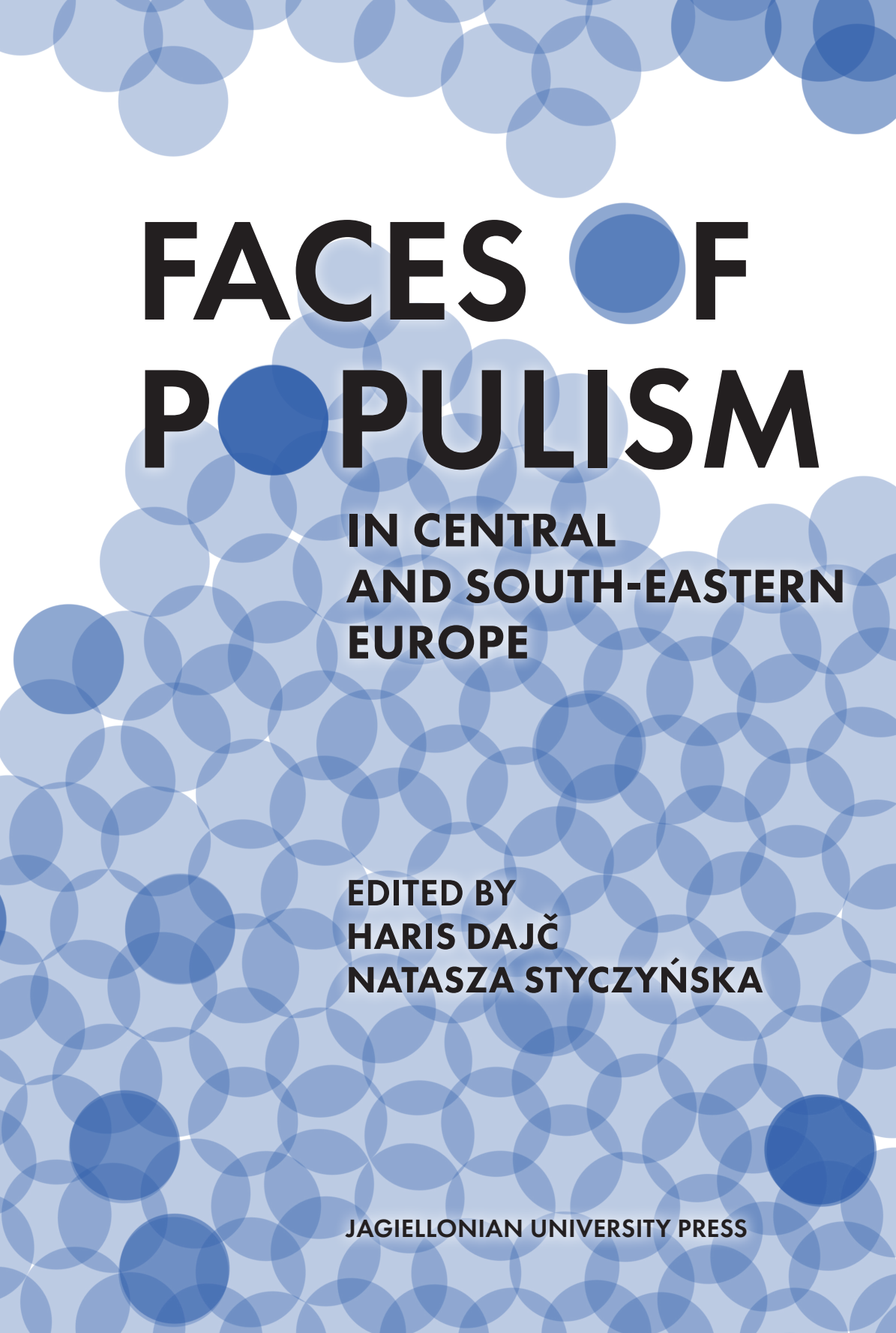




FACES OF POPULISM

**IN CENTRAL
AND SOUTH-EASTERN
EUROPE**

**EDITED BY
HARIS DAJČ
NATASZA STYCZYŃSKA**

JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Haris Dajč and Natasza Styczyńska
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December 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The book *Faces of Populism in Central and South-Eastern Europe* is the result of research cooperation within the project Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism (POPREBEL) and the conference that was held in Belgrade in April 2022, within the scope of the project. POPREBEL is a Horizon 2020-funded research project that analyses the rise of populism in Central and Eastern Europe and is run by a consortium of six universities: University College London, Jagiellonian University, Charles University, University of Tartu, Corvinus University of Budapest, University of Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy and, think tank, Edgeryders.

The 21st century brought significant crises (economic and refugee crises and the COVID-19 pandemic) that generated fertile ground not only for populist rhetoric but also policies. With the recent Russian aggression in Ukraine, one could notice a new wave of populist slogans often merged with nationalist and conspiracy arguments. The war in Ukraine generated dissonance among populists in the region and brought further proof that populism is very context-dependent. As Russia is a close neighbour to

the region and fuels populist movements in Europe, especially in the former Yugoslavia, our book focus on different faces of populism that developed in Central and South-Eastern Europe during the recent period.

“A[t] last everyone understands that populism matters” is the opening statement of the handbook on populism published by Cambridge University Press (Kaltwasser et al. 2017: 1). On the other hand, there is much less agreement regarding the definition of the phenomena.

Populism is one of the most frequently-used terms in contemporary political debates and the media. This elusive and difficult-to-measure concept became also highly politicised. The number of populist governments in Europe has increased in recent years, and the victory of Donald Trump in the US falsified the theory that the rule of populists concerns only young democracies (Kyle and Gultchin 2018). Interestingly, in Central and South-Eastern Europe, populist actors are part of the political mainstream and parties in power (Poland, Hungary). Although the dichotomy between ‘pure people’ and ‘the corrupted elite’ characterises all populist movements and actors, we wondered if there were particular features that connect these types of actors in the post-communist countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The volume collects chapters primarily based on empirical research undertaken within the POPREBEL research project framework, however, it also includes chapters by external researchers with whom we had the pleasure to cooperate during the time of the project.

In the first chapter of the book, Alexander Mesarovich addresses the conditions under which the confluence of populism and Euroscepticism impacted the accession processes in Croatia and Serbia. The author uses a social network analysis to identify the structure of relations within the parliaments of Croatia and Serbia during their accession processes, along with interviews with politicians from both countries. In the end, he demonstrates some potential challenges faced by those attempting to confront the ongoing populist phenomenon that are relevant in the case studies of these two countries.

Milan Vukomanović’s chapter on populism and religion in the Western Balkans focuses on Serbia, Montenegro and Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina). He explores how nationalist religious discourse and the advancement of an ethnocentric political theology have also been utilised as a populist mechanism in the hands of the current political elite in those

case studies. A special focus is given to the Serbian Orthodox Church and its “protection of culture” and how it started to participate with local political elites in reshaping the classical modernisation concept by accommodating it to local, national and particular moulds.

The chapter of Paulina Lenik examines the attributes of voters favouring populist parties in Czechia and Poland, using European Social Survey data for 2012–2016. By illustrating the amorphous nature of populism using Czechia and Poland as case studies, she proved that populism has country-specific features, complementing the previous region-wide assumptions on the general attributes of populist voters. Her findings exemplify that populism varies across political contexts and has a slightly different nature from what had been established on the regional level.

The fourth chapter, written by Ognjen Radonjić, addresses the Russian conquest of Serbia’s oil and natural gas sector from 2008 to the present day, as well as the Russian war on Ukraine. The author explains how Russia uses energy as a soft power instrument of foreign policy. In Serbia, this Russian soft power strategy has materialised through the Energy Treaty signed in 2008. Radonjić explains how the neo-traditionalist narrative referred to Serbia’s historical, cultural and religious ties with Russia and the neo-feudalist narrative to the traditionally close friendship of the Russian and Serbian authorities, as well as private relations between certain Russian and Serbian politicians. This led to a highly probable event of total energy instability and complete dependence on Russia in Serbia.

Joanna Orzechowska-Waśławska and Agnieszka Sadecka, in the fifth chapter, focus on ‘othering’ Europe in Poland’s right-wing media post-2015. Their chapter examines specifically the strategies of othering of Europe and the EU used by national populists in Poland in the name of promoting (and defending) Polish national traditional values, which have been portrayed as endangered by the liberal, supranational values professed by the EU. The empirical part of the study is based on the analysis of magazine covers of two opinionated right-wing weeklies: *Gazeta Polska* and *Do Rzeczy* during 7 years (2015–2021). They traced that, in the post-2015 period, there has been a significantly different perspective on the EU compared to the enthusiastic tone adopted – sometimes by the very same journalists – at the time of Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004. The authors successfully explore and analyse the ways in which the national ‘self’ is contrasted with the European ‘other’.

Natasza Styczyńska and Jan Meijer, in their chapter on populist Euroscepticism in Poland, analyse the state of play in the field of populist Euroscepticism in Poland and the rest of Europe, and, based on existing research, they suggest the most useful approach to define and study populist Euroscepticism observed in Poland. The authors suggest adopting an ideational approach to researching populism, which applies a specific focus on the ideas of populist parties and movements, as it considers these to be the key features of populism and the distinguishing feature of the parties and movements in question. When it comes to Euroscepticism, they stress the importance of a detailed look at the correlation between populism and Euroscepticism, which are often assumed to be ‘distinct but intersecting phenomena.’ The authors argue that differentiating between ‘Europe-level populism’ and ‘populist Euroscepticism’ is essential because it allows for the untangling of populist and Eurosceptic messages.

In the seventh chapter, Mladen Radulović and Haris Dajč examine the connection between nationalism and egalitarianism in populist narratives and value orientations in Serbia in the 21st century. Using a triangulation of different methods, the authors manage to detect how nationalism and egalitarianism, both as messages (from above) and as value orientations (from below), have shaped the modern political life of Serbia. They analyse nationalism and egalitarianism in the political messages of the two parties that won the most votes in parliamentary elections since 2000 and use data gathered during the past 20 years in the World Values Survey and European Values Study. The authors successfully explain the *longue durée* of nationalism and egalitarianism in Serbian society since the 19th century.

The final chapter, by Maja Vasiljević and Ljiljana Dobrovšak examine the encounter of nationalism – more precisely, right-wing populism – in the political life of Croatia in the 21st century. The authors re-examine and fulfil previous analyses of this topic with a historical insight into the political narratives that deal with nationalism. Special attention is given to the Homeland Movement and the initiative ‘On the Behalf of the Family.’ Vasiljević and Dobrovšak strongly explain the consequences of the rise of right-wing populism in Croatia, in weakening democratic institutions in Croatia.

In the postface, *New Russia’s Imperialism and Populist Deluge from the Current Perspective of Russia’s Aggression against Ukraine*, Nikola

Samardžić summarises how the emergence of populist politicians in 21st century – who were and still are allies of Russia – fuelled the deepest and most dangerous crisis in European relations since 1945. The author explains how dissatisfactions among developed European societies and in the geographical peripheries that were included in the process of EU enlargement helped the rise of populism, while also shining a light on the role of the Kremlin in that process.

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OBSTRUCTING IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE:

POPULISM, EUROSCEPTICISM,
AND EUROPEAN UNION
ACCESSION
IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

ABSTRACT

Euroscepticism takes many forms, from disagreements on policy to disputes over abstract concepts such as “sovereignty” and culture. Throughout the process of European Union (EU) accession, all these arguments are mobilized to attempt to stall the process. Each case has a different combination of said arguments which are employed by Eurosceptic individuals creating an iterative conflict between Eurosceptic and pro-EU actors which shifts and evolves throughout the accession process.

This chapter seeks to delineate how this conflict affects the accession process by examining the cases of Croatia and Serbia. In particular, it addresses the question of under what conditions did/does the confluence of populism and Euroscepticism

impact their accession processes? To accomplish this, this chapter first identifies successful conditions for Europeanization, defined here as the process of accession, derived from the literature on policy learning. Then, social network analysis is used to identify the structure of relations within the parliaments of Croatia and Serbia during their accession processes which is paired with interviews with politicians. These are then used to identify under what conditions the actions, beliefs, and behaviour of populist and Eurosceptic politicians were able to impact accession by interrupting the diffusion of information, norms, and beliefs to relevant policymakers throughout the process.

KEYWORDS: europeanization, policy learning, accession, populism, social network analysis

INTRODUCTION

Joining the European Union (EU) is intended to be a transformational process, involving a dramatic reformulation of the economy, society, and politics of a candidate state. The conclusion of this long process, this process of Europeanization, is accession wherein the candidate state is judged by the European Commission as sufficiently transformed to become a member of the EU. Throughout, the EU acts to ensure the successful diffusion of norms, values, and “ways of doing things” to the candidate state (Radaelli 2002: 4).

However, this is not simply a passive process and, indeed, is not simply a state level one as individual actors (policymakers, politicians, bureaucrats, etc.) have an essential role to play as the ones who are responsible for enacting the change and being the recipients of EU norms. These norms require a change in state level, organizational rules, and also *individual* adjustments to the new “ways of being,” in-line with the requirements of accession. As such, individual actors play an essential role in accession as both the objects and subjects of the reforms (Mendelski 2011). This chapter contributes to the expanding literature on organizational learning dynamics by analysing the impact of Eurosceptic, populist parties on the EU accession processes

of Croatia and Serbia. Specifically, this chapter addresses the question of under what conditions were Eurosceptic parties able to impact their respective EU accession processes?

To accomplish this, this chapter first derives conditions for successful policy learning from the literature. Then, Social Network Analysis (SNA) is used to construct network maps of the Croatian Parliament (*Hrvatski Sabor, Sabor*) and the Serbian National Assembly (*Narodna Skupština, Skupština*). The network maps, and interviews conducted with said policymakers, are used to identify the relational power of the identified populist parties and their impact on the accession process, in terms of their ability to ensure the alignment or misalignment of the cases with the policy learning conditions, is assessed. Overall, the chapter finds that the conditions for successful Europeanization were present to a limited extent in both cases but the central positioning of Serbian Eurosceptic, populist parties acted to block policy learning processes which explains the divergence.

