative, but serving in government positions as well. While scholars of social sciences and economics devote increased resources and pay more and more attention to the research of the populists' electoral advance, the analysis of populist strategies pursued in government position remained a largely overshadowed and a secondary issue.

The paper addresses the question of "incumbency challenge" faced by populist parties in government position, and conducts a case study analysis of the Hungarian radical rightwing populist party Fidesz, one of the most successful populist parties in East-Central-Europe. The research operationalizes the performative and discursive theory of populism, and analyses the discourse maintained by Fidesz during its two consecutive government period between 2010 and 2018. Based on the research results, the paper ultimately argues that the externalization of the "them and us" dichotomy allowed a strategy to maintain, or even radicalize, populist discourse in government position. These findings challenge the dominant stream of populism literature stating that long-term incumbency of populist parties either results in electoral losses, or in adaptation and mainstreaming processes weakening the populist rhetoric and claims. Even if this "externalization strategy" might not be exclusively used by rightwing populist parties, it can be identified as a viable strategy for populist parties in government to overcome the incumbency challenge. Concerning the Hungarian case study, it definitely contributed to the radicalization of the former right-conservative, actually radical rightwing populist party Fidesz during the past eight years.

### **1. Theoretical Background**

Although one can definitely observe a cautious change in the literature regarding the episodic or stable character of populism, research projects focusing on the adaptation of populist parties to government positions are comparatively rare. Influenced by the "populist moment" theory of Lawrence Goodwyn (Goodwyn 1976) as well as by the empirical evidences gathered during the nineties, both Paul Taggart and Margaret Canovan argued for the periodical characteristics of populist politics and mobilization. As Taggart noted, "populist politicians, movements and parties emerge and grow quickly and gain attention but find it difficult to sustain that momentum and therefore usually will fade away" (Taggart 2004: 270), while Canovan observed that "populist movements tent to be spasmodic, flaring up briefly and dying away almost as fast" (Canovan 2005: 89). Against this background, Albertazzi and McDonnell argued on the basis of the empirical evidences of the past fifteen years that both populist politics in

general as well as populists in power positions in particular are definitely sustainable (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015: 165-166).

While the perception of populism as an “episodic” phenomenon slowly altered and faded away, there is still a considerable lack of research explaining the different strategies how populist parties are able to effectively survive and even remain in power. All the more, as the hindrances of incumbency for populist parties, or the “incumbency challenge” appear to be real.

Based on the analysis of the broader literature conducted by Albertazzi and McDonnell, two distinct subcategories of the “incumbency challenge”, an institutional and a discursive-ideological one, can be identified. Concerning the institutional hurdle, based on the experiences of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) between 2000 and 2004, Reinhard Heinisch noted that “significant structural weaknesses inherent in populist parties pose nearly insurmountable problems that make their long-term success in government questionable”, and identified “the inexperience in policy-making”, the “lack of qualified personal”, and the pressure “to tone down the radicalness of their agenda and political presentations” as the sources of structural weaknesses (Heinisch 2003). Against the same background, Yves Mény and Ives Surel argued that populist parties are “by nature neither durable nor sustainable parties of government” (Mény & Surel 2002). These statements were partially confuted by Albertazzi and McDonnell, who pointed out that “electoral losses are not the inevitable price of populist incumbency” (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015: 167) and that populist parties face the very same challenges as all newcomer parties entering government first time in their history (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2015: 169). Furthermore, according to the conclusions of Takis Pappas and Taggart & Kaltwasser stating that the linkage between charismatic leadership and populism is not constitutive and rather weak (Pappas 2016 and Taggart & Kaltwasser 2016: 360), low institutionalization, strong, direct personal leadership, and the lack of distinct party structures cannot be considered as general characteristics of populist parties at all. By combining the arguments of Albertazzi & McDonnell and Takis Pappas, one can conclude that the first two institutional weaknesses identified by Heinisch are not specific to populist parties, but rather afflict all newcomer parties first time entering government positions.

Nevertheless, this conclusion does not render the whole concept of “incumbency challenge” obsolete. The third weakness revealed by Heinisch has no institutional characteristics, but resonates well with the discursive-ideological remark made by Margaret Canovan highlighting populism’s “own inability to live up to its promises” (Canovan 1999), or with other words its inability to handle the immanent conflict between the redemptive and pragmatic faces of democracy. Populists, being representatives of the redemptive concept, become firmly anchored in and come under pressure by the pragmatic concept of democratic politics once occupying government positions. Consequently, the discursive-ideological concept of incumbency challenge, the difficulty to bridge the gap between the immanently anti-elitist, oppositional characteristics of populist claims on the one hand, and the filing of elite positions and the performing of elite functions, once in governments, on the other hand, seems to be an exclusive characteristic of populist parties, and as such, requires the close attention of populism research.

Based on this argument, populist parties definitely requires certain distinct strategies to master the incumbency challenge, if they intend to remain firmly in power. Scholars studying Western European populism remained largely silent about the unique characteristics of populists occupying government positions, and the distinct strategies they pursue. Moreover, the development of counter-strategies against the “populist surge” or even populist parties in government attracted considerable attention

since the outbreak of the refugee crisis in 2015, thus the “desire to contain” partially overshadowed the “desire to understand” (Kaltwasser & Taggart 2016 and Taggart & Kaltwasser 2016).

In contrast, with regard to the Polish and Hungarian cases Jan-Werner Müller argued that these governments adopted three techniques of governing and moral justification, including the complete colonization or “occupation” of the state, mass clientelism, and discriminatory legalism (Müller 2016: 44-49). Although this analysis seems to perfectly describe the political reality of the two illiberal states, but as Müller also notes it, it is rather questionable whether these techniques are only used by populists. Furthermore, Müller’s three above techniques do not appear to have any direct connection with the incumbency challenge in discursive-ideological sense at all.

In their case study about the Slovakian Smer Party, Peter Spač and Vlastimil Havlík offered sound explanatory frames how the party of Prime Minister Robert Fico effectively mastered the incumbency challenge. Being a centrist or exclusively populist party after its founding in 1999, i.e. a party in which case populism as a thin-ideology is not supplemented by other main ideologies, Smer has gradually accommodated to its future government position from 2002, establishing strong party structures and undertaking an ideological shift from “exclusive populism” to left-wing populism, ultimately developing to a non-populist social democratic party (Spáč & Havlík 2015). The arguments provided by Spač&Havlík, how Smer completely left behind all its populist characteristics, are not necessarily convincing. If not only the ideological dimension, but also the discourse maintained by the party had been analysed, the research outcomes would be obviously different. Nevertheless their contribution analysing the “mainstreaming strategy” pursued by Smer, but also by certain other populist parties trying to master the incumbency challenge through institutional adaptation and ideological moderation, is definitely worth of mentioning.

In contrast to the theory of Spač & Havlík, this paper argues that certain populist parties in government position tend to pursue a different strategy to overcome the incumbency challenge. Instead of ideological mainstreaming or moderation, they keep the populist plea to the people, but pluralize and externalize the “them and us” dichotomy, and shift the focus from the existential and moral conflict existing between “the People” and the elites to the existential and moral conflict between “the People” and “the others”. This “externalization strategy”, the full or partial “outsourcing of the populist dichotomy” from the domestic to the European or international context might offer a solution for populist parties to overcome the third, discursive-ideological incumbency challenge identified by Heinisch, and hold stable elite and government positions parallel to keeping their radical populist claims.

## 2. Main conceptual and methodological framework

Uninterruptedly serving in majority government position for two legislative periods from 2010 until 2018, and re-elected for a third one with a constitutional two-third majority of the mandates in April 2018<sup>4</sup>, the Hungarian radical right-wing populist party Fidesz offers one of the most relevant cases to study the discursive strategies of sustaining populist mobilization. Fidesz definitely spent the longest time among any East-Central-European populist parties in government position, without losing its populist characteristics. Furthermore, party-chairman and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is often

4 It must be noted that neither the 2014, nor the 2018 Hungarian elections fully complied with the OSCE commitments of democratic elections, and were labelled therefore as “free but not fair” elections. See the report of the OSCE electoral observation missions to the respective Hungarian elections: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/hungary/121098?download=true> and <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/hungary/376639?download=true>.

portrayed as the archetype of charismatic populist leader (Pappas 2016). Therefore the pioneering role of Fidesz and Viktor Orbán in the maintaining of populist governance appear to be unquestionable.

Against this backdrop, the paper conducts a focused case study analysis of the Hungarian radical right-wing populist party Fidesz, and the discourse maintained by the party during its two consecutive government period from 2010 until 2018. The deconstruction of the party's discursive structure allows to scrutinize whether any outsourcing of the populist "them and us" dichotomy or any radicalization of the populist discourse could have been observed in the 2010-2018 governmental period of Fidesz, and ultimately to confirm or disprove the existence of "outsourcing strategy" in the case of one of the most emblematic governing populist parties in East-Central-Europe<sup>5</sup>.

From a conceptual perspective, the paper follows a dual-track approach. Primarily it conducts a political discourse analysis (PDA) to tackle the developments related to the discourse of Fidesz while occupying government position. Within the methodological framework established by Ernesto Laclau (Laclau 2005a and 2005b) and Martin Nonhoff (Nonhoff 2007), the paper identifies (1) the equivalential chains of demands formulated by the populist actor and the key developments throughout the years in this chains of equivalence, and (2) the dynamical process of the antagonistic division of the discursive space, and so, if applies, the dynamic construction of the populist "them and us" dichotomy. Ultimately (3) the paper scrutinizes the dimension of representation, whether any "empty signifier" can be identified in the discursive construct and answers the question whether this empty signifier is stable or also subjugated to discursive changes caused by the externalization of the populist dichotomy and discourse (Nonhoff 2007: 186).

Bearing in mind the paramount role played by Prime Minister and party chairman Viktor Orbán in the Fidesz party, fulfilling all requirements of political charisma as it is defined by Takis Pappas (Pappas 2016:4), just as the (1) effective power centralization within the party, (2) unmediated and emotional leader-led relationship, and (3) political radicalism, the political discourse analyses is ultimately narrowed down to his speeches as key manifestations of the party discourse. The text corpus comprehends the annual "State of the Nation" speeches of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, as well as his regular contributions to the Hungarian summer university in Băile Tusnad/Tusnádfürdő, Romania between 2010 and 2018, as these discursive items can be considered the guiding lights of the narrations and rhetoric used by representatives of the Fidesz party. In certain years the text corpus is complemented by other strategic speeches of Prime Minister Orbán.

The results of the political discourse analysis are used to test the validity of the following hypothesis for this particular case study:

"Populist parties being in government position for certain time tend to maintain the populist discourse or style by externalizing the "them and us" dichotomy and partially changing the construct of political enemy from the concept of "elites" to external ones, like the European Union, immigrants, or foreign conspiratory forces."

Against this backdrop, if the hypothesis is ultimately confirmed, the paper aims at conducting a qualitative analysis of the Fidesz-discourse to demonstrate how the "externalisation strategy" is implemented and performed in the particular Hungarian case.

Considering the second track of the research, the research outcomes of the discourse analysis are also interpreted in the context of Benjamin Moffit's conceptual framework of "performed crisis"

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5 To the categorization of Fidesz as populist party see: Enyedi 2016, Pappas 2014, 2016, Kriesi & Pappas 2015, Palonen 2018.

(Moffit 2014). In Moffit's argumentation, crisis is not an external, but an internal feature of populism. The existence of crisis depends from the perception of the political community, and as such it is subjected to the discursive performance of political actors. Therefore crisis is also constructed or performed by populists, via mediation, performance and spectacularisation (Moffit: 2014: 191). As the performance and discursive perpetuation of the crisis appear to be further ideal tools for populists in incumbent position to maintain the populist style and discourse, it is worth to include it into the analysis. All the more so as comparative empirical studies claim that after 2008 the European scope of the economic and sovereign debt crisis (Kriesi & Pappas 2015: 307) contributed to a shift from anti-elitism at domestic level to anti-elitism at European level (Kaltwasser & Taggart 2016: 205). Of course this conclusion can be all the more valid for the subsequent European refugee crisis. As this phenomenon shows important commonalities with the "outsourcing of populist dichotomy" being in the centre of our investigation, the paper ultimately also scrutinizes whether the performance of crisis is present in the political discourse of Prime Minister Orbán and his Fidesz party, and whether the outsourcing of the populist dichotomy has any impact on the discursive construction of crisis, shifting its focus from the domestic terrain to the European one.

In his work, Moffit distinguished six distinct step how populist actors can spectacularise a crisis, divide the people from those who are responsible for the alleged crisis and exploit the situation to offer strong leadership and simple solutions in order to harvest electoral support (Moffit 2014: 198). This six step model of the populist performance of crisis include (Moffit 2014: 198-208):

1. Identifying the failure
2. Elevating it to the level of crisis by linking into a wider framework and adding a temporal dimension
3. Framing "the People" vs. those Responsible for the Crisis
4. Using Media to Propagate Performance
5. Presenting Simple Solutions and Strong Leadership
6. Continuing to Propagate Crisis

The text corpus used for the purposes of the discourse analysis will also be investigated on the basis of the six above mentioned steps of performing a crisis to determine, whether the performance of crisis plays a significant role in the political discourse of the Hungarian radical right-wing populist party Fidesz, and whether any shift can be identified with regard to the scope of the economic crisis from the domestic level to the European one with repercussions to the populist "them and us" dichotomy.

### **3. Political Discourse Analysis of the Hungarian "System of National Cooperation"**

The text corpus applied to the research is narrowed down to the strategic speeches of party chairman and later Prime Minister Orbán between 2009 and 2018 and comprehends the 17 speeches listed in Annex 1. Mostly the annual "State of the Nation" speeches and Băile Tuşnad summer university lectures of Orbán were included in the corpus, except in cases when one of these texts from certain years were not publicly available. From such years other strategic speeches with high political significance complemented the hiatus.

Before going into the details of the discursive demands that can be arranged into a chain of equivalence, some general remarks must be made about the macro-level characteristics of the discursive structure. Based on the analysis of the text corpus, no gradual externalization of the populist dichotomy

could be observed in the years of incumbency after 2010. The reason is that the externalization already took place well before the Fidesz party won the Hungarian parliamentary elections and entered the government with a two-third constitutional majority in the spring of 2010. In his regular annual speech at the “Civic Picnic”, a closed gathering of the Hungarian right-conservative political and intellectual elite in the small town of Kötcse, Orbán already drafted in 2009 the strategic outlines of his future politics after a potential election victory. In this speech, which is otherwise not a populist speech act, he argued as following.

*“I am convinced that we shall not offer a counter-governance, but we have to realize a governance guided by the goals of our nation. Of course, this has a significant impact on the government program, on the political style, the structure of the government, and several other political questions. I think that this question must be discussed by the right-wing sooner than later, and it must figure out what power structures appear to be best serving the country’s interest in the time period of fifteen-twenty years. Personally, within the frames of this discussion, I suggest to choose the politics of permanent governance instead of the politics of permanent fight. Not the ongoing and permanent conflict with our counterparts shall determine our mindset, but the struggling for important national goals. Of course there will be a political competition and ultimately the electorate will decide. But the main question is what alternatives do we offer. Do we offer the continuation of the two-party-system in a dual power field characterized by permanent debates on values? Or do we present the behaviour of a great governing party, the behaviour of a political power with a claim for permanent governance to the public.”*

(PM Orbán’s speech at the “Civic Picnic” in Kötcse 2009)

This guideline, the reorientation from a politics determined by democratic competition and power struggles to a politics of permanent claim to power, has fundamentally determined Orbán’s narratives until our present days, and while the populist dichotomy, or the concept of public enemy was extended to several new subjects to keep the populist narrative and mobilization alive, the former communist elite, the representatives of the “past eight years”<sup>6</sup> played in this framing since the very beginning a rather subordinated role, once compared to the external threats and enemies of the “Hungarian nation”<sup>7</sup>.

The discursive structure of Orbán between 2010 and 2018 can be divided into two consecutive periods. However, this periodization does not reflect on the change between the dominantly internal and external characteristics of the populist dichotomy, as it was mentioned above that the externalization of the concept of public enemy has dominated in the whole timeframe of the research. Hence the main difference can be identified between two strategic ways how the concept of the external public enemy has been constructed. This difference also appears to be in strong connection with the opportunity structures offered by the global political environment in the form of the “economic/Euro/sovereign debt crisis” and the “refugee crisis”, and thus with the “performance of the crisis” by the populist actor itself. The first period between 2010 and 2015 is characterised by the period of the discursive “economic freedom fight” against the destructive powers of speculative neoliberal capitalism opposing the national economic policy of Hungary and intending to push back the country to the “debt slavery” of

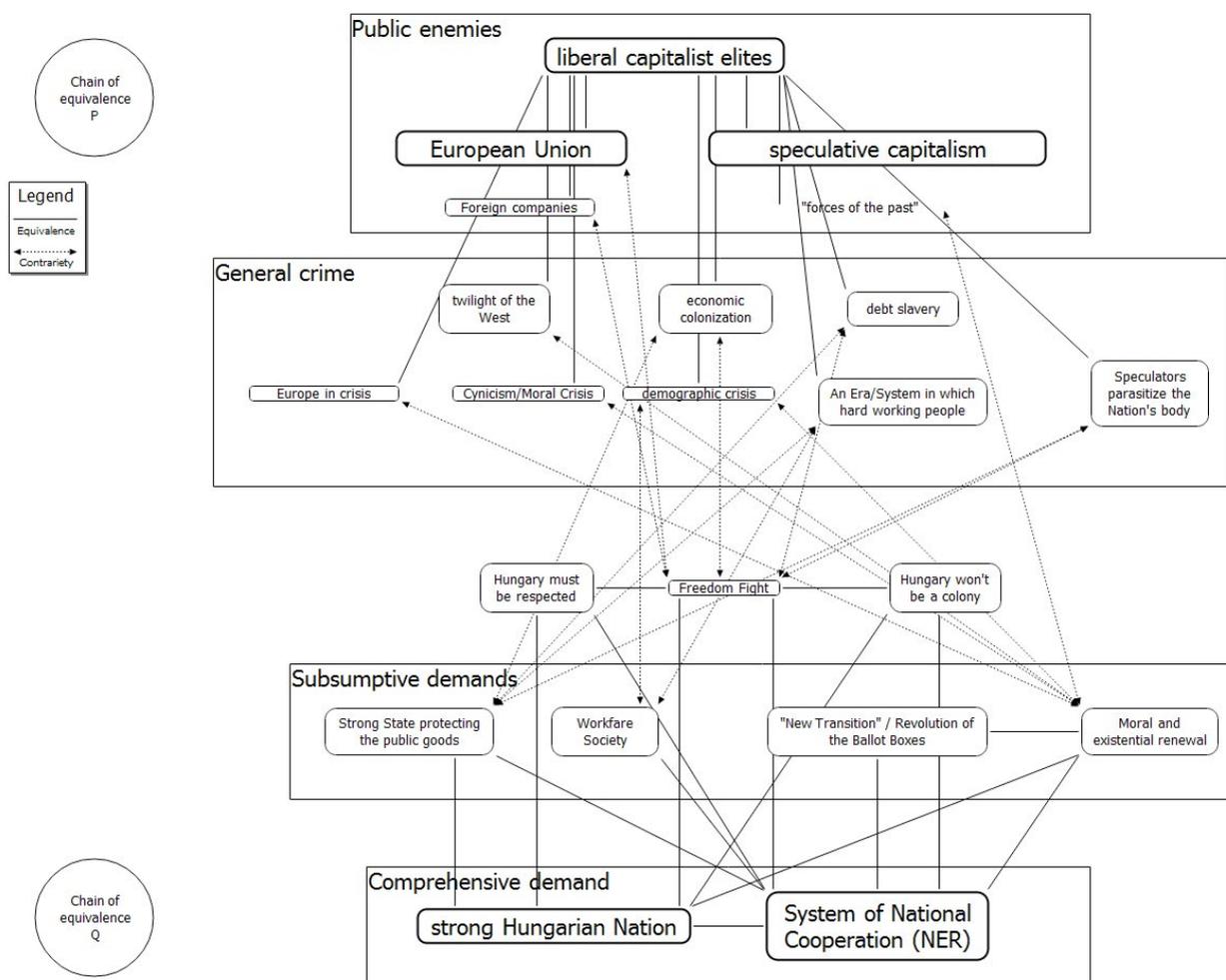
6 The discourse of Fidesz often referred to the government period of the left-liberal coalition between 2002 and 2010 as the “past eight years”.

7 Enyedi came in his analysis of Hungarian populism to a similar conclusion. See: Enyedi 2016

the “past eight years”. In contrast, the second period between 2015 and 2018 has focused on the ethnic and cultural homogeneity and biopolitical survival of the nation in the context of the refugee crisis, framed by Orbán as “migration of nations” (Völkerwanderung).

#### 4. Concepts of enemies and “the general crime” in the period 2010-2015 (chain of equivalence P)

Concerning the period 2010-2015, chain of equivalence P represents the concept of enemies and negative signifiers of the “general crime” (Laclau 2000: 54; Nonhoff 2007:12), while the chain of equivalence Q represents the claims and demands formulated by Orbán to overcome the challenges and shortcomings posed by speculative capitalism and liberal capitalist elites for Hungary. The logic and structure of the two chains of equivalence, the contrariety and equivalence of the demands is portrayed below:



Discursive chains of equivalences in the period of 2010-2015. The author’s compilation

Chain of equivalence P primarily comprises liberal capitalist elites, the European Union, and foreign companies as public enemies in the “them and us” populist dichotomy, while the left-liberal political forces in Hungary, often referred as “forces of the past”, plays only a secondary, subordinated role. The “general crime” of these political and existential enemies is, from the perspective of the Fidesz party discourse, the destructive construction of “speculative capitalism” subjugating the Hungarian society

and other European nations to “debt slavery”, causing economic, moral and demographic crisis, treating Hungarians as unequals being inferior to core Western nations, and colonizing the country both in economic and political sense, undermining that way the people’s right to self-determination.

According to Prime Minister Orbán, “speculative capitalism” and the central claim of the liberal capitalist elites for a small state, playing only a restricted role in the organization of the social life in comparison to the role of the markets, brought the European civilization at the edge of collapse. According to Orbán, one key reason of the crisis in the Western World is the abandoning of the traditional European values. In contrast, the social organization of the BRIC countries based on the respect for traditional social values makes these countries more and more successful in the global competition. As Orbán formulated in his 2010 Băile Tusnad speech “successful capitalism [...] does not only need free and effective market, but it also needs moral fundamentals. Moral fundamentals that practically originate from the faith in God.” (PM Orbán’s Băile Tuşnad summer university speech 2010)

Allegedly, a key aspect of the moral disintegration in the era of speculative capitalism, especially in Hungary, has been the altered relationship to work. Orbán characterized the post-1990 era of speculative capitalism in Hungary as “the period, when ordinary and trustworthy people always turned out as losers” (PM Orbán’s Băile Tuşnad summer university speech 2010) and when “unscrupulous adventurers scattered the nation’s wealth, and speculated with the future of 10 Million people, consumed the Hungarians’ vital force, and parasitized the eternal life.” (PM Orbán’s commemorative speech at the anniversary of the 1956 revolution 2010)

Although the Western model of capitalism might have been in crisis, but according to Orbán’s interpretation its stakeholders, multinational companies, the European Union, and the former Hungarian left-liberal political elite, have been keen to confront the process of Hungarian national renewal. As he stated “speculators are eyeing whole countries with an undisguised and unmistakable gaze”, while Hungary’s situation has been particularly unfavourable due to low political performance of the left-liberal elites before 2010.”

We are vulnerable, because we were also weakened by the politics of the previous era. We have every reason to fear that this past wants to return. The past that brought immense indebtedness on us, record unemployment, abuse of power, widespread corruption, escalation of crime, the rise of extremism, the emergence of ideologies that reject human dignity and equality, the deployment of the police against peaceful citizens, a capital on the verge of bankruptcy and a countryside in decline. The mountain rescue leader knows that the avalanche will not change its course. There is no other solution but to face the danger.” (PM Orbán’s State of the Nation Address 2011)

With this framing Orbán created the notion of external threat during his first year of government, externalizing the existential “them and us” dichotomy of populism. Concerning the category of “others”, between 2010 and 2012 mainly the allegedly shady actors of global capitalism, the global economic elites, and its political allies appeared in the discourse of Orbán as concepts of public enemies. However, parallel to Hungary’s democratic backsliding and the European reactions on the 2011 media law and the adoption of the new, practically one-party constitution in 2012, important changes took place in the rhetoric of the Hungarian Prime Minister too, adapting his discursive toolkit, and particularly the populist “them and us” dichotomy to the new political realities. Orbán already declared in his 2011 Băile Tusnad speech that the recipe of the successful integration among the new global conditions cannot be acquired from the West, therefore the previous strategy of the emulation of Western patterns is futile (PM Orbán’s Băile Tuşnad summer university speech 2011). Nevertheless in his 2012 commemorative

speech at the anniversary of 1848 revolution and freedom fight, Orbán first time incorporated the European Union unvarnished into his concept of enemy and freedom fight, once he compared Brussels to Moscow and the EU to the Soviet Union.