THEORY: EUROPEANIZATION AS POLICY LEARNING

While the initial waves of enlargement of the EU, or as it was then the European Economic Community (EEC), involved bargaining between the candidate state and the EU/EEC, accession in the SEE region took place under very different conditions. The countries which emerged from the wars in the former Yugoslavia were marked by economic, social, and political collapse. Unlike states such as Denmark or the UK which engaged in a process of bargaining vis-à-vis the then EEC to preserve various national opt-outs, the states of the SEE region were engaged instead in a process of reform driven by the *adoption* of EU political and economic norms in an attempt to catch up with the West (Ágh 1996; Bideleux 1999).

This overall structure significantly constrains the conception of Europeanization applicable to the accession process, reducing it to: “(a) construction, (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms

which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli 2002: 3–4). Candidate states within this framework are either actively or passively adopting the logic of formal and informal rules and procedures, without recourse to opt-outs or special treatment available to previous candidate countries (Grabbe 2002). This is because Europeanization under accession conditions is considered an *all-encompassing* mission intended to allow the candidate states to join the EU, necessitating substantial changes to their domestic structures, policies, and political framework whereby *abnormal* national frameworks and policies are contrasted with *normal* systems which exist within the EU (Majstorović 2007). Thus, Europeanization under accession conditions involves both the passive and active diffusion of European rules and norms to the candidate state, with the EU using accession conditionality and repeated interaction to drive diffusion.

However, policymakers in the candidate state are not passive actors, or simply recipients of EU wisdom, but *active* players constantly attempting to solve problems. While this duality, as both the reformers and the subjects of reform, can present challenges (Mendelski 2011), it is an essential feature of the process. As such, the framework of policy learning is appropriate as the literature emphasizes learning as a change in behaviour (Huber 1991). Indeed, given the *longue durée* nature of the accession process, policy learning’s emphasis on the logic of appropriateness, wherein actors process information to arrive at new foundational systems of understanding which impact the range of possible future behaviours, is quite apt (Dunlop 2020).

Within the overarching framework of policy learning, four typologies have been identified depending on the conditions under which learning takes place. The two key determinants are problem tractability, i.e., the level of uncertainty regarding the issue, and the certification of actors, i.e., are the “experts” to whom policymakers may turn for answers considered as “experts” (Dunlop and Radaelli 2018). The combination of these results in the four types of learning presented in Figure 1.

While all four types of learning exist in different policymaking contexts, the structure of the accession process restricts the options to only two: Learning in Epistemic Contexts (LEC) and Learning in Hierarchy (LIH). This is because the EU, and its representatives, assume a certain level of expertise within the process by sending representatives to speak on specific matters,

and by acting as the ultimate arbiter of success (Klumbyté 2011). Thus, the EU acts as a source of ideas and expertise which candidate countries, and their policymakers, draw upon throughout accession (Kamkhaji and Radaelli 2017). This precludes the possibility of Learning in Reflexivity and Learning as By-Product of Bargaining as the EU, and its representatives, are structurally positioned as highly certified actors.

		Problem Tractability	
		Low	High
Certification of Actors	Low	Learning in reflexivity	Learning as by-product of bargaining
	High	Learning in epistemic contexts	Learning in hierarchy

FIGURE 1. Types of Learning

Source: Dunlop and Radaelli 2018: 258.

LIH, which occurs under conditions of high problem tractability, is analogous to the structure of EU conditionality. The transposition of the *acquis communautaire*, which must all be passed into domestic law for the candidate state to accede to the EU, is a *highly* tractable problem: domestic law is carefully studied by EU actors, the necessary changes are clearly stated, and said changes must pass a final evaluation by the EU in order for a chapter to be closed (European Commission 2004; 2011a). Thus, domestic actors learn through repeated observance what is permissible, identifying boundaries and with clear penalties for non-compliance (Dunlop and Radaelli 2018: 262).

Alternatively, LEC occurs under conditions of lower problem tractability, where the solutions are not as clear as under LIH. As part of this, the active participation of experts is essential to allow policymakers to reduce issue complexity and drive learning (Dunlop and Radaelli 2018: 300). EU initiatives such as twinning or the wider socialization practices of the EU during the accession process, such as repeated summits and conferences or visits by local Members of Parliament (MPs) to the European Parliament or vice versa, are intended to help drive such socialization and learning under LEC conditions (Johnston 2005; Palmowski 2011). The breadth of these initiatives, covering areas from education (Powell, Bernhard and Graf 2012), to politics (Kocijan and Kukec 2016), to journalism (Petrović 2015), and everything

in between (de Witte 2012), provide a space for engagement and problem solving by candidate state policymakers with the addition of EU experts.

Thus, these two different typologies of learning are driven by different fundamental conditions. LIH, involving the repeated setting and following of rules as a driver of learning, occurs under the following conditions:

- (LIH 1) Under conditions where these rewards/punishments outweigh the cost of compliance to the actor then learning is fostered.
- (LIH 2) Under conditions where the rewards/punishments for compliance/non-compliance are credible learning is fostered.

LEC, on the other hand, is successful when:

- (LEC 1) Under conditions where the actors doing the “teaching” are experts learning is fostered.
- (LEC 2) Under conditions where the “experts” are inserted into the relevant decision-making bodies learning is fostered.

CASE SELECTION: MOST SIMILAR SYSTEMS DESIGN

With these conditions in hand, it is now possible to move on to a discussion of the cases and the methodology. Croatia and Serbia were chosen as the cases to be studied in line with a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) approach. The intention is, given the similar histories of Croatia and Serbia, to control for a large number of possible variables to isolate the specific impact of the independent variable (populist party influence) on the dependent variable (EU accession) (Lijphart 1971; Przeworski and Teune 1982). Both countries share a similar history: both were constituent republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija*), shared the same legal structure, and took part in the wars of the 1990s.

To control, in part, for divergent levels of political and economic development this chapter examines both countries from the parliamentary period in which they signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU until either accession, in the case of Croatia, or until 2020, in the case of Serbia.

The SAA, a core part of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), is similar to the Europe Agreements which countries signed in previous rounds of accession. SAAs are only signed with countries which possess a minimum level of democracy and institutional stability (European Commission 2016b). For Croatia, this produces a timeline of 2000–2013 and for Serbia a timeline of 2008–2020, as Croatia signed an SAA in 2001 (Commission of the European Communities 2002) and Serbia signed one in 2008 (European Commission 2009). This timeline also controls for the institutional makeup of each state as Croatia transitioned from a semi-presidential system to a parliamentary system following the 2000 elections and Serbia was not fully independent until the end of the State Union with Montenegro in 2006. Table 1 gives a full list of the relevant control variables including the number of minority ethnic MPs at the start of the accession process.

TABLE 1. Control Variables

Variable	Croatia (2000)	Serbia (2007)
Population	4.47 million	7.38 million
GDP per capita	€5,800	€4,002
President	Non-executive	Non-executive
Government type	Unicameral Parliamentary Republic	Unicameral Parliamentary Republic
Size of legislature	150–160	250
Electoral system	Proportional Representation (PR), Party List	Proportional Representation (PR), Party List
Electoral districts	12	Single District
Distribution of seats	D'Hondt, 5 per cent threshold (in each district)	D'Hondt, 5 per cent threshold
Minority Representation	8 MPs ¹	8 MPs ²

Source: *Ustav Republike Hrvatske* 1990; *Ustav Republike Srbije* 2006; European Commission 2009; European Commission 2012a.

¹ Set at 8 since the 2002 amendment on national minorities (*Ustavni zakon o pravima nacionalnih manjina* 2002).

² There is no set number for minority MPs under Serbian law, but minority lists are exempt from the electoral threshold. Thus, the number of minority MPs per parliament fluctuated between 8 and 12 from 2008–2020.

As shown in Table 1, both countries were, at the start of their respective accession processes, small, relatively poor, parliamentary republics, which used a variant of the PR system to elect representatives and contained some minority ethnic MPs in their respective parliaments.

Within Croatia and Serbia, a number of populist, Eurosceptic parties who held seats in the legislature were identified (Mudde 2000; Stojarová and Vykoupilová 2008; Vukomanović 2009; Veselinović 2018; Kukec 2019; Mikucka-Wójtowicz 2019; Petsinis 2020). Populism, for the purposes of this chapter, is understood within the framework of Mudde's (2004) definition of a "thin ideology" with four distinct features: vertical polarisation between "the people" and "the elites," both antagonism and a *Manichean* struggle between the two, and the idea that politics should be an expression of the "general will" (Bešlin et al. 2020). However, as opposed to focusing on the "thickening" of this "thin ideology" by mixing solely with nativism (Bešlin et al. 2020: 4), this chapter identifies Euroscepticism, understood as a rejection of the liberal principles of EU integration, as a unifying theme among populist parties. Thus, this allows for the incorporation of both the classic radical right-wing populist parties *and* left-wing populist parties within the same comparative framework. The definition of Euroscepticism, for this chapter, subsumes both the "hard" and "soft" varieties under the overarching category of "Eurosceptic" (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008; 2013). This is not to say that the distinction is not a meaningful one, but simply that this chapter focuses on aggregate opposition so the distinction can be discounted.

Further, due to the "fuzziness" of the term populism some parties which *could* be conceptualized as populist do not appear on the list while some which are on the list *could* be argued to only be populist at certain intervals. The problematization of the populist categorization, though, is beyond the scope of this chapter. To control for this, as will be further addressed below in the methodology section, interviews were also conducted with parliamentarians and other policymakers to corroborate these identifications and identify the impact of their MPs on the work of the parliaments. Table 2 presents the list of relevant parties:

TABLE 2. Eurosceptic Populist Parties in Croatia and Serbia

Croatia		Serbia	
Party	Time in Sabor	Party	Time in Skupština
Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (<i>Hrvatski demokratski savez Slavonije i Baranje</i> , HDSSB) (Kukec 2019)	2003–2013	Serbian Movement “Dveri” (Dveri) (Stojiljković and Spasojević 2018)	2016–2020
Croatian Civil Party (<i>Hrvatska građanska stranka</i> , HGS) (Rooduijn et al. 2019)	2011–2013	United Serbia (<i>Jedinstvena Srbija</i> , JS) (Rooduijn et al. 2019)	2008–2020
Croatian Party of Rights (<i>Hrvatska Stranka Prava</i> , HSP) (Veselinović 2018)	2000–2011	Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia (<i>Pokret obnove Kraljevine Srbije</i> , POKS) ³	2016–2020
Croatian Party of Rights – dr. Ante Starčević (<i>Hrvatska stranka prava – dr. Ante Starčević</i> , HSP-AS) (Veselinović 2018)	2011–2013	Socialist Movement (<i>Pokret socijalista</i> , PS) ⁴	2012–2020
		Serbian Peoples Party (<i>Srpska narodna partija</i> , SNP) ⁵	2014–2020
		Serbian Progressive Party (<i>Srpska napredna stranka</i> , SNS) ⁶	2012–2020
		Serbian Radical Party (<i>Srpska radikalna stranka</i> , SRS) (Vranić 2019)	2008–2012, 2016–2020
		United Peasant Party (<i>Ujedinjena seljačka stranka</i> , USS)	2016–2020

Source: Stojiljković and Spasojević 2018; Veselinović 2018; Kukec 2019; Rooduijn et al. 2019; Vranić 2019; Suvaković 2020.

³ Eurosceptic SNS satellite party (‘Програм, Статут, правилници и одлуке Председништва’ 2022).

⁴ “Leftist” Eurosceptic party, in coalition with SNS from 2012 (‘Програм Политичке Партије – Оснивачки Програм – Покрет Социјалиста | Партија Борбене Левице – Александар Вулин’ 2022).

⁵ Populist party subsumed into SNS for 2016–2020 period.

⁶ The SNS is a broad tent, catch-all, populist conservative party (Vukomanović 2009; Mikucka-Wójtowicz 2019). Its designation as a truly “Eurosceptic populist” party is, thus, tentative and would apply more to certain elements of the party rather than the entire party itself.

METHODOLOGY: COMPARATIVE SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

To identify the impact of these parties on the EU accession process of the chosen countries Social Network Analysis (SNA) was used to construct network maps of the *Sabor* and *Skupština*. Each map shows the compositions of the parliament at the end of the session in question, to provide a common point of comparison across all cases and allow for the inclusion of relative shifting in committee membership throughout a parliamentary period. The one exception is the *Sabor* 2011–2013 map which shows the structure of the *Sabor* at the moment of accession. This allows for an understanding of the relational power of each of the parties in question. Data was drawn from the parliamentary websites of the *Sabor* and *Skupština* and was entered into GEPHI, an open source SNA tool (Bastian, Heymann and Jacomy 2009). Individual MPs are the nodes while shared participation in a parliamentary group, such as a party or a committee, results in a tie between the two MPs. These were weighted by the relative importance of the types of ties, as per interview responses (Mesarovich 2022).⁷ The types and weighting of ties are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Types and Weights of Ties

Croatia		Serbia	
Type of Tie	Weight	Type of Tie	Weight
<i>Stranka pripadnost</i> (Party)	1	<i>Politička stranka</i> (Party)	1
<i>Klub</i> (Parliamentary Club, determines seating)	0.5	<i>Poslanička grupa</i> (Working Group, determines seating)	0.5
<i>Odbor</i> (Committee)	0.25	<i>Odbor</i> (Committee)	0.25

⁷ The network data is available open source at the following address: <https://doi.org/10.7488/ds/3407>. The online data repository can be found here: <https://datashare.ed.ac.uk/handle/10283/4363> [accessed: April 22, 2021].

Croatia		Serbia	
Type of Tie	Weight	Type of Tie	Weight
SPK (Connection from the President of the <i>Sabor</i> to individual MPs)	0.2	SPK (Connection from the President of the <i>Skupština</i> to individual MPs)	0.2
Com (Non- <i>Odbor</i> Delegation/Committee)	0.15	<i>Radna tela/Delegacija</i> (Working Group and other Delegations)	0.15
PP (Connection from the Deputy Speaker ⁸ to individual MPs)	0.1	PP (Connection from the Deputy Speaker ⁹ to individual MPs)	0.1
PGP (Country Specific Friendship Committee)	0.01	<i>Prijateljstva</i> (Country Specific Friendship Committee)	0.01

Source: own elaboration.

The raw data collection was conducted from 2018–2019 and produced initial maps. This allowed for the identification of central actors which facilitated conducting semi-structured interviews with current and former policymakers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted both in-person and online in multiple rounds from 2019–2021. They were not transcribed, as this was not considered necessary, and all interview responses are only used here anonymously, in line with the ethical requirements of social scientific research. A total of six interviews were conducted in Croatia and nine in Serbia either in English or in Serbo-Croatian. They lasted an hour and a half on average with the shortest lasting only 45 minutes and the longest almost three hours.

⁸ Technically “Vice President” (*Potpredsjednik*) of the *Sabor*.

⁹ Technically “Vice President” (*Potpredsednici*) of the *Skupština*.

RESULTS 1: LIH IN CROATIA AND SERBIA

This section proceeds through a presentation of the relevant data and a discussion of the impact of populist parties as per the LIH conditions. Due to space limitations, only two specific parliamentary periods per case will be discussed in detail followed by a general analysis of the broader cases. As stated above, the conditions for successful LIH are as follows:

- (LIH 1) Under conditions where these rewards/punishments outweigh the cost of compliance to the actor then learning is fostered.
- (LIH 2) Under conditions where the rewards/punishments for compliance/non-compliance are credible learning is fostered.

LIH CASE 1: CROATIA 2003–2007

In this period, Croatia's status as candidate state was confirmed and, following confirmation that Croatia was fully cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), accession negotiations could begin (European Commission 2004; 2005). By the end of this period, two chapters of the *acquis* had been closed and a further two chapters were judged as “well advanced” and “well aligned” (European Commission 2007: 42, 62). The relevant SNA map for this period is presented in Figure 2.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the *Sabor* was split between the HDZ and the SDP, with the HDZ being the ruling party during this period. Generally, the other parties are mixed around both blocks, representing shared links in committees and other bodies. The relevant populist parties in this period, the HDSSB and the HSP, are generally excluded from the decision-making architecture. The HDSSB is isolated on one left and the HSP, who have five MPs in this period, are part of the cloud of minor parties on the top left of the map.

Why was Croatia successful in this period, despite the eight populist MPs in the *Sabor*? Under the control of the HDZ, the government operated in a top-down fashion. Despite attempts to introduce internal democracy more recently (Croatia 4, 2021), the HDZ at this time was hierarchical with power vested in the party leader (Croatia 1, 2021, Croatia 2, 2021). This ensured

FIGURE 2. Sabor Map

2003–2007¹⁰

Key: **HDZ**, **SDP**, **HNS-LD**, **HSS**, **HSP**,
IDS, **SDSS**, **HSU**, **HSLs**, **HDSSB**¹¹

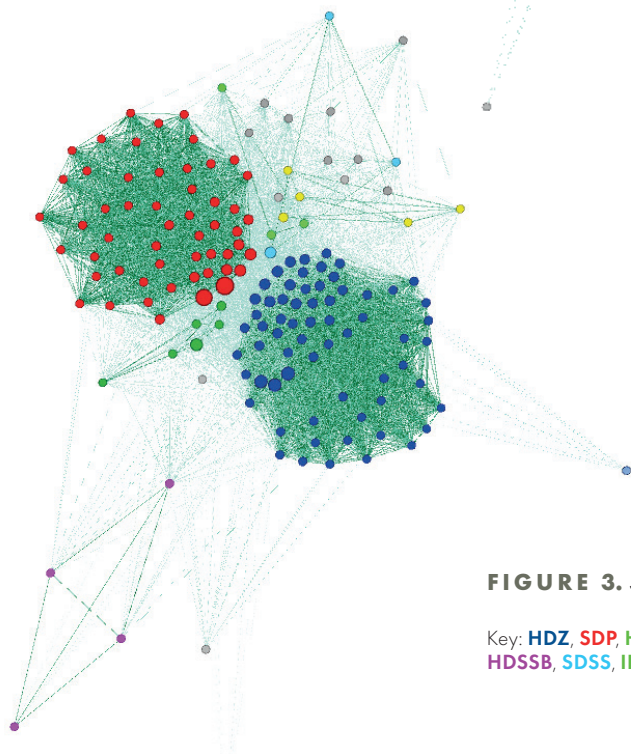
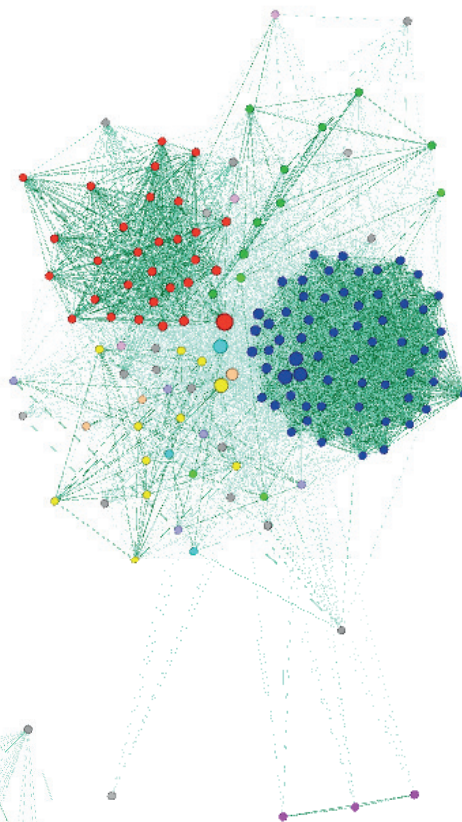


FIGURE 3. Sabor Map 2007–2011

Key: **HDZ**, **SDP**, **HSS**, **HNS-LD**,
HDSSB, **SDSS**, **IDS**, **HSP**

¹⁰ All maps generated according to Yifan Hu Proportional, Optimal Distance: 100, Relative Strength: 20, Initial Step Size: 0.95.

¹¹ A full list of all parties in the Croatian and Serbian parliaments, and the relevant acronyms, is provided in the Appendix.

that, as long as the policies were supported by the leader, then change was possible. Given the strength of control by Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, and his use of illicit slush funds derived from the accession process during this period (*Reuters* 2020), the reforms were clearly in his interest, and he was able to enforce his will top-down through the party hierarchy. As such, there was little space for negotiation and discussion which allowed the smooth passage of the necessary reforms through the *Sabor*, successfully fulfilling LIH 1 by *blocking* the participation of the Eurosceptic, populist parties from decision-making bodies.

Further, this period also demonstrated the *credibility* of the EU's position on the reform process. Despite the initial enthusiasm for Croatian accession, the opening of accession negotiations were delayed in this period due to non-cooperation with the ICTY (European Commission 2005: 3). The request by the ICTY for the arrest and extradition of Ante Gotovina, a commander of Croatian forces during the war, was politically explosive and triggered mass demonstrations (Pavlaković 2010). However, the successful blocking of the accession process signalled to MPs that the EU's *threat* of exclusion was *credible*, just as credible as its offer of membership which was continually expressed by EU representatives (Croatia 2, 2020). As such, despite the vocal opposition to EU membership by Croatian populist parties, the offer was still viewed as credible by elite actors who controlled the party system. Thus, LIH 2 was met.

LIH CASE 2: CROATIA 2007–2011

This situation repeats itself in the third Croatian parliamentary period. In this period, Ivo Sanader remained PM at the beginning of the period before resigning and being replaced by Jadranka Kosor, also of the HDZ. By the end of 2011, Croatia had completed the transposition of the *acquis* into Croatian law and was prepared to accede. Negotiations on the final chapter were closed on June 30, 2011 and the Commission issued a favourable opinion on Croatian accession soon after (European Commission 2011b). The SNA map for the period is presented in Figure 3.

Once again, we see the Croatian political dyad with the HDZ and SDP taking the lion's share of seats within the parliament. The relevant populist parties, the HDSSB and HSP, are, again, generally excluded from positions

of power within the *Sabor*. Central accession organs, such as the National Committee (*Nacionalni odbor*) which acted as the core parliamentary committee overseeing accession, were staffed by party leaders and elites while populist MPs were excluded. This ensured that information was passed from EU representatives to party leaders or national elites, and then to elites within the *Sabor* who were able to use the hierarchical party structure to ensure support for the necessary legislation (Croatia 6, 2021). Thus, permitting the speedy passage of EU related bills through the *Sabor* and enabling learning as per the LIH conditions.

LIH CASE 3: SERBIA 2014–2016

In this period, Serbia made some progress as well towards the EU, with the passing of significant judicial reform legislation bringing the judicial system to “some level of preparation” regarding the relevant *acquis* by the end of 2016 (European Commission 2016a: 12–13). Serbia also opened the first two chapters of the *acquis* (*Milestones in EU – Serbia Relations* 2020) and achieved limited progress on other chapters. Figure 4 presents the relevant SNA map for this period.

Within this period, LIH 1 held true to a *limited* extent, as can be seen by the limited progress made during this period. Only two chapters of the *acquis* were opened in these two years, and none were closed (*Milestones in EU – Serbia Relations* 2020). This contrasts with the Croatian experience, wherein, once negotiations were opened, they proceeded at a much more rapid pace.

This is due to the rising influence of Eurosceptic actors within the parliament. Although the EU continued to offer significant aid to support accession (European Commission 2016a), the pace of accession began to slow. Populist actors were not only within the parliament, as they were in Croatia, but they had been co-opted into the governing coalition. This allowed the populist parties to pervert the LIH learning mechanisms. Since the parties were “like fiefs” they were able to successfully take over departments (Serbia 1, 2019; Serbia 4, 2019), running them to their own benefit as parties of power (Ajzenhamer and Dajč 2019), rather than to act as successful channels for top-down learning of rules and norms. As such, the parties began to engage in boundary testing and pushing, learning the extent to which they could delay the progress while still benefiting from EU funds.

FIGURE 4. *Skupština* Map 2014–2016

Key: SNS, SPS, DS, PUPS,
SDPS, JS, SVM, NS, SPO

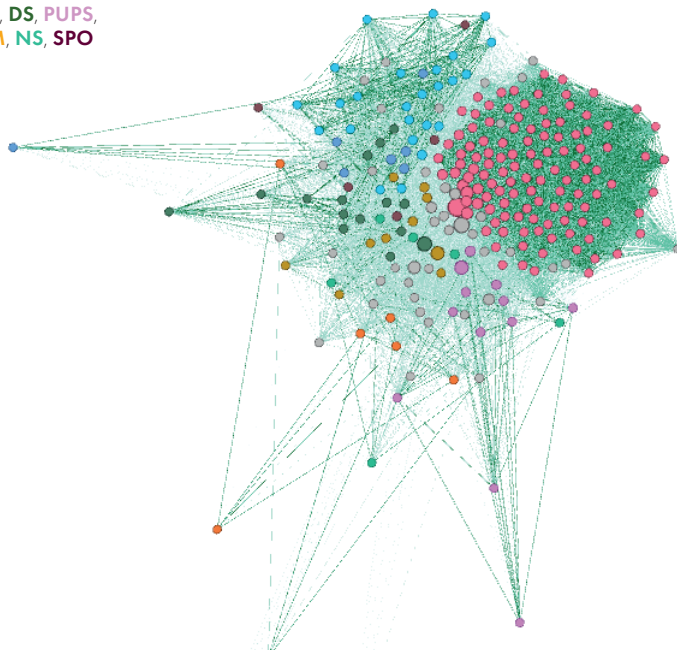
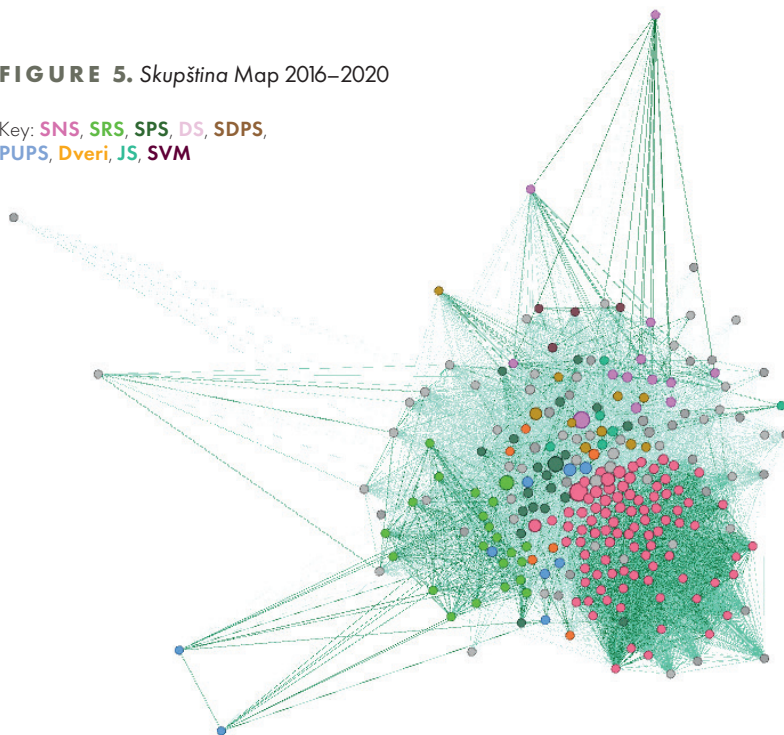


FIGURE 5. *Skupština* Map 2016–2020

Key: SNS, SRS, SPS, DS, SDPS,
PUPS, Dveri, JS, SVM



LIH CASE 4: SERBIA 2016–2020

Serbia, during this period, made some significant progress towards EU accession when measured by chapters opened. By the end of the period eighteen chapters of the *acquis* had been opened in total, a significant improvement on the previous period. However, no further chapters were closed (*Milestones in EU – Serbia Relations* 2020). While this does indicate some limited momentum, the failure to close any chapters is indicative of the broader slowdown in accession negotiations. Figure 5 presents the SNA map generated for this period.

As shown in Figure 5, the SNS, the ruling party, was in a dominant position within the legislature. Their coalition partners, the SPS, SDPS, PUPS, JS, and SVM are distributed around the centre of the map. The most extreme Eurosceptic populists, the SRS, are semi-isolated on the lefthand side of the map. However, this period was also marked by a boycott of the *Skupština* by opposition MPs, such as those from DS. Thus, the concentration of populists within the parliament increased steeply from 2019 with the start of the boycott (*Reuters* 2019).

Serbia, then, within this period can be said to only *partially* fulfil the LIH conditions. While the boycott of opposition politicians significantly aided the passage of government business throughout the chamber (Serbia 8, 2020), it did not help the broader learning process (Serbia 2, 2019; Serbia 3, 2019; Serbia 4, 2020). Populists successfully obstructed the process at all levels, with or without the opposition (which was the reason for the boycott). While this *could* have been expected to lead to quicker integration, in line with the SNS's official pro-EU stance, it instead simply led to further stagnation, since there was no opposition to truly push for EU integration and ensure the functioning of the various checks and balances of the parliament (Serbia 9, 2020). Although there were attempts by EU actors to communicate the necessity of changes to Serbian politicians (Serbia 7, 2020), the information did not always filter through as the presence of actively hostile populist blocks (both of MPs within the ruling party and their coalition partners) in the chamber and in committees prevented this information from diffusing.