*As he said: "We know very well the nature of unsolicited assistance by comrades, and we can identify it even though it is dressed in well-tailored suits, not in uniforms. [...] European bureaucrats observe us with suspicious eyes because we say that new ways are required. We say that one must break out from the jail of indebtedness and we say that only great nations can make Europe great again. You will see my dear friends that we will be right. Neither was feudalism destructed by overlords, nor was the communism destroyed by party secretaries. The reign of speculators will not be abolished by speculators and bureaucrats either, and nor will they free the troubled chariot of Europe from the ditch. They will not do that, but the hardworking citizens of Europe will do. Either the world of hardworking people will come, or it's over for Europe."*

(PM Orbán's commemorative speech at the anniversary of the 1848 revolution 2012)

Prime Minister Orbán also meticulously constructed the discourse of his own European leadership from the very beginning. In the same March 15 speech from 2012 Orbán constructed two populist dichotomies at once and posted them in equivalential relation to each other. The first dichotomous relation is created between the hard working European people craving for strong Nations on the one hand, and the European bureaucrats and speculators on the other hand, while the second dichotomy strained between the Hungarian nation, the hard-working Hungarian people and the above mentioned European actors. Considering the constructed nature of the first dichotomy, and the real existing political tensions between Hungary and the EU with regard to the second one, with this step of equivalence creation Orbán placed his struggle against the EU in the frame of a broader European conflict, and himself in the position of a populist leader with European significance. Furthermore, since 2011 Orbán frequently framed his politics as a project of a forerunner, pioneering the political fundamentals of a new Europe of strong, sovereign nations and traditional societies.

*"The truth is that the torch of those we could follow flamed out. The recipe of the way out from the crisis and the rules of the new transition cannot be acquired from the West. Moreover, it seems as we would have a small advantage in finding solutions that are emulated now by the Western countries."*

(PM Orbán's Bäile Tuşnad summer university speech 2011)

Consciously following the logic of externalization, Orbán also framed the conflict between his government and the EU as a true existential dichotomy claiming that the European Union intends to colonize Hungary, treats it as a second-class country unequal to the Western states, and attacks and undermines the Hungarian government to subjugate the Hungarian people to the yoke of "debt slavery" again. Therefore, recalling the tradition of Hungarian revolutions and freedom fights against the Habsburgs in 1848 and the Soviets in 1956, he proclaimed the "freedom fight" against European and Western influence in the country. As he claimed in his 2012 commemorative speech at the anniversary of 1848 revolution and freedom fight:

*"The political and intellectual program of 1848 sounded: We don't want to be a colony! The main program and demand of Hungarians in 2012: We don't want to be a colony! [...] Freedom means for us that we are not of lower value than others and we also deserve respect. It*

*means that we work for us, for ourselves, and we won't live in debt slavery. [...] The colonists of our days prowl around their targets very carefully. They narcotize their victims and slowly consume the victims' opposition and instinct to live. Just as a frog is gradually cooked in the water. Although the space is narrow, the frog finds it pleasant and feels comfortable. It even does not suspect that it should be worried. The frog does not understand and don't want to understand what is happening with it until it is cooked. That is the way how once strong nations become exposed and sink into peril. That is the way how millions of families get harness in their neck and snaffle in their mouth. And that is the way why the children do not inherit the fruit of their parents' life-long work, but only the unpayable loans and the narrowed horizon of the parents' life."*

(PM Orbán's commemorative speech at the anniversary of the 1848 revolution 2012)

In contrast, the domestic political opponents of Prime Minister Orbán have played a rather subordinated role in the whole period between 2010 and 2015 once compared to the rhetorical weight and presence of the "speculative capitalist elites" or the "European bureaucrats". As a further obvious consequence of the externalization of the populist "them and us" dichotomy, also the terrain of political conflict was externalised from the domestic political field to the European and international one.

Furthermore, the externalization of the "them and us" dichotomy has had twofold consequences for the Hungarian left-liberal political parties, being in government position between 2002 and 2010, and serving as Orbán's opposition after 2010. First, with his framing Orbán delegitimized the opposition as a puppet, being only an object in the hands of Orbán's real European and global political opponents. Thus left-liberal opposition became a discursive entity without own, sovereign political will, only representing the past and lacking any suitable program for Hungary's future. Second, through the externalization of the populist dichotomy, Prime Minister Orbán partially depoliticized the domestic political arena and relegated it to secondary importance in comparison to the imagined European one, where Orbán's real populist performance happened. Obviously, the key audience of this performance has been uninterruptedly the Hungarian domestic audience, even if the performance referred to European or global politics, and not to Hungarian domestic issues. Nevertheless, according to this pattern Orbán rarely said more than a few words about the Hungarian opposition, and if he does that happened mostly before the upcoming elections in 2014 and 2018. These discursive acts below confirm the above mentioned concept of "puppet opposition" lacking the qualities of real political subjects and only following the orders of their speculative capitalist masters.

*"Our achievements reflect that Hungary is performing better. The efforts of the Hungarian people in 2012 were not pointless. It was a good decision to break free from the designated path and take our fate into our own hands, but not everyone is happy about this. Those who profited politically and economically from Hungary's weakness for several years or even decades, both at home and abroad, are unhappy about it. They plan to take Hungary back into the past, hoping that time has lessened the bleak memory of those years. But they will be proven wrong; a strong country doesn't forget. We will not forget those eight years. [...] We will not forget that together, they put the country to ruin. They are the old set, we know them well and we know exactly what they are up to. They would cancel the bank tax and instead make the population pay once more; they would cut pensions and again abolish tax concessions after children. **This is what the banks and the speculators expect them to do, and the weak always bow to the will of the powerful. They never stood for and continue to***

***not stand up for the interests of the Hungarian people. This is why they are surrounded by the buzzing of influential foreign interest groups, like flies around meat.***<sup>8</sup> *They are in fact the ones who want the people of Hungary to be saddled with them yet again.*"

(PM Orbán's State of the Nation Address 2013)

Parallel to the continuous discursive subordination and devaluation of his internal political opponents and the extension of the circle of external public enemies, Orbán also consciously intensified the existential conflict embodied in the "them and us dichotomy" by rhetorical means. Building on his freedom fight concept introduced in March 2012, in his 2014 state of the nation speech Orbán introduced a kind of war rhetoric based on metaphors of battle, war, and struggle for life and death.

*"We have won many battles, but we have yet to win the war. What has happened is simply that instead of retreating, we have begun to fight back. Those who think that we are the ones who instigated this conflict are mistaken. When we took office in 2010, the war between the multinationals and consumers, between the banks and foreign currency debtors, and between monopolies and families were already well underway. And we Hungarians were in a losing position on all fronts. In 2010, the choice we had to make was on whose corner of the ring we should enter the fight, and we chose the red white and green corner. The balance of power has changed significantly since then; we have won several rounds, but the fight is not over. [...] Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result. I feel our lives are rather exhilarating", good old Winston said. I am sure this is why I feel that our lives are so full of effervescence. The truth is that behind every struggle, every attack and every flying bullet lies the same intent, whether with regard to the reduction in public utility prices, the bank tax, the Constitution or anything else. The question is whether Hungary will be a country of fighters and winners, or if it will once again be the turn of the compromisers. The question is, will we make do with what we receive, or will we fight for what we have a right to."*

(PM Orbán's State of the Nation Address 2014)

This language effectively expanded the potential coverage of the existential dichotomy between the Hungarian nation and its well-known opponents, broadened the spectrum of potential existential threats from the economic terrain to other issues related to the nation's survival. That language of war might have played a crucial role as a precondition of the 2015 change in Orbán's rhetoric, switching the focus of the existential struggle against speculative capitalism to the ethnic, cultural and biological survival of the Hungarian nation in the context of the "migration crisis."

Similarly to his 2009 announcement in Kötöcs that laid the groundwork for Orbán's discursive strategy after 2010, the Hungarian Prime Minister's key speeches in 2014 can also rather be interpreted as pioneers of Orbán's post-2015 discursive toolkit, even if they obviously have not reflected on the future context of the migration crisis. Apparently, Orbán has never been in need to post festum adjust his discursive strategy to the political facts on the ground. Just the contrary, both in 2009 and 2014 he created rhetorical frames well in advance that could be effectively exploited later in the light of the upcoming events, like his landslide political victory and confrontation with the European Union after 2010, or the outburst of the refugee or – in Orbán's interpretation – the migration crisis in 2015.

The famous 2014 Băile Tuşnad speech introducing the concept of "illiberalism", coined by Fareed Zakaria (Zakaria 1997), as a label of proud self-identification into Orbán's rhetorical toolkit, played such

<sup>8</sup> Emphasize added by the author.

a pioneer role and made remarkable contributions to Orbán's negative chain of equivalence. First, it officially declared liberalism as an enemy. Although at the beginning Orbán's illiberalism concept has had a strong focus on economy, the rhetorical rejection and anti-thesis of liberalism could obviously be widely used in the future opposition to other qualities of liberal politics, like political correctness or multiculturalism. Although only with a limited scope – after 2014 and mostly in international context –, but "illiberalism" can be perceived as a possible empty signifier (Laclau 2005a:69), a key demand able to represent the totality of demands in Orbán's discursive construct. As the Hungarian Prime Minister claimed:

*"We had to state that a democracy does not necessarily have to be liberal. Just because a state is not liberal, it can still be a democracy. And in fact we also had to and did state that societies that are built on the state organisation principle of liberal democracy will probably be incapable of maintaining their global competitiveness in the upcoming decades and will instead probably be scaled down unless they are capable of changing themselves significantly. [...] What this means is that we must break with liberal principles and methods of social organisation, and in general with the liberal understanding of society."*

(PM Orbán's Băile Tuşnad summer university speech 2014)

Parallel to his rhetoric offensive against liberalism, Orbán also incorporated civil society organisations (NGOs) into his concept of enemies first time in his 2014 Băile Tuşnad speech. It happened that time due to the ongoing struggle over the finances provided by the Norway Grants to Hungarian NGOs, but the narrative could be easily extended and exploited in the post-2015 period, when advocacy NGOs active at the field of human rights and migration became the most despised public enemies in the discourse of Orbán and his Fidesz party. Unsurprisingly, Orbán deployed the same method of discreditation in the case of the critical civil society, as he did with regard to the Hungarian left-liberal opposition. Portraying watchdog NGOs as paid political activist representing the interest of foreign others, Orbán discursively deprived them from their "agency", their status as independent civic subjects and degraded them to the level of objects, tools in the hands of his prime global enemies. This discursive construct also created significant imbalance between the speaker and the affected NGOs, qualifying Orbán as the only true political subject, and discrediting the NGOs criticism by fundamentally questioning their independence.

*"... if I look at the non-governmental world in Hungary, or at least at those organisations which are regularly in the public gaze – and the recent debate concerning the Norway grants has brought this to the surface – then what I see is that we are dealing with paid political activists. And in addition these paid political activists are political activists who are being paid by foreigners. They are activists who are being paid by specific foreign interest groups, about whom it is difficult to imagine that they view such payments as social investments, and it is much more realistic to believe that they wish to use this system of instruments to apply influence on Hungarian political life with regard to a given issue at a given moment. And so, if we want to organise our national state to replace the liberal state, it is very important that we make it clear that we are not opposing non-governmental organisations here and it is not non-governmental organisations who are moving against us, but paid political activists who are attempting to enforce foreign interests here in Hungary."*

(PM Orbán's Băile Tuşnad summer university speech 2014)

Summing up, chain of equivalence P has been constantly developing between 2010 and 2015, incorporating new concepts of enemies, like the European Union, or civil society, aside of liberal capitalist elites and speculative capitalism, the original ones. The externalization of the populist dichotomy has played a dominant role throughout the whole period, relegating the Hungarian left-liberal opposition into a secondary role. The “general crime” committed by the enemies of the Hungarian people remained largely the same in the whole period: attempts to re-establish debt slavery for the country, and subjugate it to an economic colonization.

### **5. Populist demands and the “System of National Cooperation” in the period 2010-2015 (chain of equivalence Q)**

The populist claims of the Fidesz party and Prime Minister Orbán, comprised by the chain of equivalence Q, are formulated against the negative chain of equivalence above.

Concerning the construction of the populist concept of the “people”, Orbán followed a dual-path approach. One approach is based on the concept of the Hungarian nation, which is inclusive in social and economic, but exclusive in ethnic terms. The second approach used by Orbán operates with the concept of the “hard working people”, which is an exclusive concept morally (not being a hard working person is immoral), but both semi-inclusive, semi-exclusive from an economic and social perspective (as mostly everyone can be a hard working person, if he or she decides to do so). Both the Hungarian nation and the hard working people are homogenous categories being in existential conflict with the public enemies embedded in the negative chain of equivalence, and hence fit to the definition of populist logic (Laclau 2005a: 117-124).

The chain of equivalence Q comprises three key subsumptive demands<sup>9</sup> (Nonhoff 2007:182) to counter the lack in public goods caused by the items of the negative chain of equivalence. First, the Fidesz party and Viktor Orbán claimed a new transition and the moral and existential renewal of the nation. Second, Orbán claimed a strong state able to protect public goods and national interest. And last but not least, in a strong correlation with the claims above, Prime Minister Orbán also envisaged the creation of a “workfare society” able to serve as a stable fundament both for the sustainable economic growth of the country and the moral renewal of the Hungarian society.

In his 2010 commemorative speech at the anniversary of the 1956 revolution and freedom fight Orbán already called his electoral victory as “the revolution of the two-third” and equated it with the 1956 revolution and 1990 transition. “And that way happened the armed revolution in 1956, the constitutional revolution in 1990, and the two-third revolution in 2010. That is the way how history is written and a nation is gaining rebirth.” (PM Orbán’s commemorative speech at the anniversary of the 1956 revolution 2010) Although the labels used by Orbán varied extensively during the years, from the “Revolution of the Ballot Boxes” to system change or transition, its content remained largely unchanged. As Orbán already formulated it in 2010, clearly distinguishing the era of his government from the past period between 1990 and 2010, the new transition must fundamentally alter the political, legal,

9 Nonhoff distinguished three types of political demands that stand in hierarchical relationship with each other. First, cumulative demands articulated in a language act describe partial aspects of the necessary conditions required to overcome the lack of certain public goods. Second, subsumptive demands represent necessary conditions of certain public goods that are also considered to be sufficient conditions of the fulfilment of other public goods. Therefore the fulfilment of a subsumptive demand results in the simultaneous fulfilment of several cumulative demands. Third, the comprehensive demand represents the highest level of discursive claims, the fulfilment of which results in the fulfilment of all subordinated subsumptive and cumulative demands. As the comprehensive demands can discursively substitute any other demands in the chain of equivalence, it often fulfils the role of the “empty signifier” in a discursive project.

economic and moral fundament of the Hungarian state and society, on the basis of moral, tradition, and national interest.

*“Our Nation said yes to fundamental changes in our country. Everything must alter, our constitution, our laws, the public moral, the taboos, the orders, the goals, the relationships, and the values too. Media, environment protection, the schools, public procurement, all must be changed. Everything must be changed, that is hostile to the people, hostile to the nation, hostile to the reason and the moral. Everything that is hostile to life.”*

(PM Orbán’s commemorative speech at the anniversary of the 1956 revolution 2010)

The cumulative demands related to the subsumptive demand of the “new transition” overarched the complete reorganisation of the Hungarian constitutional system and the state institutions between 2010 and 2014, and contributed significantly to the democratic backsliding of the country. The analysis of these particular issues is definitely beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless it must be emphasized that the claim of a fundamental change equal to the 1989-1990 transition has been part of Orbán’s discursive toolkit from the very beginning, and his future conflict with liberal values on the basis of national interest has been coded in his discourse in a straightforward manner.

Orbán’s claim for a strong state rooted in the concept of national interest and has been in strong opposition to the concept of liberal constitutionalism. As Orbán emphasised it in his speeches in 2014, his main accusation against the liberal state was that it appeared to be unable to serve the national interest. As he said, prior to 2010 the state “has embraced, has represented neither the nation, nor the national interest. Instead of that the “labanc” [a historical term applied for those who collaborated with the Habsburgs against the Hungarian national movement and the revolution of Rákóczi in the XVII.-XVIII. century] ruled the country in the name of checks and balances and their foreign lords according to their will. [...] If it is true that the source of malaise has been the weakness of Hungary, and it is definitely true, we must set a strong Hungary as our ultimate goal.” (PM Orbán’s State of the Nation Address 2013) Furthermore, “the liberal democracy was incapable of openly stating and committing the prevailing government, including through the use of its constitutional powers, to serving the interests of the nation with their work. And it in fact challenged the very idea of the existence of national interests.” (PM Orbán’s Băile Tuşnad summer university speech 2014) The cumulative demands related to the subsumptive demand of “strong state” embraced the extra – or according to Orbán’s understanding: the fair – taxation of foreign companies, the state guarantee on commodity prices, the state regulated abolition of foreign currency debts, Hungary’s fiscal independence, etc., in nutshell, the state’s engagement in the “economic freedom fight” against the constructed public enemies. This concept of the protective, strong state has been uninterruptedly playing a key role in the whole period of analysis. In addition, after the outbreak of the refugee crisis in 2015 the strong state also undertook the protection of the cultural and ethnic homogeneity to guarantee the survival of the Hungarian nation being under siege by the invasion of immigrants.

The third subsumptive claim, the creation of a workfare society has had an antagonistic relationship both to speculative capitalism and welfare society. Workfare society has been both an economic and moral project intended to contribute to the economic independence, sustainable growth, and moral renewal of Hungary. As Orbán stated in 2011:

*“Hungarian people want to stand on their feet, want to be the masters of their own fate and know that this can only be achieved with decent work. Anyone can say anything, Hungari-*

*ans are decent people and work for them is a matter of honour. Hungarians do not want to live on benefits, to look for the easy way, they want to work."*

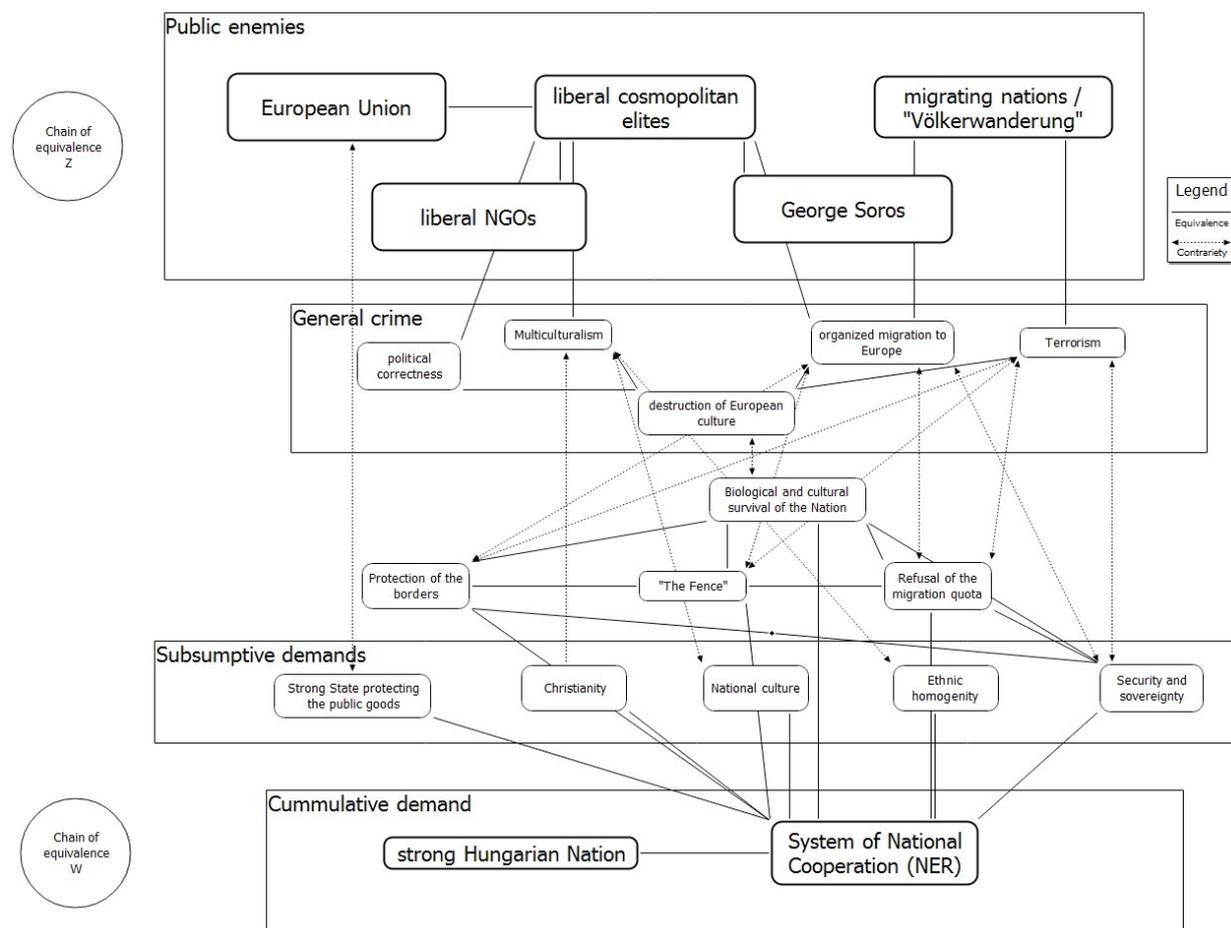
(PM Orbán's State of the Nation Address 2011)

The cumulative claims contributing to the creation of workfare society has embraced the introduction of a new public work scheme, flat tax, and financial and tax benefits for families, creating contrariety both to capitalist speculation and to living from social benefits, and so ultimately to the alleged economic and social reality in Hungary before 2010.

The comprehensive demand represented by all these subsumptive and cumulative claims in Prime Minister Orbán's speeches was the creation of a distinct, new political system achieving all demands represented in the chain of equivalence Q. Prime Minister Orbán baptized his new regime already in 2010 as the "System of National Cooperation" (In Hungarian: "Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere", in abbreviated form: "NER"). (PM Orbán's Băile Tuşnad summer university speech 2010) In the hierarchical structure of the comprehensive, subsumptive and cumulative demands embedded in the chain of equivalence, the "System of National Cooperation" appears to be the key empty signifier (Laclau 2005a: 110-117) able to represent all demands in the positive chain of equivalence and serves as the symbol of Orbán's hegemonic projects.

## **6. Concepts of enemies and "the general crime" after 2015 (chain of equivalence Z)**

As mentioned above, the second period of the Fidesz party's discursive performance after 2015 has had a strong focus on cultural and ethnic homogeneity and biopolitical survival of the Hungarian nation in the context of the refugee crisis, which clearly distinguishes it from the previous period. Therefore it appears to be necessary to re-model the party's altered discursive structure showing fundamentally new characteristics. Chain of equivalence Z represents the concept of enemies and the negative signifiers of the "general crime" in the period after 2015, while the chain of equivalence W represent the claims and demands formulated to overcome the challenges and shortcomings posed by the liberal cosmopolitan elites and the refugee crisis, or in Orbán's wording the "migration of nations" ("Völkerwanderung") for Hungary. The logic and structure of the two chains of equivalence, the contrariety and equivalence of the demands is portrayed below:



Discursive chains of equivalences in the period of 2015-2018. The author’s compilation

Chain of equivalence Z primarily comprises liberal cosmopolitan elites, the European Union, the “migrating nations”, liberal watchdog NGOs, and the alleged networks financed by the American investor and philanthropist with Hungarian roots, George Soros as public enemies in the “them and us” populist dichotomy. Similarly to the previous period, the left-liberal political forces in Hungary have only played a secondary, subordinated role in the discourse as political tools in the hands of – mostly – George Soros. The “general crime” committed by these actors is the intentional destruction of European culture and the deliberate changing of the ethnic relations in Europe by supporting the illegal migration to the EU. Also in strong contrast to the previous period, after 2015 Prime Minister Orbán has intensively applied conspiracy theories, and simple, from time to time stylistically rude language. Furthermore, he exploited the opportunities provided by the performance of crisis (Moffit 2014), reaching high levels in every six aspects of crisis performance. By switching the focus of the existential dichotomy from the economic terrains to the questions of biological, ethnic and cultural survival, the comparison of the key characteristics of Prime Minister Orbán’s two discursive periods obviously confirms the possibility of incumbent populist radicalization. In this context, radicalization reflects on the fact that over time Orbán’s rhetoric has embraced an increasing amount of radical-right features, especially nativism (Mudde 2016: 3-5).

Interestingly, Prime Minister Orbán introduced his new, anti-immigration discourse in January 2015, month before the outbreak of the European refugee crisis. With this move he once again in advance created the discursive structures he later exploited, instead of the post festa adaptation of his rhetoric to the existing characteristics of the political environment.

In his 2015 State of the Nation speech he claimed that “Terrorist organizations recruit fighters to join their ranks from among immigrants living in the continent’s western part, while the southern borders of the EU – including our own state’s borders – are besieged by waves of modern-day migration, in the face of which increasingly frustrated states and governments are at a loss. [...] Europe is facing questions which can no longer be answered within the framework of liberal multiculturalism. Can we shelter people, many of whom are unwilling to accept European culture, or who come here with the intent of destroying European culture?” (PM Orbán’s State of the Nation Address 2015)

With the equation of terrorism and immigration used as the interpretative frame to explain the future events of the refugee crisis, and declaring liberal multiculturalism an obsolete idea not able to provide proper answers to the crisis looming over Europe, Orbán laid the groundwork of his discursive strategy deployed until 2018. Furthermore, he could effectively link a significant part of the new narrative, mostly the rejection of liberal multiculturalism, to his former anti-liberal positions, allowing him to maintain continuity in the discourse, offering his narration more vigour and credibility. Against this background, Prime Minister Orbán complemented the chain of equivalence with further elements, resulting in a comprehensive conspiracy theory over the deliberate alteration of Europe’s ethnic composition.