CONCLUSION

Both in the cases presented here and more broadly the LIH conditions were met in Croatia. The hierarchical nature of the parties allowed for the rapid passage of legislation, enabling the transmission of knowledge from the EU level to party elites, and then into the wider group. Accession was in the political interest of the relevant actors and populist actors were excluded from the decision-making apparatuses of the *Sabor*.

Overall, in Serbia, the similarly hierarchical nature of political parties also assisted LIH, enabling the limited learning seen throughout the accession negotiations. LIH 1 cannot be said to be entirely true as, without the influence of the opposition in parliament in recent years, the government has only opened and closed specific chapters of the *acquis*. That Serbia has yet to close Chapter 32 (Financial Control) (*Serbia* 2016), despite it being the first one to open, is indicative of the issue: personal and party benefit trump the accession conditions when possible.

LIH 2 held to the same extent as in Croatia since Serbia experienced similar blockages in SAA negotiations due to non-cooperation with the ICTY (*Serbia* 2016). Further, EU actors repeatedly have stressed that the overall offer of accession is credible (*Serbia* 7, 2020). Although the impact of the dispute over Kosovo may impact the inevitable credibility of the accession process, there has been no formal pressure by the EU for a resolution one way or another (Bieber 2015). As such, LIH 2 has been *largely* met in Serbia, as it has experienced both penalties for non-compliance and actors experienced repeated, direct, confirmation of the credibility of the accession offer during the period under study.

RESULTS 2: LEC IN CROATIA AND SERBIA

This section focuses on the other four parliamentary periods under study and proceeds to discuss the results in the case more generally. First, though, a re-stating of the LEC conditions:

FIGURE 6. Sabor Map 2000–2003

Key: **SDP**, **HDZ**, **HSS**, **HSLs**,
LIBRA, **HB**, **HSP**, **LS**, **IDS**

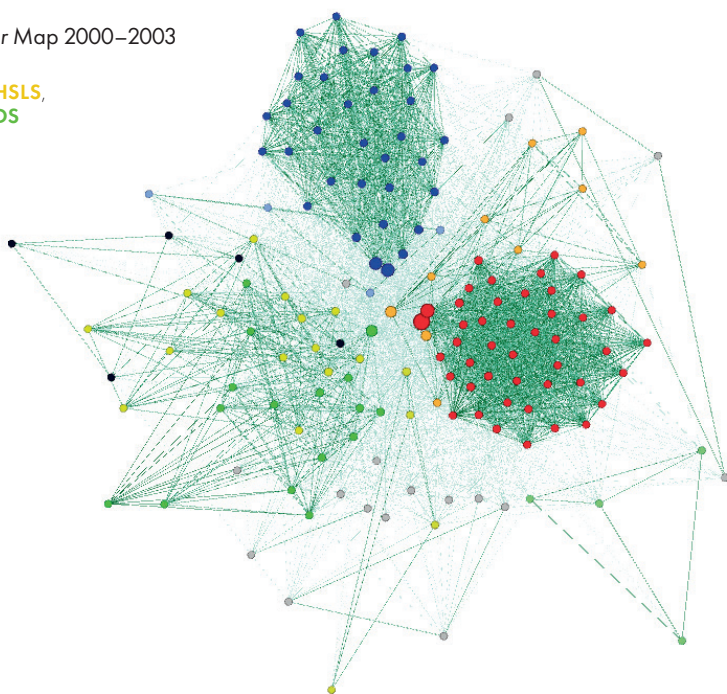
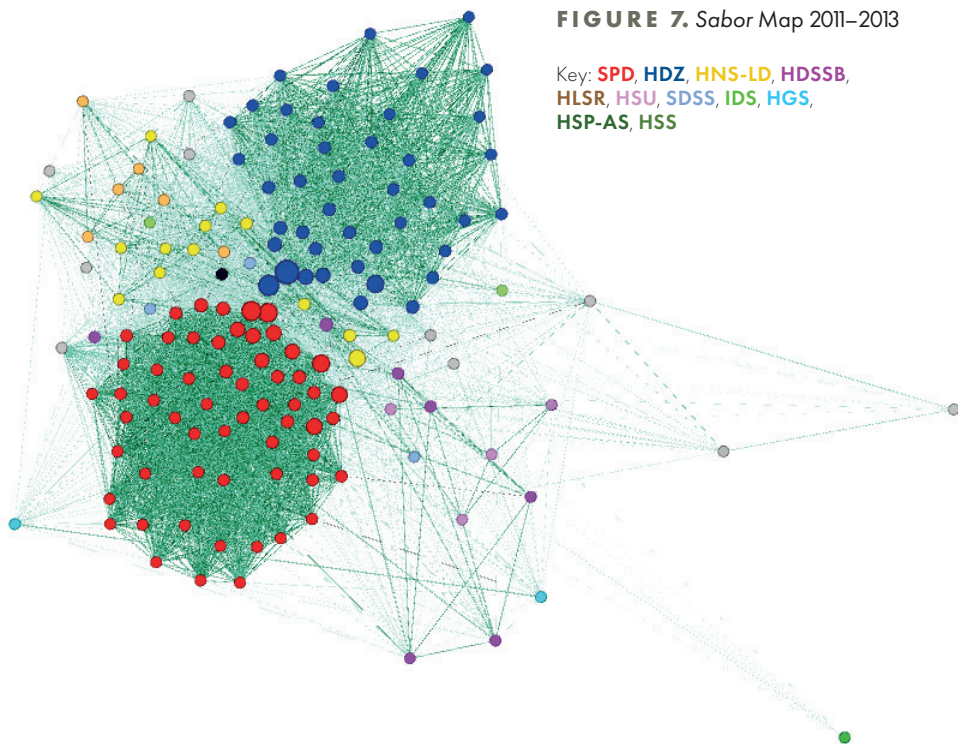


FIGURE 7. Sabor Map 2011–2013

Key: **SPD**, **HDZ**, **HNS-LD**, **HDSSB**,
HLSR, **HSU**, **SDSS**, **IDS**, **HGS**,
HSP-AS, **HSS**



- (LEC 1) Under conditions where the actors doing the “teaching” are experts learning is fostered.
- (LEC 2) Under conditions where the “experts” are inserted into the relevant decision-making bodies learning is fostered.

LEC CASE 1: CROATIA 2000–2003

In this first period, Croatia was still undergoing a period of relative democratization after the death of independence leader of Franjo Tuđman and the shift to a parliamentary democracy. Throughout, Croatia conducted negotiations on an SAA, consolidated the democratic system, and continued the necessary economic reform program to complete the transition to a market economy (Fisher 2005). Although for accession were not launched in this period, significant groundwork was set for them to begin in the subsequent parliamentary period (European Commission 2005). Figure 6 shows the SNA map produced for this period.

As can be seen in Figure 6, the *Sabor* was divided with many strong parties beyond the core HDZ-SDP dyad. The government in this period was a coalition between the SDP, HSS, and HSLS and the main populists, the HSP, are spread throughout the centre/centre-top of the map.

In this period, EU representatives frequently met with representatives of the Croatian government. They acted to provide external expertise in the lead up to the formal negotiation process (Croatia 3, 2020), helping to identify legislation and policies to be reformed. Such assistance was noted for its positive impact during these early stages (MWH Consortium 2008). Populist actors were also, as indicated by the map, relatively excluded from central decision-making apparatuses. As such, both LEC 1 and 2 were met in this early period which is matched by the clear progress made meeting the Copenhagen Criteria and the signing of the SAA.

LEC CASE 2: CROATIA 2011–2013

Like the 2000–2003 parliamentary period, the 2011–2013 period was also marked by a relatively mixed *Sabor* and an SDP led coalition government. In this period, the accession agreement was signed, and Croatia officially acceded to the EU. The core legislation required to join had been passed

in the previous periods and only some slight modifications remained. The main challenge was to ensure that Croatia would be completely ready to take on the full responsibilities of EU membership and would be a responsible member state (European Commission 2012a). Figure 7 displays the network map generated for this period.

In this map, the ruling SDP party dominates the bottom left-hand side. The coalition partners, the HSN-LD, HSU, IDS, and SDSS are scattered throughout with the HSN-LD taking a relatively central position. As usual, the HDZ takes up the opposite position and the populists are relatively excluded from the centre. The HSP-AS MP is quite centrally located, though, as are some of the HDSSB MPs for the first time.

Throughout this period high level contacts were maintained between Croatian MPs, parties, and EU representatives in the lead up to accession (Croatia 2, 2020). This represented a continuation from previous periods with high level elite-EU contacts (Croatia 3, 2020; Croatia 5, 2020). This enabled the transfer of knowledge to certain sections of the Croatian political class, although populists did increase their influence in this period as represented by their more central positioning.

While Croatia did accede to the EU this was an entirely successful period. Flare ups continued in particular over a German extradition request for a Croatian former intelligence officer which caused significant diplomatic embarrassment (Šabić 2019). A transition facility also had to be agreed to allow Croatia time to strengthen its judicial and administrative capacity (European Commission 2012a). This, paired with other findings on the failure of the wider reform agenda in Croatian governance (MWH Consortium 2008; da Silva Caldeira 2011), shows that while the LEC conditions were *largely* present in Croatia, they cannot be said to have been *entirely* present.

LEC CASE 3: SERBIA 2008–2012

The elections in 2008 were held after the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo, which resulted in early elections in Serbia and the victory of a pro-EU coalition (European Commission 2009). The *Skupština* was divided between this pro-EU block and the rapidly anti-EU, populist SRS who were the largest opposition grouping. This is represented visually in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8. *Skupština* Map 2008–2012

Key: **SRS**, **DS**, **G17**, **DSS**, **LDP**, **SPS**, **NS**,
PUPS, **LSV**, **SDP**, **SVM**, **SPO**, **JS**, **NL**,
DSHV, **PZDD**, **BDSS**, **DLR**, **PVS**,
SDU, **SLPS**

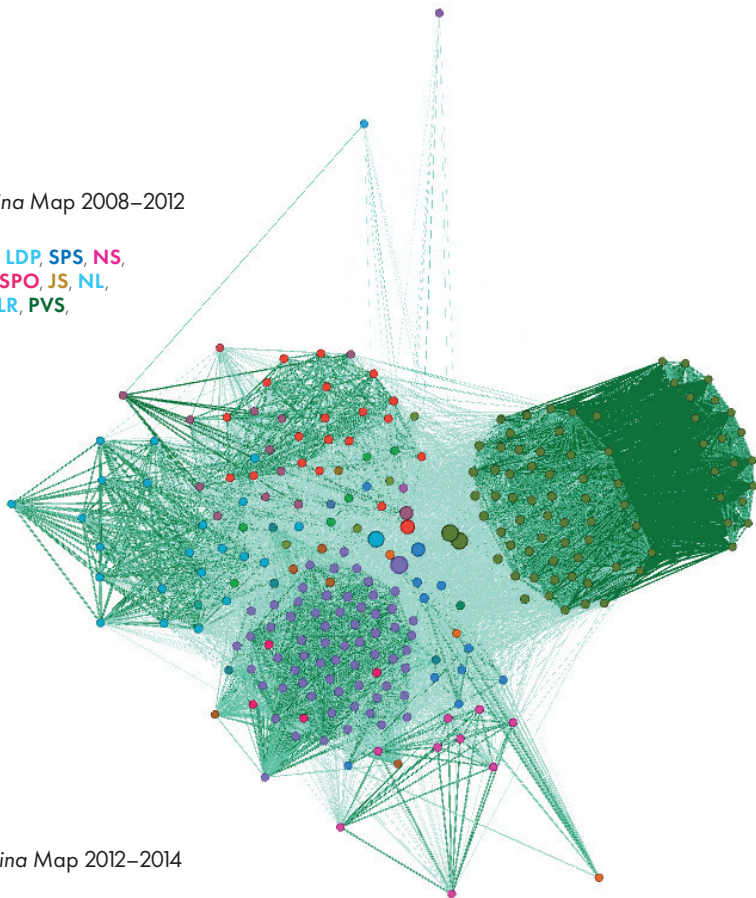
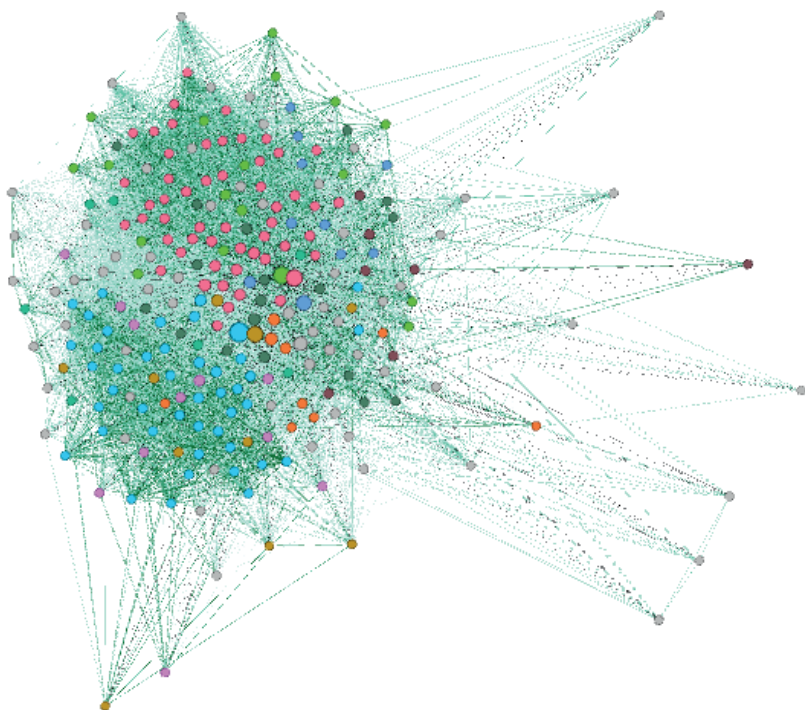


FIGURE 9. *Skupština* Map 2012–2014

Key: **SNS**, **DS**, **DSS**, **SPS**, **LDP**, **G17**, **PUPS**, **SDPS**, **NS**, **JS**



In this map the governing coalition is made up of the various parties on the left-hand side of the map while the SRS, the large populist opposition, is on the right. Other than two MPs in the centre, the SRS is generally excluded from governing bodies. A good number of their MPs, at the far right, have little to no role in the work of the *Skupština* in this period and are solely linked with members of the party.