In the same 2015 State of the Nation speech Orbán also introduced the new discursive concept of biopolitics. According to his claim, issues affecting the biological survival of the nation should enjoy absolute priority over economic issues. As he stated: “The modern world sees economic facts as the ones that truly count. It may be right, but I would attach higher priority to facts related to life. Above all, the facts which determine our biological survival and continuance.” Furthermore, Orbán also identified political correctness as a concept of enemy, preventing Europe to give appropriate answers to the challenges it faces.

*“Europe today continues to huddle behind the moats of political correctness, and has built a wall of taboos and dogmas around itself.” Based on his criticism on political correctness, Prime Minister Orbán ultimately labelled liberalism as an exclusively, nearly totalitarian ideology unable to respect diverging opinions and political pluralism. “Yes, we must understand that liberal politics only ever recognizes two kinds of opinion: its own and the wrong one.”*

(PM Orbán’s State of the Nation Address 2015)

All these rhetorical moves of Orbán significantly contributed to the effective performance of crisis. Orbán ultimately identified liberal multiculturalism as the source of failure in the given political setting, and framed the concept of “the people” against those, in his interpretation liberal and European elites, who are responsible for the crisis. Last but not least, he also elevated the level of the crisis, fitting perfectly into Moffit’s framework (Moffit 2014: 198-208), when he spoke about mass-migration without considering it worth to mention that an overwhelming part of the irregular migrants are asylum seekers.

Orbán further increased the level of crisis in his 2016 State of the Nation speech, when he expressis verbis spoke about the “migration of the nations” (aka “Völkerwanderung”) in an exaggerated way.<sup>10</sup> The quote above is in itself an emblematic example of the populist performance of crisis,

10 The speeches of Prime Minister Orbán used the Hungarian term „népvándorlás” which is identical to the German word „Völkerwanderung” and the historical concept of the English “migration of nations”. The official English translations of the speeches provided by the Hungarian Chancellery use the term “mass migration”, which appears to be more commonly used in English, but has a rather different stylistically message than the original Hungarian wording. The official English translations of Prime Minister Orbán’s speeches tend to stylistically ease the message that is often much harder in the Hungarian than in the English version. In this paper I consequently use the wording “migration of nations” as the

including the elevation of the level of crisis, by discursive means:

*"I would now like to explain why I have said all this. In summary, it is because all of this is now in danger. The financial stability we have worked so hard for is in danger. The only recently evident closing of the gap between us and other economies is in danger. Our nationally-oriented foreign policy – which has been built with such painstaking attention to detail – is in danger. Restored public order and public security free of terrorist threats are in danger. And our national culture – which is slowly finding its feet once again – is also in danger. What is more, not only does this danger threaten the things which we have, but also the things which we may have in the future: our prospects; the possibility of a promising future; and our children's expanding European potential, which is only beginning to unfold. The name of this danger is mass migration. [...] The second and third decades of the twenty-first century will be the decades of mass migration. An era is upon us which we were not prepared for. We thought that something like this could only happen in the distant past or was confined to the pages of history books. In fact, however, over the next few years more people than ever – multitudes outnumbering the entire population of some European countries – could set out for Europe. It is time to face reality. It is time to separate that which exists from that which we would like to exist. It is time to discard illusions, sophisticated theories, ideologies and utopian dreams. [...] History has kicked down the door on us: it has laid siege to the borders of Europe and the security of European cultures and European citizens."*

(PM Orbán's State of the Nation Address 2016)

By identifying the elites responsible for the crisis, Orbán also offered a conspiracy theory to explain these elites' modus operandi. According to his theory, Europe might have not been able to find the proper decisions in its own defence, because the cosmopolitan elites intend to rule the European nations and societies by undermining their ethnic homogeneity and power to resist.

*As Orbán stated "in Brussels and some European capitals the political and intellectual elite see themselves as citizens of the world – in contrast to the majority of people, who have a strong sense of nationhood. The way I see it, the political leaders are also aware of this. And while there is no chance of them agreeing with their own peoples, they would rather turn their backs on them. As used to be said in this part of the world, 'they know what to do, they dare to do it, and they do it'. But this means that the real problem is not outside Europe, but inside Europe. Those who do most to endanger the future of Europe are not those who want to come here, but the political, economic and intellectual leaders who are trying to reshape Europe against the will of the people of Europe. This is how, for the planned transport to Europe of many millions of migrants, there came into existence the most bizarre coalition in world history: the people smugglers, the human rights activists and Europe's top leaders."*

(PM Orbán's State of the Nation Address 2016)

After the invalid Hungarian referendum about the planned European refugee relocation quotas in October 2016, Orbán's rhetoric in his 2017 speeches further radicalized.<sup>11</sup> He increased his anti-liberal

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translation of „népvándorlás” to preserve the original style, context, and secondary meaning, except in the quotes from the official translations.

11 In October 2016, a controversial referendum took place in Hungary on the ability of the European Union (EU) to resettle migrants in Hungary without the Hungarian parliament's approval. Following an expensive and manipulative government campaign, the referendum held on 2 October failed to pass the 50-percent validity threshold. See: Nations

discourse claiming that liberalism turned to be fundamentally anti-democratic. With this Orwellian move he elevated his own concept of “illiberal democracy” from the status of an exception to the level of normality, while parallel to that he stigmatized “liberal democracy” as a largely impossible, pathological case due to the emerging conflict between liberalism and democracy.

*“From an ideological perspective this means that liberal ideology turned against the ideology of democracy, the latter being the ideal of a community organised on a majority basis, according to the will of the majority. From a political perspective, the open society means that – instead of elected members of parliament and governments – true power, decisions and influence must be put in the hands of people who are part of the global network, media gurus, unelected international organisations and their local offices. [...] This is the transnational empire of George Soros, with its international heavy artillery and huge sums of money. What makes this worse is that, despite the Hungarian people declaring its will in the quota referendum, the organisations of George Soros are working tirelessly to bring hundreds of thousands of migrants into Europe. They are working to divert the Hungarian parliament and the Hungarian government from the path that has been determined by the people”.*

(PM Orbán’s State of the Nation Address 2017)

With this rhetoric move, Orbán ultimately also extended the concept of public enemies to the alleged networks of George Soros and human rights watchdog NGOs, culminating in the alleged pro-migration alliance of “Brussels”, George Soros and the government-critical part of the Hungarian civil society. With these developments, the chain of equivalence Z reached its ultimate form encompassing cosmopolitan liberal elites, the European Union, George Soros and independent watchdog NGOs as public enemies, conspiring to undermine the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of Europe by settling millions of migrants to the old continent.

## **7. Populist claims and simplified solutions to the crisis of mass migration after 2015 (chain of equivalence W)**

Similarly to the previous period, chain of equivalence W comprises the positive claims formulated by Prime Minister Orbán, and the simplified solutions offered by his Fidesz party in the context of the refugee crisis after 2015.

Concerning the construction of the “people”, the “us” side of the populist dichotomy underwent significant simplification. The social dimension, the category of the hard working people has definitely fallen into the background, in spite of the fact that the redistributive aspect of xenophobia has been also widely instrumentalized in the Hungarian public. Thousands of government financed billboards advertised in 2015 and 2016 that migrants are not allowed to take away the work from Hungarian people.<sup>12</sup> Prime Minister Orbán contributed to this discourse in his 2015 State of the Nation speech at the following way.

*“And as far as I see it, Hungarian people are by nature politically incorrect – in other words, they have not yet lost their common sense. They are not interested in talk, but want facts and results; they are not interested in theories, but want jobs and affordable utility bills; and they do not swallow the nonsense that unemployment is a natural concomitant of modern*

in Transit Hungary Report 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/hungary>

12 Budapest Business Journal, 8 June 2015, [https://bbj.hu/politics/immigrant-billboards-being-destroyed\\_98829](https://bbj.hu/politics/immigrant-billboards-being-destroyed_98829).

*economies. They want to free themselves from the modern-day debt slavery that they were driven into by foreign currency loans. They do not want to see their country thronging with people from different cultures, with different customs, who are unable to integrate; people who would pose a threat to public order, their jobs and livelihoods."*

(PM Orbán's State of the Nation Address 2015)

The quote also serves as a perfect example for the stylistic simplification and radicalization of Orbán's rhetoric after 2015.

The chain of equivalence W comprises three key subsumptive demands, security, sovereignty, and the preservation of the ethnic, cultural and religious composition of the Hungarian nation to counter the danger posed by the items of the negative chain of equivalence. The cumulative demands contributing to the fulfilment of the subsumptive claims are the protection of the borders, the establishment and maintaining of the border fence at the Hungarian-Serbian and Hungarian-Croatian border, and the refusal of the "migration quota", the EU asylum seeker relocation scheme adopted by the Council in September 2015. The comprehensive demand represented by all these subsumptive and cumulative claims is the biological and cultural survival of the Hungarian nation, provided by the protective frames of the System of National Cooperation (NER). The central role of "NER" allowing the fulfilment of the comprehensive demand formulated in the discourse leaves the empty signifier unaltered. In both discursive periods of Prime Minister Orbán and his Fidesz-party the "System of National Cooperation" is the signifier able to represent or substitute every single item of the positive chain of equivalence.

Orbán's subsumptive demands for security and border control were frequently vested in metaphors of war, especially of the border wars against the Ottoman conquest between the 15th and 18th century. These metaphors empowered the discourse with the notion of rightful self-defence, national pride, and the mission of fighting in Europe's defence. As Prime Minister Orbán stated in his 2016 State of the Nation speech:

*"We are giving personnel, border guards, technical hardware and equipment to the Balkan countries, because it is they who are in reality defending Europe's borders. And while they are resisting, we will also be able to defend our own borders more easily. We have known this since the time of Hunyadi.<sup>13</sup> [...] We shall teach Brussels, the people smugglers and the migrants that Hungary is a sovereign country, and its territory can only be entered by those who will obey our laws and accept the authority of our law enforcement and military personnel. The defence of our southern borders will not be enough. We must stand our ground on another battlefield – fortunately this is not the realm of soldiers, but of diplomats."*

(PM Orbán's State of the Nation Address 2016)

In contrast to the previous period, when concepts of subsumptive demands, like workfare society or the strong state protecting and providing public goods required certain content and positive definition attempts, this requirement has not been necessarily present in Orbán's second discursive period after 2015. Subsumptive demands like security, sovereignty, and cultural and ethnic homogeneity has been often defined in a negative way, as a reference to the absence of the imagined doomsday that the

13 János Hunyadi has been a Hungarian general and statesman in the 15th century fighting successfully against the Ottomans on the Balkan Peninsula. Hunyadi maintained good diplomatic and military relations to the Balkan nations also opposing the Ottoman conquest.

“general crime” of the public enemies would have been caused. The framing of this definition process deployed the whole toolkit of xenophobic radical right discourse against the migrants/asylum seekers, including the charges of criminality, terrorism, and violent promiscuity. Stylistically, that rhetorical items represent the endpoint of the discursive development process, both with regard to the outsourcing of the populist “them and us” dichotomy and the radicalisation of the populist claim in incumbent position, reaching the discursive qualities of the xenophobic radical right.

*“The EU clearly divides into two camps: on the one side are the federalists, and on the other are the supporters of sovereignty. The federalists want a United States of Europe and compulsory resettlement quotas, while the supporters of sovereignty want a Europe of free nations, and will not hear of any form of quota. This is how compulsory resettlement quotas have become the essence and symbol of the times we now live in. This is important in itself, but it also encapsulates everything which we fear, which we do not want, and which has the potential to prise apart the alliance of European peoples. We cannot afford to allow Brussels to place itself above the law. We cannot afford to allow the consequences of madcap policies to be expanded into those countries which have complied with every treaty and every law – as we have done. We cannot afford to allow them to force us or anyone else to import the bitter fruits of their misguided policies. We do not want to – and we shall not – import crime, terrorism, homophobia and anti-Semitism to Hungary. In Hungary there shall be no lawless urban neighbourhoods, there shall be no street violence or immigrant riots, there shall be no arson attacks on refugee camps, and gangs shall not hunt our wives and daughters. In Hungary we shall nip any such attempts in the bud, and we shall be consistent in punishing them.”*

(PM Orbán’s State of the Nation Address 2016)

## 8. Summary

The conducted political discourse analysis of Prime Minister Orbán’s speeches in the government period of the radical right-wing populist Fidesz party from 2010 until 2018 confirmed the presence of the “outsourcing strategy”, the externalisation of the populist “them and us” dichotomy in the party’s discourse. However, no gradual introduction of the externalisation could be observed, as the discourse was ruled throughout the whole period by the concepts of external enemies, relegating the domestic opponents of Fidesz into a secondary role. The decision about the strategic reorientation of the discursive focus, overshadowing the domestic terrain of political conflict, was announced by Viktor Orbán in his September 2009 speech at Kötcse, well before the landslide victory of Fidesz at the 2010 parliamentary elections. The motives behind the very early deployment of the externalisation strategy from 2010 require further analysis and the extension of the research period to the years before 2010 spent in opposition by Fidesz.