As such, Serbia was able to make some significant progress towards accession in line with LEC conditions 1 and 2. EU and other Western actors provided clear insight into the necessary reforms, providing expertise in line with LEC 1 (Serbia 7, 2020; Serbia 9, 2020). This contributed to the constitutional reform process which resulted in the improvement of constitutional design from “further reforms are needed” (European Commission 2008: 7) to “largely in line with European standards” (European Commission 2012b: 6) by the end of the 2012 parliamentary period.

Further, the fractured party system at this stage, like in Croatia from 2000–2003, acted to support LEC 2. Although the parties themselves are hierarchical (Serbia 1, 2019), the large number of parties within the *Skupština* and the governing coalition allowed for a broad diffusion of information via interaction with EU representatives as party elites met frequently with said representatives (Serbia 2, 2019). The exclusion of SRS and other populist actors from central positions prevented them from interfering with this diffusion process.

LEC CASE 4: SERBIA 2012–2014

In this period Serbia made some halting progress towards EU membership. Some key benchmarks were passed, the SAA came into force, and the 2013 Brussels Agreement between Belgrade and Priština was signed (European Commission 2014). However, while there was some progress in terms of the functioning of parliament and in judicial reform, serious issues remained including the overuse of emergency procedures to pass legislation (European Commission 2013; 2014), something which remained an issue for Serbia throughout the period under study. The SNA map generated for this period is represented in Figure 9.

This map is remarkably dense with a significant number of connections between almost all parties. The ruling SNS is mostly clustered in the bottom

left and centre, although there is not much party clustering to speak of. MPs from a whole range of coalition partners and some opposition parties are all mixed throughout the centre.

Such a distribution fits within the expectations of the LEC conditions as the broad mixing enabled learning, through the broad mixing of parties, and yet also *prevents* LEC due to the integration of populist, Eurosceptic elements within core institutions and committees. The rise of the SNS, which split off from the SRS, brought some Eurosceptic individuals into the halls of power. Their importation of hierarchical, closed off forms of functioning began to degrade information gathering and processing functions of the parliament during this period (Serbia 1, 2019; Serbia 2, 2019; Serbia 5, 2019). This meant that, despite interventions by EU actors to help drive LEC as per condition 2, it is not clear if they were able to interact with the “correct” individuals. Which, when combined with the short tenure of this parliamentary period, explains the relatively slow pace of accession.

CONCLUSION

Overall, in Croatia the LEC conditions were largely met but not entirely. While the initial period is marked by a high degree of mixing within the *Sabor*, later periods were not. Due to the intensity of high level contacts between party leaders, government officials, and EU representatives (Croatia 2, 2020; Croatia 3, 2020; Croatia 5, 2020), the LEC conditions were *broadly* met. These meetings enabled the transfer of knowledge from the “expert” EU actors to the necessary, high-level officials in Croatia. With the top-down party structure, this ensured that legislation would be passed in a rapid fashion, as per the LIH conditions. Populist actors were successfully excluded from these high level meetings and their power was curbed in committees and other organizational bodies within the *Sabor* (Croatia 1, 2020), hampering their impact. However, this hierarchical approach to politics interfered with the free gathering of knowledge which is an inherent part of LEC. As such, although accession in Croatia was a success whether it led to *deeper* learning remains in question.

In Serbia, the rise of the SNS and the co-option of populist parties and individuals into the Serbian government interfered with learning under the LEC conditions. The increasingly hierarchical “pyramidal system

of psychopaths” (Serbia 1, 2019) resulted in a very closed system wherein only certain party leaders interact with outside experts while *internally* information is directed in a top-down fashion. Populist actors can actively disrupt the work of the *Skupština*, derailing discussions in committees and interfering with the transmission of knowledge to MPs from outside sources (Serbia 3, 2019; Serbia 6, 2019). Collectively, the hierarchical party system and *active* interference from co-opted populist parties disrupts the discursive, problem solving, learning mechanisms of LEC, thereby stalling the accession process in more recent years.

POPULISTS AS A PERMANENT FIXTURE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

All told, the policy learning conditions provide robust explanatory measures for the relative successes and failures of Croatia and Serbia during accession. Croatia, with its more institutionalized party dyad and isolated populist parties, was better positioned to complete the reform process. Relevant populist parties were, generally, excluded from decision-making apparatuses and their power to obstruct the work of parliament was curtailed. This allowed for the diffusion of information to relevant individuals, enabling the passage of the necessary legislation and ensuring that Croatia did accede to the EU.

Populists in Serbia, on the other hand, were better placed to obstruct the learning processes. As predicted by the LEC conditions, their relative power in the parliament, as members of the government or governing coalitions, enabled them to directly impact the work of relevant committees. This prevented relevant information from diffusing throughout the *Skupština* and, even more seriously, interrupted the information gathering process as well. While the party structure in Serbia is similar to Croatia, which helped in completing certain reforms as predicted by LIH, the hierarchical nature of political parties when combined with the presence of populist parties prevented much learning from occurring.

This, though, was not solely a Serbian problem. The Croatian accession experience was also noted for the relatively shallow nature of the changes (ADE s.a. 2019: ii). This was due to issues both in the structure of the accession process but also to the limited availability of information to wider MPs and the constraining impact of hierarchical party structures. As previously mentioned, party leaders were always informed clearly of the necessity of certain changes (Croatia 6, 2021). However, this did not always translate into top-down diffusion of knowledge and the relative absence of information available to MPs prevented them, in some cases, from even *accessing* information (Croatia 5, 2021), blocking learning under LEC 2. As such, and as predicted by the literature on policy learning, the Croatian accession can be considered as successful but not necessarily *transformative* due to this prevention of wider learning.

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to generalize from a two case comparison, this research has, hopefully, validated the usefulness of the policy learning approach to understanding EU accession. More importantly, though, it also highlights some lessons which could be of use for understanding the impact of populist parties on public policy and how best populist party participation in legislatures can be understood.

From the Serbian case, it is clear that the *inclusion* of populist parties within governing coalitions is problematic as they can obstruct the functioning of knowledge diffusion processes which are inherent to policymaking. Through the inclusion of populist parties in the government they were able to obstruct the meaningful work of the government, interrupting the flow of information through the various governing bodies and even the broader organs of state. The persistence of this has a greater impact than would be expected from their formal power within the legislature and government, acting to constrain what is possible and to counter attempts by the EU to promote knowledge diffusion through interaction with Serbian officials.

The Croatian experience also highlights how, even if they are excluded from the levers of power, they can still have an impact. Populist obstruction can best be overridden if they are *excluded* from decision-making processes but, as shown in Croatia, exclusionary, closed off decision-making structures are also not supportive of deeper learning. Simply not allowing populists to participate resolves the issues seen in the Serbian case but sacrifices the collaborative processes inherent to liberal democracy. Cutting off the nose of democracy to

spite the face, if you will, was an effective strategy in assisting the rapid passage of legislation but simply buried the issues raised by the persistence of populist parties to be addressed later. In line with the expectations of the outcome of the “hollowing out” of transitional democratic institutions in the pursuit of EU accession (Bešlin et al. 2020: 8–9; Krastev 2007).

This does not mean that any and all learning processes are doomed but it does highlight a, perhaps, contradictory element of democracy and policy learning processes. Enacting a strict *cordon sanitaire* against populists and Eurosceptics, can be a useful strategy for achieving short-to medium-term political objectives. Indeed, Croatia is in this regard the “success” case, insofar as it has achieved EU integration. However, is this a “good” outcome? Is the transposition of legal and regulatory frameworks sufficient to count as “Europeanization”? Recent issues in Croatia, such as negative findings in the Commission’s Rule of Law reports and broader issues with political clientelism in the country would, perhaps, indicate that the hierarchical political style of Croatia, while useful in assisting the accession process, does carry with it distinct drawbacks (European Commission 2020; 2021).

Again, this is a tentative result due to case selection limitations and the specificities of the EU accession process. Any attempts to draw significantly broader insights from the limited study here will, inherently, be undermined by the temporal, political, and cultural specificities of the cases. Hopefully, though, this chapter has demonstrated some potential challenges faced by those attempting to confront the ongoing populist phenomenon.

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INTERVIEWS

- Croatia Interview 1: former Croatian MP, May 19, 2020, conducted via WhatsApp in English by the author.
- Croatia Interview 2: former EU actor in Croatia, July 31, 2020, conducted via Zoom in English by the author.
- Croatia Interview 3: Croatian politician, November 20, 2020, conducted via telephone in English and Croatian by the author.
- Croatia Interview 4: Croatian politician, April 23, 2021, conducted via email in English by the author.
- Croatia Interview 5: former Croatian MP, March 4, 2021, conducted via Zoom in English by the author.
- Croatia Interview 6: former Croatian MP, March 12, 2021, conducted via Zoom in English by the author.
- Serbia Interview 1: former Serbian MP, June 4, 2019, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in English and Serbian by the author.

Serbia Interview 2: former Serbian MP, June 7, 2019, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in English by the author.

Serbia Interview 3: Serbian politician, December 17, 2019, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in Serbian by the author.

Serbia Interview 4: former Serbian MP, December 18, 2019, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in English and Serbian by the author.

Serbia Interview 5: former Serbian politician, December 18, 2019, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in Serbian by the author.

Serbia Interview 6: Serbian politician, February 18, 2020, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in English by the author.

Serbia Interview 7: foreign civil servant, February 19, 2020, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in English by the author.

Serbia Interview 8: Serbian MP, February 19, 2020, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in Serbian by the author.

Serbia Interview 9: former Serbian MP, February 20, 2020, conducted in Belgrade, Serbia, in Serbian by the author.

APPENDIX I: PARTY MAKEUP AND LISTS

TABLE A1. Croatian Political Parties

Party Name (English)	Party Name (HR)	Acronym	Periods in the Hrvatski Sabor
Bosnian Democratic Party of Croatia	<i>Bošnjačka demokratska stranka Hrvatske</i>	BDSH	2011–2013
Democratic Centre	<i>Demokratski centar</i>	DC	2000–2007
Croatian Bloc	<i>Hrvatski blok</i>	HB	2000–2003
Croatian Democratic Union	<i>Hrvatska demokratska zajednica</i>	HDZ	2000–2013
Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja	<i>Hrvatski demokratski savez Slavonije i Baranje</i>	HDSSB	2003–2013
Croatian Civic Party	<i>Hrvatska građanska stranka</i>	HGS	2011–2013

Party Name (English)	Party Name (HR)	Acronym	Periods in the <i>Hrvatski Sabor</i>
Croatian True Revival	<i>Hrvatski istinski preporod</i>	HIP	2000–2003
Croatian Christian Democratic Union	<i>Hrvatska kršćansko-demokratska unija</i>	HKDU	2000–2003
Croatian Labourists – Labour Party	<i>Hrvatski laburisti – Stranka rada</i>	HLSR	2007–2013
Croatian Independent Democrats	<i>Hrvatski nezavisni demokrati</i>	HND	2000–2003
Croatian People’s Party	<i>Hrvatska narodna stranka</i>	HNS	2000–2003
Croatian People’s Party – Liberal Democrats	<i>Hrvatska narodna stranka – Liberalni demokrati</i>	HNS-LD	2003–2013
Croatian Social Democrats	<i>Hrvatski socijaldemokrati</i>	HSD	2007–2011
Croatian Social Liberal Party	<i>Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka</i>	HSLS	2000–2010
Croatian Social Liberal Party/Independent	<i>Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka/Nezavisni</i>	HSLS/ IND	2011
Croatian Party of Rights	<i>Hrvatska stranka prava</i>	HSP	2000–2011
Croatian Party of Rights Dr. Ante Starčević	<i>Hrvatska stranka prava dr. Ante Starčević</i>	HSP-AS	2011–2013
Croatian Peasant Party	<i>Hrvatska seljačka stranka</i>	HSS	2000–2013
Croatian Party of Pensioners	<i>Hrvatska stranka umirovljenika</i>	HSU	2003–2013
Istrian Democrats	<i>Istarski demokrati</i>	ID	2011–2013
Istrian Democratic Assembly	<i>Istarska demokratska stranka</i>	IDS	2000–2013
LIBRA - Party of Liberal Democrats	<i>LIBRA - Stranka liberalnih demokrata</i>	LIBRA	2000–2003
Liberal Party	<i>Liberalna stranka</i>	LS	2000–2003
Alliance of Primorje-Gorski Kotar	<i>Primorsko goranski savez</i>	PGS	2000–2007
Slavonia-Baranja Croatian Party	<i>Slavonsko-baranjska hrvatska stranka</i>	SBHS	2000–2007
Party of Democratic Action of Croatia	<i>Stranka demokratske akcije Hrvatske</i>	SDAH	2003–2011

Party Name (English)	Party Name (HR)	Acronym	Periods in the Hrvatski Sabor
Social Democratic Party of Croatia	<i>Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske</i>	SDP	2000–2013
Serb People's Party	<i>Srpska narodna stranka</i>	SNS	2000–2003
Independent Democratic Serbian Party	<i>Samostalno demokratska Srpska stranka</i>	SDSS	2003–2013

Source: Website of the Croatian Parliament (<https://sabor.hr/>).