The performance of crisis played a central role in the construction of the party’s discursive structures. It has deeply influenced the characteristics of both the concepts of enemies and the crucial demands invented and framed by Prime Minister Orbán, thus it has had a considerable impact on the externalisation strategy too. Between 2010 and 2018, two distinctive periods of the Fidesz party’s discourse can be identified, based on the fact which external crisis has the discourse been focused on. After 2010 primarily the global economic, financial and debt crisis played a central role in the narratives,

until it was substituted by the refugee crisis in 2015. The results of the research definitely confirm the claim that the European scope of the political crises since 2008 contributed to a shift from anti-elitism at domestic level to anti-elitism at European level (Kriesi & Pappas 2015: 307 and Kaltwasser & Taggart 2016: 205). Nevertheless the strong correlation between the externalization strategy and the performance of crisis in the Hungarian case leaves the question open whether a successful implementation of the externalization strategy would have been possible in a not crisis-affected environment.

Bearing all limitations of this case study in mind, the case of the Hungarian Fidesz party demonstrates that externalisation strategy can be successfully implemented by populist parties to adapt the populist “them and us” dichotomy to the requirements of government position, overcome the incumbency challenge, and maintain or even radicalize the populist claims while being in government.

## 9. Literature

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### 9.1. Annex I - The text corpus

For the purpose of the discourse analysis always the Hungarian variants of the speeches were used. The URLs in Annex I. lead to these original language versions. To the official English translations of the speeches see Annex II.

#### **The speech of Viktor Orbán at the “Civic Picnic” in Kötcse, 5 September 2009,**

<http://www.fidesz.hu/hirek/2010-02-17/meg337rizni-a-letezes-magyar-min337seget/> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

#### **The speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the summer university in Băile Tuşnad, 24 July 2010,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-a-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetemen-es-diaktaborban-2010-julius-24> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

#### **Commemorative speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the anniversary of 1956 revolution and freedom fight, 23 October 2010,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-unnepi-beszede-a-kossuth-teren-2010-oktober-23> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

#### **Prime Minister Orbán’s State of the Nation address, 7 February 2011,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-orszagertekelo-beszede-2011-februar-7> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

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<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-miniszterelnok-unnepi-beszede-a-kossuth-lajos-teren> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

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<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/nem-fogadjuk-el-hogy-idegenek-kormanyozzanak-minket> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 23 February 2013,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/magyarorszag-jobban-teljesit-leirat> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**The speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the summer university in Băile Tuşnad, 29 July 2013,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/a-kormany-nemzeti-gazdasagpolitikat-folytat> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 17 February 2014,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/felivelo-korszak-kuszoben-allunk> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**The speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the summer university in Băile Tuşnad, 29 July 2014,**

<https://mNo.hu/belfold/orban-viktor-teljes-beszede-1239645> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 27 February 2015,**

<http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/a-kemenyen-dolgozo-emberekrol-szolnak-a-kovetkezo-ev> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

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<http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**The speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the summer university in Băile Tuşnad, 23 July 2016,**

<http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-xxvii-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetem-es-diaktaborban/> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 10 February 2017,**

<http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-19-evertekelo-beszede> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**The speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the summer university in Băile Tuşnad, 22 July 2017,**

<http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-a-xxviii-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetem-es-diaktaborban> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 18 February 2018,**

<http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede20180218> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

## 9.2. Annex II - The text corpus

The sources of official English translations quoted in the paper, provided by the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office. In case of the speeches not itemized in Annex II the quotes are the author's translations.

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 7 February 2011,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/viktor-orban-s-state-of-the-nation-address> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Commemorative speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the anniversary of 1956 revolution and freedom fight, 23 October 2012,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-in-budapest-on-october-23> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 23 February 2013,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-state-of-the-nation-speech> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 17 February 2014,**

<http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-state-of-the-nation-address> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**The speech of Prime Minister Orbán at the summer university in Băile Tușnad, 29 July 2014,**

<http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

**Prime Minister Orbán's State of the Nation address, 27 February 2015,**

<http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/the-next-years-will-be-about-hardworking-people> (accessed: 1 October 2018).

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## **Populism and the ENP to the East - Outlining and discussing a research framework for a comparison of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia**

### **1. Introduction**

Many political scientists and international relations experts as well, have found a new phenomenon on the political horizon to focus on: populism. While some argue that populism as a political phenomenon has not entered the political landscape in Europe and elsewhere all of a sudden (Hawkins / Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 527-529), it is quite uncontested that ground-breaking events in 2016 have fueled the perception that populism is something new or has gained momentum in the last years. Among those events were the support for and the election of Donald Trump as well as many national level elections in the EU member states, by which a significant number of populists have made it into the respective parliamentary scene. All over the world, it seems that new constellations and challenges have favored the success of populist actors, no matter which political ideology they adhere to. Be it right-wing populism, which has quite some history in many EU member states (Mudde 2016), left-wing populism as a result of the Euro- and economic-crises (often in the EUs south), or the election of, until now, relatively stable populist governments in Poland and Hungary (see Pappas 2016a, 30, and table 2, 33, for a current cluster of populist parties in many EU states), populism has obviously become a characterizing feature of the current EU-European political landscape. And to be sure, populism is not something that stops at the borders of democratic states. Depending on one's understanding of the concept, populism can not only be used as a mobilizing tool by politicians in democracies but can be utilized by autocrats to foster their political standing and power as well.

With the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU has conceptualized a policy especially designed for the EUs bordering states in the east and the south. The initial idea was to soften the effects of 2004 and 2007, two points in time in which new member states have joined the union. However, the policy itself has become highly contested, as its effectiveness has been questioned to a large extent. ENP member states in the Mediterranean area and the east face many challenges and various political crises as well as the war in Syria have erupted in the last decade. And as populism is obviously gaining influence in many countries all over the world, it is worth taking a closer look at the group of Eastern Partnership (EaP) member states and assess their state of populism.

The following working paper article therefore engages in a closer analysis of some EaP members. It looks at the level of populism on the party level within three of them, by asking the question of how populist the parties represented in the acting legislatures are. It additionally outlines some context factors, possibly enabling populism to flourish. As there has not been much research on this question until now, the article should be seen as a first start to map and cluster if populism exists in the three states and what could possibly be mentioned as enabling factors. Structurewise, four steps will be taken. Step one gives an overview of different understandings of populism and offers a glance at how other authors have worked with the term. Second, following a short case selection paragraph, a literature overview will show that scientific studies until now have rather overlooked the role of populist actors in these states. After this, an empirical section follows subsequently and the enabling contextual factors

for the cases are summarized. The last chapter concludes, discusses shortcomings and problems and offers an outlook for future research.

## 2. How to understand and conceptualize ‘populism’

In a recent article, van Kessel (2014) has highlighted the incoherent and manifold use of the term ‘populism’ by researchers. Most scholars dealing with populist actors, however, agree that populists (no matter what political positions they stand for or which movement they tend to represent), share at least some kind of common ground (van Kessel 2014, 101 for a discussion of these elements). This common ground is the contradiction between the political world (those who are ruling) and those who are “governed” by the former. No matter whether the political elite has been elected democratically or not, this divide is always seen and interpreted as a rupture or cleavage by populists. They conceptualize politicians (especially those ones currently in an executive position) as having completely contorted and moved away from their constituencies. They are presented as either corrupt, only looking for their own advantages, often “guided” and directed by others (Ostiguy 2017, 76-77) like for example a small group of experts on the EU European level. Populists always add a normative element to this constellation: while the governed are the “good ones”, the criticized politicians are “generally bad” (Müller 2015, 83-86). Only the incumbency of the populists will return politics to that what it should be: fighting for the desires and enforcing the positions of the “good ones”, the oppressed people.<sup>14</sup>

The quite diverse literature on populism is characterized by many debates discussing this vague concept and its core features as well as how to work with it. To get an overview of how the research on populism has emerged over the last decades as well as an idea of the various definitions that have been invented to capture this political phenomenon, it is of high value to take a look at the appendix in Pappas’ (2016b) article. He summarizes that scholars have perceived populism in many different ways, like e.g. as an ideology or as a way to make political agitation work (Pappas 2016b, appendix). In a similar way, Gidron and Bonikowski (2013) have also asked how scholarly writings working with the term ‘populism’ can be clustered. They believe to have found three grand strands: an ideological one, a discursive one and a strategic one (Gidron / Bonikowski 2013, table 1, 17). While the first one sees populism as a part of a political belief system, the second position sees populism as a mobilizing tool for politicians which they can use for example in their speech acts. According to the third strand of literature, one should rather focus on structures and such as how the relationship between the populist parties’ leadership and their constituencies is organized (Gidron / Bonikowski 2013, 10-11).

This divisional understanding of the concept also has an impact on how to empirically work with it (Pauwels 2017, 123-124) and studies have done this to various degrees. Parties can be either populist or not and this can be clearly detected in their ideational and normative groundings as well as in their belief systems (see e.g. Pappas 2016a). In this case, populist actors or parties have to match a certain number of criteria to qualify as populist. But it is equally legitimate and possible to argue that populism can be rather assessed as a degree. A newspaper article might, for instance, contain a certain amount of populist rhetoric (examples include Manucci / Weber 2017; Rooduijn 2014).

Thus, different points of view to conceptualize the term exist and depending on the standpoint, authors have taken different approaches to work with the concept. The challenge is now to narrow down

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14 If populist politicians and actors are really interested in “governing” and offering practical policy alternatives is of second rank. For some, being marginalized and possibly never taking over an executive position can be even considered as part of their “business model”, as a deep criticism of established political structures can be seen as one of their *raison d’être*.

the concept as much as possible and to anchor it in the existing literature. To begin with, everybody who is dealing with populism will stumble across Cas Mudde's definition of populism, which is probably one of the most cited ones. He states that populism is:

*"[...] an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people"*

(Mudde 2004, 543).

While this dichotomous worldview can be seen as the lowest common denominator many political scientists would share, others like Jan-Werner Müller especially emphasize that "[i]t is crucial to understand that populists are not simply anti-elitist: they are also necessarily anti-pluralist" (Müller 2015, 85). Anti-pluralists in this sense means that populists consider only those ones and their positions that they aim to represent as the only really legitimate positions. For them, deliberation with many different actors in a democratic political arena is overrated and simply not needed. Populists perceive the world as a dualistic one, in which the group they claim to represent and give a voice to, anyways, only displays one position against the contorted rest.<sup>15</sup> According to Rummens, this is one of populism's most dangerous features (Rummens 2017, 563).

But understanding populism as a concept according to the above elaborated definition does not offer the complete picture. What is important is that populists use other ideologies and content to gather support (Mudde / Rovira Kaltwasser 2013a, 498-499; Taggart 2004, 274-275, 280ff.; Stanley 2008). Populists can choose among very different ideologies and content to make their worldview work. An example should help to explain this point. If one thinks about a populist party, it might make sense to compare populism to some kind of underlying structure, a "skeleton", which gives the party a certain common framework it adheres to. But parties cannot rely on this feature on its own, as political content in terms of ideological positions, worldviews etc. needs to be uploaded on top. Thus, to a certain degree, populism by itself lacks a certain political direction. While populists may share the above-mentioned elements, they can vary massively in their political claims and political positions. As condensed by Gidron and Bonikowski (2013, 22ff.) they can either represent a left- or right-wing position or they can embrace content independently of these two branches. While some underlying dichotomies and mechanisms between left- and right-wing populist actors might resemble to be the same, there are important differences concerning their positions towards, for example, questions on (im)migration (Otjes / Louwerse 2015). And some populist movements, like the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy, even consider themselves as neither left nor right; an understanding which is however not clear for all political issues on the agenda of this party (Mazzolini / Borriello 2018, 240).

15 In addition, scholars have also discussed if a definition of populism should entail the element of leadership, being built around a charismatic politician (Canovan 1999, 6; Taggart 2004, 276). While there might be a point for some individual cases, Pappas (2016c) has demonstrated that the broader picture shows that only some populist parties share this element. However, when they share it, they manage to survive longer. In Pappas' parlance, "[...] charismatic leadership is an important causal factor for the success of populist parties or movements. The stronger the charisma of their leadership, the higher the likelihood of populist parties to prosper politically and electorally" (Pappas 2016c, 386, emphasis in the original). To add to this, it is also debated if populism is a phenomenon which is linked to political crises. While some argue that populism usually emerges when crises exist or people believe they are living in times of crisis (Taggart 2004, 275), others claim that the (electoral) support for populist actors is rather positively correlated with the instrumentalization of a (perceived) form of crisis (Moffitt 2015).

### 3. How to measure populism empirically? A short review of exemplary studies

Giving an overview of empirical works, scholars usually analyze populism on the level of political parties. They assess whether a party can be considered populist according to party documents or documented speeches of high-ranking politicians (e.g. Hawkins 2009). In recent times, there are however also more and more attempts to measure populism on the individual scale by conducting surveys (as examples see Akkermann et al. 2014; Schulz et al. 2017). Akkermann et al. (2014) have asked for the level of populism among a representative sample of the Dutch constituency. Their main research interests were first, if it was possible to deduct a specific dimension of populism among the attitudes of voters. And secondly, if those voters supporting a significant number of populist statements are also more inclined to vote for populist parties. The authors found out that the latter can be confirmed (Akkermann et al. 2014, 1344). By asking specifically for the support of populist statements and dimensions among a group of people, the authors are among the few who were measuring this phenomenon on the individual level.<sup>16</sup>

But populism research has not only devoted itself to parties, actors and attitudes of voters. The question of how the media have (re-)produced populist discourses has become fashionable as well. As an example, a study by Manucci and Weber (2017) has analyzed the level of populism of newspapers and some exemplary articles. Their study shows that populist statements in the analyzed print-media have not significantly increased, while populism in political manifestos of parties has. Also Rooduijn (2014) assesses the level of populism in various newspaper items. He is able to show that these populist framings have increased in recent times – similar to the success of populist parties – showing that populism is on the rise. And last but not least, Engesser et al. (2017) have broadened this media related endeavor to capture populism by analyzing the Twitter and Facebook strategies of various politicians from “Austria, Italy, Switzerland and the UK” (Engesser et al. 2017, 1114).

Populism research can therefore be characterized as multifaceted and rich in approaches. Depending on the understanding of the term populism, all of those ways of doing research have advantages and disadvantages. However, what those briefly summarized empirical studies have in common is a particular focus on (mostly (EU-)) Europe. The following section will outline that there is a lack of studies on populism in the three countries of interest, and that there is even less comparative cross-country research among those cases.

### 4. Short literature review

As has been argued elsewhere, populism is flourishing all over the world and this phenomenon can be observed in many countries of different regions (see special issue of IPSR 2017). But although this has been detected by scholars, it seems that there is a regional bias in analyzing populism in mostly Europe and (Latin) America (Hadiz / Chryssogelos 2017, 399-400), with a focus in each region on specific forms of populism(s) (e.g. Mudde / Rovira Kaltwasser 2013b). Therefore, it is quite astonishing that, until now, not much comparative work has been published on populism in Eastern Europe and specifically in the post-Soviet realm. Especially the EaP countries level of populism has not been under the radar of political scientist.

From the perspective of the European Union, Solonenko (2017) offers an analysis of the connection between rising populism within the EU and its effect on current developments in Ukraine,

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<sup>16</sup> But see also Hawkins et al. (2012), as a study the authors are particularly referring and aligning their work to.

mainly having a negative impact on the country's domestic situation.<sup>17</sup> Populism within the EU borders, which is very often considered to be right-wing populism, has a long-standing history and for some years, studies on various countries as well as cross-country comparisons are flourishing (see de Lange 2012 for a comparison of the radical populist actors on the right in executive positions; see Rooduijn / Akkerman 2017 for a comparison of parties on the fringes of the political spectrum in a variety of EU countries and their level of populism over time; see Verbeek / Zaslove 2016 for an in-depth engagement with populism in the case of Italy; and Grabbe and Groot (2014) for a study of “the fragmented group of xenophobic populists” (Grabbe / Groot 2014, 36) within the European Parliament). While the accession of the new EU member states in 2004 and 2007 has been very often mentioned as a success story, there are alarming tendencies in recent years that the executives of those countries try to withdraw democratic institutions and procedures. The political developments in Poland with the surprising victory of the populist PiS party (Fomina / Kucharczyk 2016), as well as Hungary's relatively stable turn to its populist Fidesz-run executive, with Victor Orban as a key actor (Batory 2016), have been discussed in the literature to a large degree.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of the 2000s, Mudde clustered different versions of populism in Eastern Europe and distinguished three forms: agrarian, economic and political (Mudde 2000, 34ff.). Leaving the borders of the EU, populism in Belarus (mentioned in Eke / Kuzio 2000, 539) and in Russia has been of interest in the political science literature as well. Oliker (2017) explains that the rule of Putin and populism, understood as it has been flourishing in mostly western Europe, do not share that many features – but this does not prevent Putin from promoting special links with populist actors in many countries abroad. March (2017, 221), however, summarizes other works that have focused on Putin's rhetorical skills by mobilizing the Russian electorate with populism infused speeches. Other states of the post-Soviet sphere are rarely mentioned in the literature on populism, and cross-country comparisons are even rarer. This is probably the case as

*“[...] the major reason for the poor performance of populism across the region is that the socio-political environment has permitted the re-emergence of authoritarian patronal presidentialism with very little scope for pluralism and hence sustained populist appeals. Such patronal presidents have co-opted demotic rhetoric, but sought to limit genuine populism both domestically and internationally. Where populism has gained a foothold, it is generally in political systems which have the most sustained traditions of elite and public pluralism (especially Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) [...]”*

(March 2017, 228).

These three countries will be the focus in the following sections, but the selection of cases needs to be legitimized first.

## **5. Empirical part: Comparing the three cases**

The ENP can be interpreted as an offer by the European Union towards its bordering states. This offer encompasses a closer and more intensified cooperation scheme, which covers a huge variety of policy fields. It has the ultimate goal of tying those partners as close as possible to the EU, so that cleavages between the EU and the bordering states are less intense, abated or, at best, do not even emerge. What

17 See <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/03/30/western-populism-ukraine/>, last access 15.01.2018.

18 See also Hegedüs (2018) in this working paper.

has at first seemed like an interesting approach to circumvent the effects of 2004 and 2007 (meaning: EU enlargement) without taking in more countries, has only partly worked out. Most scholars have highlighted the ENPs lack of success (among others see Kelley 2006; Blockmanns 2017; Kostanyan et al. 2017; Lavenex 2017). Democratic regimes did not flourish everywhere, conflicts are still prevailing, have erupted or worsened. Economic data of most partner countries could be much better and the challenges those countries have to cope with are manifold. Also, the establishment of the EaP, especially designed for the six states east of the EU, has not ameliorated the ENPs effectiveness. While countries like Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia have taken the road toward closer EU alignment,<sup>19</sup> this is not the case for the other two other countries, namely Azerbaijan and Belarus, both highly authoritarian countries. Armenia has opted for a specific path, with the signature of a “Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement” (CEPA).<sup>20</sup> While the EU offers to engage in closer cooperation with all of the EaP partners, this does not mean membership in the short or long run.

As mentioned earlier, only three countries out of the six EaP members will be analyzed. The Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia share some commonalities which makes those countries comparable. Of course, one could argue, that all of the six states share some kind of post-Soviet legacy and history. In addition, it could be argued that they are all members of the same EaP framework and therefore, are all located in the neighbouring region of the EU and Russia. This makes them face similar constellations. However, the partner countries have opted for different levels of intensity in cooperation with the EU (see above). To add to this, the three countries analyzed are ranked as “Hybrid Regimes” according to the “Nations in Transit 2017” ranking (Freedom House 2017),<sup>21</sup> which means that they are located half way (up or down) on the ladder ranging from authoritarian to democratic states. This “Hybrid Regime” position is a vulnerable one, as democracy and its institutions have not solidified, civil society could easily get suppressed and various dynamics, like for example the emergence of populism, can easily erode hard earned democratic elements.<sup>22</sup> But this level also offers at least a minimum level of competition and pluralist elements for party populism to emerge (see quote by March 2017 above). All of the three selected countries also face territorial conflicts within their state territory (Transnistria, annexed Crimea, parts of eastern Ukraine, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) (see Nodia et al. 2017, 6-9). These territorial conflicts, although having different intensity levels, lead to domestic and inter-state insecurity.

The timeframe of the analysis is restricted to the parties in the respective legislative body since the last elections in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. While the last parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova took place in November 2014, the Ukrainian electorate made its way to the ballot boxes in October 2014 to decide about the distribution of seats in the Verkhovna Rada. In Georgia, the new legislative assembled after the latest elections in October 2016.

In the following sections, an overview will be given of the respective parties in parliament and if others and experts have labelled those parties and prominent party actors as populist. What should be mentioned at this point, is that most studies, articles and experts referred to in the following section, almost never explicitly discuss what they mean by “populism”.<sup>23</sup> There is also no engagement

19 Since 2014, those states have decided on contractual obligations through agreeing on Association Agreements (AAs) with the European Union (see Emerson 2015 for an overview of the three AAs).

20 See [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eap\\_summit\\_factsheet\\_armenia\\_eng.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eap_summit_factsheet_armenia_eng.pdf), last access 21.04.2018.

21 See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2017>, last access 23.03.2018.

22 The three states stand in contrast to semi-consolidated Armenia and the two consolidated authoritarian regimes Belarus and Azerbaijan, in which the democratic transition is frozen by now and liberty and freedom are denied to their residents.

23 Of course, some exemptions exist like e.g. Kuzio (2018) in this contribution.

in a broader discussion of populism in the respective case, they mostly simply mention the term in relation to the parties, political actors, speeches etc. However, although this picture is not complete, it can still give a first impression of the state of populism and should be seen as a first step toward further engagement.

### **5.1. Republic of Moldova**

Moldova is one of the EaP member states where the incentives to cooperate and get strongly connected with the EU have been particularly strong in the past (see Korosteleva 2010, 1268-1269). This can be seen e.g. in the fact that Moldova was the first EaP country with visa-free travel arrangements. Cleavages characterizing the Moldavian political and party system are, for example, the discussion about loyalty toward the EU versus toward Russia and the territorial question over Transnistria, but there are many more (as mentioned in Brett / Knott 2015, 440). However, the pro-EU or not cleavage has gained particular severity with a view to the destabilized situation and the war starting in eastern Ukraine following the Euromaidan protests, setting the scene for the last parliamentary elections in November 2014 (Irmer 2014, 1) as well as its level and intensity of cooperation with the EU (Büscher 2014).

With this parliamentary election, five parties have made it into Moldova's unicameral 101 seats strong legislative (see table 1 in Brett / Knott 2015, 439 for the following data). The biggest share of votes has fallen to the "Socialist Party of Moldova" (PSRM) with 20.51%, a stunning outcome if one considers that the party has not been part of the last legislative period 2010-2014. Following very closely, the "Liberal-Democratic Party" (PLDM) received 20.18%, becoming the second biggest party. While back in 2010, the "Communist Party of Moldova" (PCRM) has been the biggest group in parliament, it only received 17.48% in November 2014. Two smaller parties have also made it again into the parliament with nearly the same vote shares compared to 2010: the "Democratic Party" (PDM) with 15.8% as well as the "Liberal Party" (PLM) getting 9.67% (Brett / Knott 2015, 439). Generally speaking, the political scene in Moldova is under constant change or rather crises, as can be seen, for example, in the fact that parliamentary majorities have changed in favor of the PDM increasing its seats to 41 (Nodia et al. 2017, 16), the lack of building a stable governing coalition and the detection of one of the country's biggest financial scandal at the end of 2014 (Popescu 2015, 2-3; Brett / Knott 2015, 440).

There has not been much assessment of individual populist parties in the Moldovan political system. However, according to March (2017, 227), the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova should be seen through the lenses of populism, as its anti-establishment rhetoric is one of its core features (especially since the party is not in an executive position any more). In the course of the presidential campaign for the elections in 2016, Igor Dodon has been named a populist politician as well (Brett 2016).<sup>24</sup> To add to this, Calus (2016, 32) highlights that most political parties in Moldova are focusing on populism as a mobilizing tool. Many of them seem to circumvent important questions instead of discussing how policy change should take place and how reforms should be designed and implemented.

### **5.2. Ukraine**

At least since the protests and violent escalations on Maidan Square at the beginning of 2014, the annexation of Crimea and the war in some parts of the Eastern region, the international coverage of

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<sup>24</sup> See <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/11/23/igor-dodon-victory-for-moldova-oligarchs/>, last access 16.05.2018.

developments in Ukraine has risen to a large degree. According to Solonenko (2014, 2ff.), there have been two major ruptures that characterize the party spectrum before the latest parliamentary elections. The first one could be summarized as a pro-Maidan vs. anti-Maidan cleavage, while the second one is clustered around the question how to solve the security situation in the eastern part of the country. Nevertheless, parliamentary elections were an important step after the Maidan uprisings and have been conducted withstanding the severe domestic circumstances. In October 2014, Ukrainian voters endorsed and reaffirmed a trend toward the EU (Simon 2014, 2) and after the elections, the then established coalition government embarked on a course toward integration into EU-European western structures.<sup>25</sup>

Back then, six entities have made it into the parliament. Those are “The Peoples Front” (22.14%), “Petro Poroshenko Bloc” (21.82%), “Self Reliance” (10.97%), “The Opposition Bloc” (9.43%), “Oleh Lyashkos Radical Party” (7.44%) as well as “Fatherland” (5.68%).<sup>26</sup> The two parties named first currently form the coalition government.