TABLE A2. Serbian Political Parties

Party Name (English)	Party Name (RS)	Acronym	Periods in Narodna Skupština
Association of Small and Medium Enterprises and Entrepreneurs of Serbia	<i>Asocijacija malih i srednjih preduzeća i preduzetnika Srbije</i>	APPS	2012–2014
Bosniak Democratic Party of Sandžak	<i>Bošnjačka demokratska stranka Sandžaka</i>	BDSS	2008–2012
Bosnian Democratic Union	<i>Bosanska Demokratska Zajednica</i>	BDZ	2012–2014
Bosniak People's Party	<i>Bošnjačka narodna stranka</i>	BNS	2012–2016
Rich Serbia	<i>Bogata Srbija</i>	BS	2012–2014
Better Serbia	<i>Bolja Srbija</i>	BS	2016–2020
Christian Democratic Party of Serbia	<i>Demohrišćanska Stranka Srbije</i>	DHSS	2008–2016
Democratic left of Roma	<i>Demokratska levica Roma</i>	DLR	2008–2012
Democratic Party of Macedonians	<i>Demokratska partija Makedonijaca</i>	DPM	2012–2014
Democratic Party	<i>Demokratska Stranka</i>	DS	2008–2020
Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina	<i>Demokratski savez Hrvata u Vojvodini</i>	DSHV	2008–2012
Democratic Party of Serbia	<i>Demokratska stranka Srbije</i>	DSS	2008–2014, 2016–2020
Serbian Movement “Dveri”	<i>Srpski pokret Dveri</i>	Dveri	2016–2020

Party Name (English)	Party Name (RS)	Acronym	Periods in <i>Narodna Skupština</i>
G17+	G17+	G17+	2008–2014
United Serbia	<i>Jedinstvena Srbija</i>	JS	2008–2020
Communist Party	<i>Komunistička partija</i>	KP	2016–2020
Coalition of Refugee Associations in the Republic of Serbia	<i>Koalicija udruženja izbjeglica u Republici Srbiji</i>	KUIRS	2012–2014
Liberal Democratic Party	<i>Liberalno demokratska partija</i>	LDP	2008–2014, 2016–2020
League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina	<i>Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine</i>	LSV	2008–2020
People's Party	<i>Narodna stranka</i>	NARODNA	2016–2020
None of the Answers Offered	<i>Nijedan od ponuđenih odgovora</i>	NOPO	2012–2014
New Party	<i>Nova stranka</i>	Nova	2014–2020
New Serbia	<i>Nova Srbija</i>	NS	2008–2020
People's Peasant Party	<i>Narodna Seljačka Stranka</i>	NSS	2012–2014, 2016–2020
Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia	<i>Pokret obnove Kraljevine Srbije</i>	POKS	2016–2020
The Economic Revival Movement of Serbia	<i>Pokret privredni preporod Srbije</i>	PPPS	2012–2014
Movement for Reversal	<i>Pokret za preokret</i>	Preokret	2014–2016
Movement of Socialists	<i>Pokret socijalista</i>	PS	2012–2020
Strength of Serbia Movement – BK	<i>Pokret Snaga Srbije – BK</i>	PSSBK	2012–2020
Party of United Pensioners of Serbia	<i>Partija ujedinijenih penzionera Srbije</i>	PUPS	2008–2020
The Movement of the United Vlachs	<i>Pokred Ujedinjenih Vlaha</i>	PUV	2012–2014
Serbian Veterans Movement	<i>Pokret veterana Srbije</i>	PVS	2008–2014
Party for Democratic Action	<i>Partija za demokratsko delovanje</i>	PZDD	2008–2012, 2014–2020

Party Name (English)	Party Name (RS)	Acronym	Periods in Narodna Skupština
I Live for Krajina Movement	<i>Pokret Živim za Krajinu</i>	PŽK	2012–2014
Romani Party	<i>Romani partija</i>	RP	2012–2014
Party of Democratic Action of Sandzak	<i>Stranka demokratske akcije Sandžaka</i>	SDA	2012–2016
Sandzak Democratic Party	<i>Sandžačka demokratska partija</i>	SDP	2008–2012
Social Democratic Party of Serbia	<i>Socijaldem-okratska partija Srbije</i>	SDPS	2008–2020
Social Democratic Party	<i>Socijaldemokratska stranka</i>	SDS	2014–2020
Social Democratic Union	<i>Socijaldemokratska unija</i>	SDU	2008–2014
Social Liberal Party of Sandžak	<i>Socijalno liberalna partija Sandžaka</i>	SLPS	2008
Serbian People's Party	<i>Srpska narodna partija</i>	SNP	2014–2020
Serbian Renewal Movement	<i>Srpski pokret obnove</i>	SPO	2008–2020
Justice and Reconciliation Party	<i>Stranka pravde i pomirenja</i>	SPP	2016–2020
Socialist Party of Serbia	<i>Socijalistička partija Srbije</i>	SPS	2008–2020
Serbian Progressive Party	<i>Srpska napredna stranka</i>	SNS	2012–2020
Serbian Radical Party	<i>Srpska radikalna stranka</i>	SRS	2008–2012, 2016–2020
Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians	<i>Savez vojvođanskih Mađara</i>	SVM	2008–2020
United Peasant Party	<i>Ujedinjena seljačka stranka</i>	USS	2014–2020
Green Party	<i>Zelena stranka</i>	ZES	2016–2020
Greens of Serbia	<i>Zeleni Srbije</i>	ZS	2012–2020
Together for Serbia	<i>Zajedno za Srbiju</i>	ZZS	2016–2020
Together for Šumadija	<i>Zajedno za Šumadiju</i>	ZZŠ	2012–2016

Source: Website of the Serbian National Assembly (<http://www.parlament.gov.rs/narodna-skupstina-.871.html>).

POPULISM AND RELIGION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH¹

ABSTRACT

In the current literature concerning populism as a historical, political and social phenomenon, the intertwining of religion and populism merits greater attention. In this paper, the complex link between religion and populism is assessed not only in the framework of the religious-political revival in the Western Balkans but also within the sociological debate on desecularisation as a broader social phenomenon. Consequently, the author considers three cases of religious populism: Serbia, Montenegro and Republika Srpska. In 21st century Serbia, the distinction between the church and the state has been blurred. Thus, a broader re-assessment of the political, social and cultural role of the church has taken place. In their

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joint ‘protection of culture,’ the church and state began to participate in reshaping the classical modernisation concept by accommodating it to the local, national and particular mould. In Montenegro, the events leading up to the 2020 elections represented an example of religious populism blended with neo-traditionalism. The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) was a crucial interpretive resource in the social-political movement of 2019–2020, providing, thus, a basic ideological structure for political action. In Republika Srpska, the tight connection and cooperation between the SOC and Bosnian Serb political leadership established during the war has continued throughout the early 21st century. Nationalist religious discourse and the advancement of an ethnocentric political theology have also been utilised as a populist mechanism in the hands of the current political elite.

KEYWORDS: religious populism, Serbian Orthodox Church, Serbia, Montenegro, Republika Srpska

INTRODUCTION

It is not misleading to describe Western Balkan societies today as societies of incomplete secularisation. Such a characterisation applies, I think, to the majority of post-Yugoslav societies, which have unambiguously opted for a model of desecularisation favouring classical church forms of religiosity. In contrast to Western Europe, where the traditional historical churches are not able to ‘discipline’ (Davie 2007: 96) the majority of the population, in the Balkans they predominantly participate in renewing neo-traditional cultural models. Secularisation took root in socialist Yugoslavia, but the late eighties and early nineties of the former century hindered this process. Western Balkan societies, thus, cannot be easily labeled as post-secular, at least not according to Habermas’ categorisation (Habermas 2008). They differ from western nations in which faith communities are an integral part of civil society. Because of that unfinished process in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, a prolonged tension between discourses and practices of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) as a majority religious

institution, on the one hand, and the predominantly secular position of civil society and liberal, left-oriented intellectuals, on the other has been witnessed.

Sociologically, secularisation is a *longue durée* social process, while secularism is normally understood as a polemical and even antagonistic attitude towards religion. After the Second World War, secularism largely referred to an ideological and political stance in socialist Yugoslavia, while today, in the post-socialist period, it is polemical and reactive to the most recent hybridisation of the church-state relationship, sometimes (inappropriately) labeled as 'clericalisation.' Notwithstanding the constitution and laws, the distinction between the two institutions in Serbian society is rather blurred. The state and its organisations contribute to such a hybridisation in the public sphere and I tend to call this religious-political syncretism – *political orthodoxy* (Vukomanović 2013: 328).

Political orthodoxy rejects, for example, secular values and a democratic political culture, becoming, thus, anti-European. This is apparent not only from the speeches and public proclamations of members of nationalist political parties and para-clerical organisations, but also from statements of the church hierarchy contributing, in their own right, to this form of religious populism. In the years following the demise of the Milošević regime, the Serbian government oriented itself politically towards European integration, while the SOC has maintained a conservative position. For example, the SOC was very critical of the European Constitution draft of 2004, whose preamble did not explicitly mention Christianity as the basis of European civilisation and culture. In debates concerning the EU constitution, there were arguments that Europe unnecessarily and easily renounced its parent in favour of laicism that did not bring good to anyone. According to this opinion, Europe flies away, as it were, from itself into a forthcoming 'peril.' Criticism of the EU from the ranks of the church hierarchy indicates a sort of collision between the *community* of Orthodox believers in Serbia and their own religious *institution*. The church hierarchy resists EU integration and, for that matter, European modernity, whereas the community of (traditional) believers, at least according to sociological surveys, are not necessarily inclined to accept such an attitude of the church authorities (Vukomanović 2014: 139).

In this chapter, I will attempt to highlight the issue of desecularisation in the Western Balkans by placing it in the wider context of religious

populism and neo-traditionalism that considerably intertwined with this process during the second decade of the 21st century. In the first section, I will therefore tease out some of the most prominent links between populism and religion. This will be accompanied by discussions of the neo-traditionalist revival in the SOC and the historical and theological impetus of Serbian populism. In the second half of this chapter, I will consider three case studies of religious populism: Serbia, Montenegro and Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

RELIGION AND POPULISM

In the growing literature concerning populism as a historical, political and social phenomenon, the intertwining between religion and populism merits greater attention as a subject of political science and sociology of religion. The very term ‘religious populism’ originates back to 1982, when Fred Halliday employed it in the context of the Iranian Revolution (Halliday 1982/3: 83, 187, 202). Since then, the term ‘populism’ has been applied in various religious-political contexts: from Latin America (liberation theology) via the Middle East (political Islam) to Europe (right-wing political parties) and the United States and the evangelical influence on republican politics in the era of George W. Bush and Donald Trump. For example, references to religion and the protection of Europe as a Christian civilisation have become increasingly prominent in European right-wing narratives during the last two decades.² It seems, therefore, that the complex link between religion and populism should be assessed not only in the framework of a religious-political revival in many modern states, but also within the current sociological

² The process of desecularisation in early 21st century Eastern Europe was accompanied by an anti-migration, anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic agenda. The narratives of an imminent threat spread antagonistic, anti-Islamic ideas through the following reductionist claim: Islam is incompatible with Europe and its Christian identity and is thus alien to European society and culture in general. The Slovenian philosopher Tomaž Mastnak calls this anti-Muslim attitude a ‘fundamentalist hatred’ and derives its origins in Europe from the Crusades (Mastnak 2007). See also Račius 2020.

debate on desecularisation as a social phenomenon of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Some recent studies in political science have also paid due attention to 'the politicisation of religion' by religious movements and traditional churches, on the one hand, and 'the religionisation of politics' by political actors and parties through their ideological or practical, electoral mobilisation on the other (Linz 2004; Apahideanu 2014; Ognjenović and Jozelić 2014; Zúquete 2017). One could also include here a number of interdisciplinary studies of religious (neo)fundamentalism (e.g. Roy 2004; Martensson et al. 2011).

Let me now first outline some of the most prominent links between populism and religion. Among the major aspects encountered in recent literature on populism one often finds the Manichean dichotomy between 'us' and 'them,' 'the people' and 'the (alienated) elite,' with the exclusive claim of populists to be the true voice of 'the people.' "When referring to 'the people,' populists imagine a uniform body 'untainted' by class, ethnicity or religious divisions, promoting instead an 'organic view as an ethnically and culturally homogenous totality'" (Filc 2009: 12). Thus, Mudde (2004: 543) defines populism "as 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." Though populism is a distinct ideology (or, at least, a quasi-ideology or political style – DeHana and Shterin 2018), it does not possess "the same level of intellectual refinement and consistency as, for example, socialism or liberalism" (Mudde 2004: 544). As a 'thin-centered ideology,' populism can be easily combined with other systems, including communism, nationalism or socialism. In its core, it is moralistic rather than programmatic (Mudde 2004: 544). It is also clear that populism, in such a referential frame, has two major adversaries: elitism and pluralism. Accordingly, populist politics always castigate certain groups that 'do not belong' to the 'genuine people,' including ethnic and religious minorities, immigrants, LGBT populations and dissident intellectuals or civil society activists. As a political movement and a thin-centred ideology, populism relies on a specific discourse and patterns of public style and behaviour. It is articulated through the political arena, media networks (including social media) and is easily adopted in religious debates. Religion is, in fact,

necessary to legitimise majority public policies by appropriating them through the dominant ecclesiastical discourse or political theology: “As populists have an exclusive claim to the representation of ‘the people,’ religious appeals can easily marginalise the criticisms of the opposition and alternative policy suggestions by morally and religiously discrediting dissent” (Yabanci and Taleski 2018: 6).

Religion can, therefore, be used as a political instrument in the hands of ruling populists to overcome national crises, marginalise dissent and justify attacks on democratic institutions and minorities (Yabanci and Taleski 2018: 16). This becomes especially important if we take into account that populism makes use of emotionality, by manipulating the passions of ordinary people. Arato and Cohen (2018) emphasise how populists ‘hijack religion for their own purposes’ through leveraging civil society in order to navigate political institutions. When populists mobilise religious identities through civil society, it can have a harmful effect on a liberal society. Religion, in other words, can impair democracy by endorsing one type of religious faith and sidelining another – usually minority groups and religious denominations.

According to Ivan Varga, “retraditionalisation occurs when nations and communities react to the pressures of cultural globalisation. It happens under different conditions: (a) as a reaction to the overpowering... popular culture and (b) due to the desire to maintain or (re)establish traditional culture or social institutions. For example, when previously colonised entities gained their independence, they reverted to their traditional culture and societal arrangements. Retraditionalisation could include conservative trends as well when it evokes traditions that stem from premodern periods – for instance, reintroducing positions that churches once occupied in the political, cultural, or educational sphere, as one can observe in the practice of many postcommunist states” (Varga 2012: 297).

In line with the previous definition, I would argue that in the case of Serbian society, retraditionalisation occurred after the collapse of Yugoslavia as a reaction to the ‘global order,’ seen primarily through the political and cultural ‘supremacy’ of the West (mainly the EU countries and the US). This reaction also included ‘the desire to maintain or (re)establish traditional culture or social institutions.’ As in other post-socialist societies of Central-Eastern Europe, such a reaction was accompanied by reestablishing the position that the SOC once occupied in the political, cultural and

educational spheres. In the social and cultural context of Eastern Europe, I would, therefore, be inclined to use the terms neo-traditionalism and retraditionalisation as synonyms or interchangeable words. Sociologically, both terms are associated with yet another concept frequently employed in the contemporary sociology of religion – the notion of desecularisation.

NEO-TRADITIONALIST REVIVAL OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

In a more general sense, most religions embrace at least some traditional patterns – faith in tradition, observance of tradition and conduct in accordance with tradition – that provide answers to questions about an ultimate meaning or absolute truth. Neo-traditionalism, however, usually refers to a conscious renewal or revival of what is construed to be ‘tradition.’ Accordingly, neo-traditionalism is an ideological or political programme whose aim is to reproduce and perpetuate tradition in a novel context (of modernity) with a selective reinterpretation of the past. The purpose of this reinvention of tradition is eventually to challenge the patterns of (post) modern, cosmopolitan and liberal culture and society. Accordingly, neo-traditionalists formulate a specific discourse and programme for political mobilisation, including new concepts, norms, values and practices that oppose the dominant liberal democratic political philosophy and its legal-political order. In the religious sphere, neo-traditional movements (e.g. in Africa, Russia or within political Islam) seek the rehabilitation of local and national religious traditions in a new key: they usually appeal to what they ponder to be traditional within their own experience of modernity and globalisation. In the Russian context, Ozhiganova (2019) draws special attention to the problem of patriarchy, family, and gender roles as important components of the ideology of neo-traditionalism. As far as political Islam is concerned, I have referred recently to Islamic modernism in Pakistan that reinterpreted, in a new key, some of the traditional tenets of Sufism and Barelvism (Vukomanović 2022:

131–136). In Africa, “colonial policies often stimulated rather than stilled conflict in the ongoing politics of neo-traditionalism. Far from being created by alien rulers, then, tradition was reinterpreted, reformed and reconstructed by subjects and rulers alike” (Spear 2003: 4). No wonder, then, that neo-traditionalism is employed both by political and religious authorities as a means of political mobilisation.

Historically the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), like the majority of other Orthodox churches, evolved in predominantly non-democratic political contexts (the medieval period, Byzantium, Ottoman conquests, communist ideology, etc.). Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church is not an independent political entity; historically, it has always been reliant on the state – and the latter is normally the more powerful partner in that relationship. Because of that, an excessive hierarchical control and domination took place, including passivity of the clergy and lay indifference. A new element – something that the Church experienced only in the diaspora (i.e. in the democratic countries in which its bishoprics had been present for some time) – is a whole range of open issues and problems concerning democracy, modernity, national culture, pluralism, civil society and church-state relations. In the late 1980s, after forty years of social marginalisation, the SOC, along with other churches and religious communities, returned to the public sphere and political scene in socialist Yugoslavia. In comparison with other Central-East European countries, this return was several years late. The process was very similar, but with one major difference: the wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia that heavily marked the initial period of desecularisation (Radić and Vukomanović 2014: 180). Burdened by social and economic trials, the refugee crisis and civilian casualties of the war, the citizens of the post-Yugoslav countries were ready to turn to religion and launch their wayback machine.

Before the socialist political system itself started to collapse, secularisation already declined owing to a general mistrust in the Yugoslav state, a profound political and economic crisis, and internal disturbances among intellectuals who sought for the profound reassessment of the past. The social crisis resulted, at least partly, in a latent discontent of the citizens who turned to religion and church with strong ethno-nationalist dispositions. In Yugoslavia, this process was widely accompanied by the official rehabilitation of religion

in its traditional role of the keeper of national institutions and values. In addition, a more rapid desecularisation process took place in Serbia, unlike the gradual desecularisation in other Central-East European countries. During that process, the SOC affirmed itself as the bearer of Serbian ethnic, cultural and national identity under the utmost social challenges and pressures. The concept of *belonging* to the nation (without necessarily *believing* in Orthodox dogma) was reduced to a simplified ethno-confessional matrix: 'being a Serb means being Orthodox.' This sort of ethnification and culturalisation of religion is very suitable for nationalists and populists: in the case of Serbia, it allowed Orthodoxy to gain a privileged status as the 'people's culture' and not just as a Christian denomination. Instead of initiating dialogue with the modern world, the SOC opted to condemn it by withdrawing into its own, self-imposed eschatological and liturgical 'ghetto' (Vukomanović 2011: 153).

After political changes in Serbia following October 2000, the SOC has become an important player in a new 'symphony' with the state, with unprecedented symbolic and normative influence. For example, it has offered a new framework of ideology and values for state institutions and the public education system. This political and ideological shift was very conservative, to say the least. It was founded on a vague concept of *svetosavlje*, the ideology of leading SOC theologians since the mid-20th century, involving the projection of a golden medieval past – the 'Kosovo testament' (cult of martyrdom) and the myth of St. Sava – onto the present. Thus, events such as the recent war experience of the 1990s, international isolation and delayed accession to the EU contributed to the SOC's occasional messianic and eschatological overtones and ethno-nationalist references to territory and people, especially in the context of the Kosovo problem. Monoconfessionalism (accompanied by an 'organic' view of the state, church and society), and opposition to secularism, modernisation, civil society, enlightenment, ecumenism, social and religious pluralism were only some of the elements in the new SOC agenda; arguments have even been made for an 'Orthodox public opinion' (Vukomanović 2011: 149). Although the rhetoric was theological, the aim was religious-political: to hinder the process of democratisation and of accession to the EU.

SOC representatives, especially higher clergy, often express their fear of the destruction of the 'true faith' by openly resisting the secularisation

of the modern (Western) world. They argue that modern society is seriously ill and, in order for it to 'heal itself,' it is necessary to return to the original interpretation of the eschaton, i.e. to refer to an authentic Christian interpretation of eschatology, because Christian ontology derives from it (Midić 2003: 46). According to the SOC discourse, the most reliable guide for such a course is the Liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The return to tradition and the congregational origin of Christianity with which an unbroken continuity is established certainly represents one of the main principles of Serbian Orthodox Christianity and of other Orthodox churches. This is where the SOC's traditionalism finds its natural place. More often than not, Serbian Orthodoxy views tradition as static and unchangeable rather than something open to creative reinterpretation in this day and age. Instead of religion adapting to social changes, society is to be guided by religious principles formulated in the remote past. In this context, tradition appears "as something immutable in ever-changing history, created centuries ago yet somehow coming to us intact and unaltered. As they make people conscious of these allegedly immutable things that resisted the power of historical change and invite the people to 'wake up' and 'return' to their 'genuine' identities, their chief aim is to profoundly alter the current situation..." (Perica 2002: 228).

A belief in such a Deep Roots Myth (Perica 2002: 227) is probably one of the main challenges that the SOC and some other Orthodox churches encounter today. Observed in this light, neo-traditionalism could be assessed as a detrimental social and cultural phenomenon. It logically leads to stalling in the reform processes that are necessary for Serbia's accession to the EU. Tradition, on the other hand, could be deployed as a wayback machine for the purpose of manipulation of citizens (the electorate) in favour of ruling elites. Such an instrumentalist attitude towards historic tradition, aimed at realising national(ist) and political goals, has been repeatedly misused in Serbian history. It probably culminated in the 1980s and 1990s when it led, among other causes, to the wars of Yugoslav succession. The first important element utilised in this context is certainly the Serbian Orthodox tradition. This tradition includes *svetosavlje* as an ideological system, various sacred historical monuments (churches and monasteries) and religious rites and festivals. The second aspect is, however, the construed historical and mythological tradition regarding the state and a (glorious) national past.

Finally, the third source of Serbian traditionalism resides in its folk and rural heritage. All these elements could be exploited in political discourse and practice (Naumović 1994). They are powerful tools of the legitimisation process, party politics and personality cults.

Religion enters very complex interactions with the ideological, political, cultural and economic systems today. It is part of the globalisation processes. On the other hand, through its institutions and their interpretative strategies, it still provides a safe haven for the 'protection of culture.' More precisely, religions protect their interpretative traditions that reaffirm religious institutions.

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL IMPETUS OF SERBIAN POPULISM

The SOC today is probably the second most important power centre in Serbia (after the government), in numerous cases acting as an advisor and confidant, especially with regard to the Kosovo problem. In such a political context, the SOC began increasingly offering a new ideological framework for state institutions such as the army and the education system, filling – at its own initiative, but also with the support of the state – the ideological void created after the fall of communism.

Although the SOC has managed to establish very solid relations with the Serbian state since 2000, it still has weak contact with civil society, unlike the Roman Catholic Church in Poland before the fall of communism (Vukomanović 2014: 136). There is in Serbia today, including among younger people, a certain reluctance to accept political and social pluralism – an outcome of the Enlightenment – and to embrace instead an archaic and monistic model of nation and state. It is no accident that in this context the SOC's populist enmity targets Serbian educators, or pro-pluralism and pro-Europe 'new ideologues,' independent intellectuals and NGO activists. According to such an ecclesiastical view, the patriarchal, quasi-democratic model of *sabornost* should have replaced the authoritarian socialist political

model. The revival of the 19th-century Slavophile principles of *sobornost*³ and *narodnichestvo* (populism) was, in fact, a consequence of abandoning the modern pluralistic model of society.

Like Latinka Perović (1985; 2006) before them, both Alex Dragnich (1996) and Dubravka Stojanović (2017) trace this historical path to the origins of Serbian populism in the early 1870s – the time of the foundation of the People's Radical Party (*Narodna radikalna stranka*) and the emergence of populist socialism. Stojanović describes populism as “a system, notwithstanding that it derives its greatest support by presenting itself precisely as anti-systemic. Its rhetoric is marked by one prefix: anti. It presents itself as anti-urbanist, anti-modernizing, anti-immigrant, anti-capitalist, anti-individualistic, anti-Semitic, anti-communist... But herein lies one of its biggest paradoxes – albeit showing itself as ‘anti,’ as rebellious, it is in fact a very firm system, authoritarian in its very essence” (Stojanović 2017: 8). Stojanović pursues this historical thread via both world wars, up to the 1990s and their representation in Serbian history books. Part of this history is the institution of *zadruga* (i.e. cooperative, extended family), a political ideal which she aptly describes as “the ideological subterranean river of Serbian political history” (Stojanović 2017: 43). I would argue that two other Serbian political ideals derive from such historical undercurrents: *sobornost* and the view of society as a *people's organism*. Both concepts are important for Serbian Orthodox organicistic views about the church and the state that have found place for themselves as guiding ideas even today.

³ I would roughly translate this term, in the Russian context, as ‘conciliarity’ and, more specifically, as solidarity and voluntary submission of individuals to the ‘people's whole,’ with the view of the organic function of Russian Orthodoxy in social life.

REPUBLIKA SRPSKA AS A LANDMARK OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL POPULISM

On several occasions, various Serbian politicians and church leaders referred to Republika Srpska (RS), an entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a ‘Piedmont of Serbianhood.’ This was an expression used by Ivica Dačić, the 2012 vice-president of the Government of Serbia,⁴ and this is how Nenad Nešić, the leader of the Democratic National Union (a political party in RS) also called it in 2021. Nešić further elaborated, “And not in the historical sense, in which it is often mentioned, but rather to create from Republika Srpska what is Piedmont for Italy – a border region of the Italian people that is most beautiful and most developed. Republika Srpska has its own riches, people, beauty and knowledge to be that for the entire Serbian people.”⁵ The late Serbian Patriarch Irinej used the same expression for the region of Herzegovina, referring to the “spiritual, national and moral condition experienced during [his] visit” to this province in 2012.⁶ However, Metropolitan Amfilohije was the prelate who originally used this expression (Piedmont of all Serbianhood) back in late 1994, at the spiritual academy held in the Bosnian town of Foča/Srbinje (Glasnik SPC 1994).

The war of the 1990s was as much about the character of the future Bosnia and Herzegovina as it was about the mutual relationships between the three main ethno-confessional groups (Bosniak Muslims, Serbian Orthodox and Catholic Croats). The Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 laid the foundation of the current political system,⁷ providing a framework in which war lost

⁴ “Ивица Дачић: Република Српска је Пијемонт српства,” *Nova srpska politička misao*. <http://www.nspm.rs/hronika/ivica-dacic-republika-srpska-je-pijemont-srpstva.html?alphabet=l> [accessed: April 29, 2022].

⁵ “Lider DNS Nenad Nešić za ‘Telegraf’: ‘Vidim Republiku Srpsku kao Pijemont srpstva,’” *Telegraf*. <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/jugosfera/3320809-nenad-nesic-dns-milorad-dodik-republika-srpska-vucic> [accessed: April 29, 2022].

⁶ “Patrijarh Irinej: Hercegovina – pijemont srpstva,” *Glas srpske*. https://www.glassrpske.com/lat/novosti/vijesti_dana/patrijarh-irinej-hercegovina-pijemont-srpstva/78696 [accessed: April 29, 2022].

⁷ This system is one of the most complex and decentralised in the entire world. Bosnia and Herzegovina was established as a federal state based on two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which itself consists of ten cantons), and Republika Srpska with the vast majority of Serbs.

its foothold, but it has been unable to harmonise inter-confessional and inter-ethnic relations in a long-lasting manner.⁸ This eventually led to various manifestations of religious populism and neo-traditionalism on all three sides in the aftermath of the war.

The tight connection and cooperation between the SOC and Bosnian Serb political leadership established during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued throughout the early 21st century and was rarely disputed or challenged by either the ruling or opposition political parties in this entity. The SOC is particularly sympathetic to the non-communist orientation of the Bosnian Serb regime and its willingness to support traditional church objectives. For example, the RS national anthem is the Kingdom of Serbia's (and the Republic of Serbia) anthem "Bože pravde" (*God of Justice*), confessional religious education in schools is obligatory, while the history of the militant nationalist Chetnik movement is studied with approval (Soldo et al. 2017: 150; Bursać 2019). The same respect is offered to alleged 'war heroes' Karadžić and Mladić. There is also strong support for the Serbian monarchy, whereas the SOC clergy enjoys high esteem. About 90 percent of RS's citizens self-identify, in confessional terms, with the Serbian Orthodox tradition. Finally, the constitution of the entity of RS establishes the SOC as "the church of the Serb people and other peoples of Orthodox religion" (article 28).⁹

Ethno-religious populism and neo-traditionalism in RS have, therefore, survived to this day. The proliferation of nationalist religious discourse and the advancement of an ethnocentric political theology that were visible

All territorial units, except for two mixed cantons in the Federation and the District of Brčko, are homogenous, i.e. one national group has an absolute majority. In 1997, the international community established the office of the High Representative (HR), the highest civilian authority of the Peace Agreement, with the power to impose laws and dismiss officials. After the HR received far-reaching intervention rights, Bosnia and Herzegovina became a major example of 'international state-building' or an 'imposed federalism' with a population of 3.8 million in 2019. Thus, federalism – the political model and system that was implemented to mitigate tensions and provide inter-ethnic stability between the three constituent peoples – remains a disputed issue in the country.