According to a report by the Razumkov Center, “over two election cycles none of the political forces has nominally remained in Parliament” (Razumkov Center 2015, 13; see also Fedorenko et al. 2016, 621). Except the “Fatherland” party of Yulia Tymoshenko, all of those parties are new actors in the sense that they have developed from other parties (like the “Opposition Bloc”) or are completely new. It seems that, on the one hand, parties do not represent stable institutions for voters to rely on. But of course, vice versa, voters are less attached to parties, which can be seen in the vote change of voters’ preferences over time (Fedorenko et al. 2016, 610). Kuzio has intensively worked on and analyzed the Ukrainian party system, its elements and the countries problems towards a path of stable and sustainable democratization (e.g. Kuzio 2011, 2014). He considers populism as a core element of some political parties in Ukraine (Kuzio 2010). In this working paper contribution (Kuzio 2018), he uses elements of the conceptual framework developed by Ivan Krastev to capture populism in Ukraine and concludes, that Ukrainian populism lacks elements that are traditionally considered to be parts of European populism. Among those are the topics of migration as well as anti-EU and “anti-western” positions (Kuzio 2018).

Now taking a look at individual parties, the literature mentions that many parties in Ukraine can be labelled as populist parties to a certain extent (see Kuzio 2010, 4; see also Fedorenko et al. 2016, 612). Van de Water highlights that populism has a long-standing tradition in many Ukrainian parties being part of the legislative (van de Water 2014, 1). Most of these party actors mobilize against the political elite in a dualistic way with a highly normative and judging rhetoric. Yulia Tymoshenko is mentioned as a particularly populist actor by many observers (Simon 2014, 3; van de Water 2014, 7; Kobzova / Popescu 2015, 3). This can also be said for Oleh Lyashko, who has been one of the most populist actors in current Ukrainian politics according to van de Water. Lyashkos political style is mentioned as anti-establishment to a large degree (Van de water 2014, 5; see also Kobzova / Popescu 2015, 3; March 2017, 226). Svoboda is mentioned as using populist rhetoric and tools, but the party is located on the extreme edge of the political right (March 2017, 226) and did not make it into parliament in October 2014.

25 See [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/545714/EPRS\\_ATA\(2015\)545714\\_REV1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/545714/EPRS_ATA(2015)545714_REV1_EN.pdf), last access 24.03.2018.

26 See <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2014/wp300e?PT001F01=910>, last access 05.05.2018.

### 5.3. Georgia

Three entities entered the legislature with the last parliamentary elections. These are the “Georgian Dream”, the coalition of the “United National Movement” and the “Alliance of Patriots in Georgia”. They gained 48.68%, 27.11% and 5.01% respectively (Election Administration of Georgia 2016, 16).<sup>27</sup> While former President Saakashvili took over the political procedures after the so called “Rose Revolution” in 2003, it was in 2012 that he lost political trust and re-election. The “Georgian Dream” took over the responsibility and was able to confidently hold its electoral ground in the 2016 elections.

The political landscape in Georgia is not so much divided between a pro-EU European or a Russian stance as in Ukraine or Moldova. But to be sure, the cleavage within the country (especially between the separatist regions and the rest) is striking. And a new feature following this election is that a (rather) Russia orientated party has gained parliamentary seats, the “Alliance of Patriots of Georgia” (Schrapel 2016, 3). This party exhibits of a high level of nationalism and populism and is located on the very political right, rejecting diversity (Lortkipanidze 2016;<sup>28</sup> Kucera 2016<sup>29</sup>). While only 6 seats of the 150-seat strong assembly are allocated to this party, it remains to be seen how deep its anti-democratic political beliefs are and what its impact will be.

Voters often orient themselves to the way how parties present their leaders and/or prominent politicians (Lortkipanidze 2016).<sup>30</sup> In this context, former president Mikheil Saakashvili is referred to as using populist tools and rhetoric, but this was especially the case before he entered the president’s position (March 2017, 224).

Current political parties in Georgia are mentioned relatively less often when it comes to populism. According to March (2017, 224), the ruling coalition “Georgian Dream” cannot be understood according to a populist framework. With a view to the “Alliance of Patriots of Georgia”, which has been considered as a threat from the right end of the political spectrum, Gordadze and Popescu highlight that the rise of this movement could however enable the governing politicians to exploit it to their advantages. They state that: “It is thought that that GD would feel more comfortable and appear more ‘pro-Western’ if the main opposition were to be a populist and/or pro-Russian party” (Gordadze / Popescu 2016, 4). But it will be seen within this legislative term, in which way this, until now small, populist opposition will have an impact on actual policy content and proposed laws etc.

## 6. Commonalities among the cases providing the bases for populism

Thus, after this empirical part on populist parties in the respective legislatures, some common features of the three cases will be discussed. Despite their individual differences, the three states share some elements which could enable the rise of populist actors. As one of the overall framework questions of this working paper has been about the possible factors explaining populism, some of the common features those three states are sharing will be outlined in the next sections.

First of all, it seems that the parties and the respective party systems discussed above are generally not considered to be very strong and stable by observers (for Ukraine see e.g. Razumkov Center 2015, 13-16). The party systems and their stability are therefore characterized by fluidity.

Thus, it seems that if new parties or political movements emerge, they very often use populist

27 See <http://cesko.ge/res/docs/AnnualReport2016-CeskoEng.pdf>, last access: 17.05.2018.

28 See <https://eu.boell.org/en/2016/10/14/parliamentary-elections-georgia>, last access 02.04.2018

29 See <https://eurasianet.org/s/georgia-disillusion-with-establishment-fuels-rise-of-populism>, last access: 02.04.2018.

30 See <https://eu.boell.org/en/2016/10/14/parliamentary-elections-georgia>, last access 02.04.2018.

rhetoric to challenge established actors. The link between populism and parties is a crucial one, and populism easily emerges if voters tend to not feel represented in their political systems any more (Roberts 2017, 288-290). If voters believe that politics is nothing more than a merger or a “cartelization” of parties and political actors - serving only their own, personal interests - it is not astonishing that new (populist) actors flourish easily.

Secondly, all three countries are suffering from oligarchic structures. Especially Moldova and Ukraine have to be highlighted, but the power of those structures has recently also been mentioned in the case of Georgia (Nodia et al. 2017, 11). Oligarchs are either financing political parties from outside or are themselves part of the political system. Populist parties often rely on charismatic persons, leading parties (as mentioned in Taggart 2004, 276). In what way populism and oligarchic structures are linked, however, needs to be further analyzed in future studies.

Thirdly, the people in the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine also suffer from a high corruption level. According to the “Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index” of 2017, Georgia is in position 46, Ukraine ranks 130 and the Republic of Moldova is considered to be in place 122 (Transparency International 2017).<sup>31</sup> Although one could question how appropriate estimations of corruption really are, they tell us a lot about the possible breeding ground for populism. Of course, (new) political actors and parties criticizing a corrupt political system, protesting for democratic change or criticizing established (corrupt) structures and actors do not necessarily have to be populist.<sup>32</sup> However, populists with their anti-establishment rhetoric, mobilizing against a corrupt political elite, can easily exploit this situation for their party and personal advantage.

To add to the perception that corruption is widespread, the economic situation as well as the personal live situations are considered to be fairly negative in the three countries this article focuses on. Data retrieved from the “EU Neighbourhood Barometer – Eastern Partnership Survey”, conducted in 2014, reveal that in the three analyzed countries, more than half of the people state that they are “dissatisfied” (EU Neighbourhood Barometer 2014, 11) with their current ways of living. This negative view is repeated when those interviewees are asked to assess the state of the economy. According to the report, “[I]n four countries, respondents are considerably more likely to judge the national economic situation as bad than good: Ukraine (96%), Armenia (85%), Georgia (80%) and Moldova (79%)” (EU Neighbourhood Barometer 2014, 16). These data might also give us a hint at the question in which way perceived uncertainties about one’s future financial and economic outlook are fueling populism.

All those elements can be considered as catalysts laying the ground for populism to flourish easily. What is however somehow counterintuitive from the perspective of EU European populism, is that the European Union does not seem to be a target for populist mobilization. While a hostile position towards the European Union and international organizations in general is frequently named as an element of EU European populism (see the debate about Brexit, and many other cases) (Taggart 2017, 256-257), anti-EU positions are rarely advocated by populists in the three countries. According to March (2017), populism is not directed against the EU in the analyzed cases. He states:

*“Certainly, the EU factor has become a contested subject element in those FSU states (Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) that are members of the Eastern “neighbourhood,” not least during Ukraine’s Euromaidan of 2013–14. Nevertheless, the majority of the electorate and elites support EU accession, while remaining outside the EU removes the salience of issues which*

31 See [https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2017#table](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table) , last access 03.04.2018.

32 We should be reminded that anti-pluralism is that what makes populist actors particularly dangerous (Müller 2015, 88f.).

*so exercise populists elsewhere (e.g. immigration, the “profligacy” of the EU, its primacy over many domestic laws)”*

(March 2017, 219).

Also, on the individual level, data shows that the biggest share of interviewees residing in the EaP states have a positive view of the European Union, and even a third have at least neither a positive nor a negative image of this organization (EU Neighbourhood Barometer 2014, 39). The survey conducted in 2014 reveals that 40% of Georgians, 45% of Moldovan citizens and half of Ukrainians see the EU as a “good” entity (EU Neighbourhood Barometer 2014, 40) and most consider cooperation as valuable (EU Neighbourhood Barometer 2014, 55).

## **7. Problems, critical discussion and conclusion**

What have we now learned from this empirical snapshot-analysis dealing with populism in the three states of the EaP? First of all, it can be summarized that all of the three states have political parties in their legislative that can be considered more or less populist. And secondly, these populist actors and parties are acting within an environment where they could easily gain voter support and influence.

This article should be seen as a first step for outlining a possible research framework and for analyzing populism in the respective cases. It is an attempt to set the spotlight on an, until now, neglected research area. First of all, no comparative assessment of populism has been conducted yet in the EaP realm and there are no databases one could extract information on populism or populist parties from. And secondly, there is no common understanding in the scientific literature, articles, reports etc. of what can be considered as a populist party or actor. The word “populism” is often used without care and without further explanation. It seems that many authors have different underlying assumptions and definitions about the term. What are the main elements of “populism”? Is populism used as a mobilizing tool, or is it rather seen as an underlying ideology of political parties and actors? Is the focus on anti-corruption rhetoric, or more on creating a homogenous group against the politically established parties and actors? Is it possible to measure when a discourse is populist? How many statements have to be characterized as populist within a speech, to count as populist? Most cited publications are silent about the definition(s) used. Party manifestos or speeches should therefore be systematically analyzed according to anti-establishment and -elite framings and it should be analyzed in which way populist actors are creating a homogenous, anti-pluralist conception of the represented and, from their view, oppressed and suffering people. Without this analysis, we have no clear and comparative tool to assess how populist the parties actually are. This is also the case if one looks at the enabling conditions, offering populism an easy ground to gather support. All of the factors mentioned above need to be further examined (theoretically and empirically), as it is not yet entirely clear how they are interlinked with populism.

It is of course questionable if only taking a look at political parties in the parliament will enable a solid and adequate enough assessment of the populist landscape in the respective countries. First of all, if parties are such volatile and unstable institutions as mentioned in the literature, one has to ask if populism measured on the party level is really offering a solid view on the whole picture. It might probably be more fruitful to take a deeper look at individual, high ranking politicians and their speeches to assess how much populism infused their narratives etc. are. In addition, opposition movements and parties which have not made it into the parliamentary scene are dropping out of the analysis and we therefore might miss some important features of the political landscape. As an example, one could

name the rise of Renato Usatîl in the Republic of Moldova, who has been considered as an actor using populist tools (Irmer 2014, 2-3; Brett / Knott 2015, 440) - but his party has not been allowed to run for votes in the legislative elections (Calus 2016, 38). Furthermore, on the individual level, an analysis of voters' attitudes might be of interest as well. Surveys among the public could help us understand more about the distribution of populist attitudes. Last but not least, and as highlighted above in chapter 3, the media plays an important role in (re-)shaping and framing populism - or even worse, in bringing forward and supporting populist slogans. An analysis of leading newspapers, social media etc. in all of the three cases could give an interesting insight in the media landscape and their appeals to populism.

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