⁸ According to the most recent census, conducted in 2013, the Bosnian religious landscape includes: Sunni Muslims – 51% of the population; Serbian Orthodox Christians – 31%; Roman Catholics – 15%; and others, including Protestants and Jews – 3%. The law recognises the legal subjectivity of four traditional religious communities: the Islamic Community, Jewish Community, the SOC and the Roman Catholic Church.

⁹ Constitution of the Republika Srpska. Council of Europe. Strasbourg 1996, 6.

during the war and, in its aftermath, make us wonder if religion in Bosnia has been utilised as a populist mechanism in hands of the political elite. Milorad Dodik, the current leader of RS (who has often made nationalist and religious allusions in his public appearances) has recently articulated the political discourse of withdrawing from Bosnia's military, intelligence, judicial and tax institutions and has threatened possible secession. Such a discourse also resorts to some populist and neo-traditionalist stratagems. Dodik speaks what most of his constituency wishes to hear: the endangerment of the Serbian nation, an Islamic threat to the RS, terrorism, the conflict of civilisations, etc. Once described in Washington as an anti-nationalist 'breath of fresh air' (Madeleine Albright), Dodik is currently supported by right-wing European leaders and parties in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia. He has become a genocide-denying secessionist, targeted by the latest American anti-corruption sanctions. His response to these prohibitions is that the time when the EU, U.S. and other Western democracies modeled Bosnia to their taste has passed.¹⁰ These sanctions, as it were, will just help the Serbs break free from Bosnia into the keen embrace of their 'true friends' – Russia, China and Serbia.

Dodik first came to prominence back in 1998, as a young, moderate reformist politician and prime minister of RS. However, in 2001, after losing the presidential election, Dodik changed course, converting himself into an independence-minded nationalist hardliner. He gradually gained control at all levels of RS's government and, in 2009, succeeded in ousting foreign judges and prosecutors from Bosnia's judicial system. Over the years, Dodik has rejected numerous accusations by human rights and media freedom groups of restricting the media's independence and popularising hostile rhetoric against political opponents. Dodik regularly denies the genocide in Srebrenica, by stating that it is a fabricated myth.¹¹ He has repeatedly expressed hope that Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán will serve as his allies against the 'tyranny' of Western democracies, endorsing Orbán's

¹⁰ "Dodik: Prošlo vrijeme uvođenja sankcija, to je beskoristan posao," magazine *Argumenti*. <https://www.argumenti.rs/dodik-proslo-vrijeme-uvodjenja-sankcija-to-je-beskoristan-posao/> [accessed: April 30, 2022].

¹¹ "Dodik: Bošnjaci od Srebrenice prave mit koji ne postoji," *Danas*. <https://www.danas.rs/svet/dodik-bosnjaci-od-srebrenice-prave-mit-koji-ne-postoji/> [accessed: April 30, 2022].

argument that the EU's main challenge regarding Bosnia is how to manage the security of a state with two million Muslims.¹² In an openly populist manner, Dodik and his party colleagues demonstrate their affiliation with the SOC even on the most secular of occasions, such as elections to their political positions in 2010. In the Banja Luka Orthodox cathedral church, conspicuously erected right next to the government headquarters, Dodik was sworn into his presidential post in the clear context of an Orthodox Church ritual, administered by three Serbian bishops (Šajinović 2010).

After serving for 15 years as RS president or prime minister, Dodik became a member of Bosnia's multi-ethnic presidency in the fall of 2019. However, already in 2021, with tacit support from Moscow and Belgrade, he directed a Serb walkout from Bosnia's multi-ethnic institutions – thus blocking decision-making – in order to protest the international High Representative's move to sanction genocide denial.¹³ Dodik and Serb officials under his control claimed that they would no longer respect decisions by the High Representative, including imposing laws or dismissing officials who undermine the delicate postwar ethnic balance. In winter of 2022, Dodik intensified his secessionist 'crusade,' vowing to form an entirely Serb army, judiciary and tax system. In his hatred-filled speech with blatant religious references, he offended Bosniaks by calling them 'second-rate people' and 'treacherous converts' who sold their 'original (Orthodox Christian) faith for a dinner.'¹⁴ American, British, German and other western officials have recently started accusing Dodik of encouraging ethnic tensions to distract from his own corrupt undertakings. Nevertheless, Dodik claimed that sanctions would not prevent him from 'fighting for the rights of RS.'

Dodik frequently mentions secession in his ethno-nationalist discourse. It seems, however, that it is not in the best interest of his compatriots in RS and Serbia that his political entity proclaims its independence. Only Russia

¹² "Rasističkim uvredama Orbán brani Dodika i Varheljija," *Danas*. <https://www.danas.rs/svet/region/nasa-stranka-iz-bih-trazi-da-se-orbanu-uskrati-gostoprinstvo-25-januara/> [accessed: April 30, 2022].

¹³ "Dodik preti oteplenjem zbog Inckovog zakona o zabrani negiranja genocida," *Danas*. <https://www.danas.rs/svet/dodik-niko-ne-treba-da-se-cudi-koracima-koje-cemo-preduzeti-ako-se-ne-povuce-inckova-odluka/> [accessed: April 30, 2022].

¹⁴ "Dodik: Bošnjaci su konvertiti i podanički narod, a ne državotvorni," *Al Jazeera Balkans*. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2021/8/4/dodik-bosnjaci-su-konvertiti-i-podanicki-narod-a-ne-drzavotvorni> [accessed: April 30, 2022].

and probably some of its allies would recognise RS as a state, leaving its 1.2 million inhabitants under potential Western sanctions. In all likelihood, even Serbia would not dare to recognise it. On the other hand, previous experiences with referendums in RS (2016, 2018) illustrated that it is possible to organise such a populist event with no consequences for either Dodik or RS. Now, Dodik can still maintain that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a dysfunctional, failed state, announcing at the same time the future secession of RS. In fact, Dodik instigates hope for Bosnian Serbs and capitalises on that expectation at elections. This, of course, frustrates politicians in the Federation and brings him additional votes in the RS. Dodik obtains support among pro-Serbian nationalist lobbyist groups in the United States¹⁵ and Europe, as well as in the Russian government. The project of full independence of RS and the cessation of all legal and political relations with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is, nevertheless, a very serious issue and is something that could not be carried out in peaceful terms.

THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN MONTENEGRO (2019–2020)

A very recent example of neo-traditionalism that became a *spiritus movens* of a social movement were the massive protests, prayer marches and litanies in Montenegro against the religion law of January 2020 – especially its property provisions. As with other social movements, the ultimate success of this popular (populist) rebellion against the Montenegrin state authorities and President Milo Đukanović largely derived from the status and prominence of the SOC Metropolitanate in Montenegro headed by the late Metropolitan Amfilohije and the use of publicly recognised symbols and discourses that invoked strong historical experiences and collective memories. To maximise

¹⁵ “Obrad Kesić tvrdi: Pozicija Srbije i Srpske u SAD nikada nije bila jača,” *Avaz*. <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/703115/obrad-kesic-tvr-di-pozicija-srbije-i-srpske-u-sad-nikada-nije-bila-jaca> [accessed: May 1, 2022].

access to discontented citizens, Serbian Orthodox prelates combined religious themes with nonreligious elements to garner wider support among those citizens who were seeking a change from the three-decennial political status quo in Montenegro.

Let me first provide some background details regarding this legal challenge, including a brief discussion of some ecclesiastical differences that have burdened intra-Orthodox relations in Montenegro since the early 1990s.¹⁶ The constitution of Montenegro stipulates and guarantees freedom of religion as well as the right to change one's confession. It specifies that there is no state religion and guarantees equality and freedom for all churches and religious communities. The Law on Freedom of Religion (2020) additionally prohibits religious discrimination and hate speech. However, religious groups, particularly the SOC's hierarchy and its believers, have continued to claim that the legal provisions governing their status in Montenegro are problematic and inadequate. Consequently, the SOC organised mass litanies and popular rallies against this law and its property provisions in particular. Namely, the new law required religious organisations to provide proof of ownership of their property or else lose title to it. Religious organisations were not required to register but, without registration, they could not own property and possess bank accounts (Report 2020). In reaction to this new policy, the SOC deliberately refused to register.

This popular rebellion initially lasted from January to March 2020, and it included protests in front of the Embassy of Montenegro in Belgrade. This led to diplomatic tensions following the attempts at a public burning of the Montenegrin flag. The protests continued in early summer 2020 and largely contributed to the change of political power in Montenegro at

¹⁶ The SOC in Montenegro is represented by a powerful Metropolitanate and it has continual support of the people and part of the political establishment. Both the SOC and MOC enjoy significant political backing, except that the former also gets it from Serbia, while the previous political elites favored the latter. In fact, they legalized the activity of the MOC in January 2000, after the police officially registered the church in the historic town of Cetinje. This was a culmination of the process that had started already in 1993. The head of the MOC, priest Miraš Dedeić (who was enthroned as Metropolitan Mihailo in 1998) is, however, a controversial ecclesiastical figure, excommunicated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The SOC, of course, never accepted the formation of the new, Montenegrin Church. The SOC Archbishops' Synod and late Patriarch Pavle repeatedly condemned this 'non-canonical,' 'political' entity, whereas Metropolitan Mihailo was excluded from the Serbian Church in 1998 (Morrison and Čagorović, 2014: 160).

the August elections. Opposition political parties, with the support of the SOC, including their candidate for Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapić, won the elections, while the disputed law was changed by the end of that calendar year. After the electoral victory of the opposition coalition that constituted three parties (For the Future of Montenegro [*Za budućnost Crne Gore*], The Peace Is Our Nation [*Mir je naša nacija*], and Black on White [*Crno na bijelo*]), some media stated that there was a close relationship between the Prime Minister-designate Zdravko Krivokapić and the SOC. According to reports, there were rumors that Metropolitan Amfilohije had even personally selected Krivokapić, a professor with no previous political experience, who came to prominence only weeks before the election. Krivokapić himself dispelled those rumors.¹⁷

The SOC litanies with Orthodox icons and banners contributed, therefore, to the demise of a regime that few people in Montenegro believed to be replaceable through peaceful elections. This social, civil movement in Montenegro blended democracy, nation, faith and ideals of freedom in the political struggle against a corrupt government. Even Metropolitan Amfilohije voted at the 2020 elections for the first and last time in his life (he died in October 2020). The rector of the Cetinje Orthodox Theological Seminary stated that this was an opportunity for Moscow, Brussels and Washington to see the full splendour of Orthodox faith among the Montenegrin people.¹⁸ On the other hand, Čedomir Jovanović, president of the Liberal Democratic Party in Serbia, interpreted the church litanies as a rejection of the NATO, a revocation of Kosovo's independence, an abandonment of the EU integration process and a return to a Russian political agenda. Some other politicians compared the religious activism in Montenegro with the Iranian revolution, i.e. the religious use of politics.

A significant dose of suspense accompanied the enthronement of the new Metropolitan Joanikije at the Cetinje monastery on September 5, 2021. It was probably the greatest challenge for the newly-elected government

¹⁷ "Zdravko Krivokapić: 'Nisu mi mentori ni Beograd ni Rusija ni Amfilohije,'" Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/bs/zdravko-krivokapi%C4%87-nisu-mi-mentori-ni-beograd-ni-rusija-ni-amfilohije/a-54976328> [accessed: May 1, 2022].

¹⁸ "Poruke sa litije u Podgorici: Crna Gora naša zemlja, a SPC naša crkva," Radio Television Vojvodina. https://rtv.rs/sr_lat/region/poruke-sa-litije-u-podgorici-crna-gora-nasa-zemlja-a-spc-nasa-crkva_1089289.html [accessed: May 1, 2022].

in Montenegro and provided a slim chance for Đukanović to resume his control. It was also a significant test for institutions and Prime Minister Krivokapić. There were attempts at preventing the church ceremony by human barricades along the main roads leading to Cetinje, but Bishop Joanikije was eventually transported to the monastery by a police helicopter and the solemn act of his enthronement to the highest ecclesiastical seat in Montenegro passed without obstruction. Significantly enough, the new Metropolitan was escorted to the Cetinje monastery not only by the police forces, but also by Serbian patriarch Porfirije himself, securing, thus, the highest church stamp on his appointment. The successful enthronement in May 2021¹⁹ was soon after interpreted by his supporters as a sign from heaven.

Now, if we delve, at least briefly, into the most recent history of Montenegro, we find that a deeper source of the long-lasting intra-Orthodox rift in Montenegro has always been regarding the question of autocephaly, but it is not simply based on ecclesiastical matters. This political struggle goes to the core of the issue regarding the national identity of Montenegrins. The split between the MOC and the SOC has lasted three decades and has continued undiminished to this date. Although debates over autocephaly and Montenegrin identity and statehood were interwoven in the period prior to Montenegro's declaration of independence, other matters have subsequently dominated the political agenda as well, leading to the political change of 2020. It is well known that religion provides a fresh spiritual and emotional compensation for the dissolution of social and value systems. It is also an efficient instrument of authority and social control able to promote a new social ethos. Historically, as a reservoir of cultural values and collective remembrance, the SOC has been able to embody a symbolical power needed to construct new national, group, and individual identities. It is clear that populist political elites – in this case the opposition coalition that won the Montenegrin elections in 2020 – were fully aware of the historical meaning, political significance and populist potential of the SOC as the key religious institution in the country, supported by the majority of Montenegrins and Serbs. However, the SOC had not been amicable to the previous

¹⁹ "Joanikije izabran za mitropolita crnogorsko-primorskog," Radio Free Europe. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/joanikije-mitropolit-izbor-spc/31280196.html> [accessed: May 1, 2022].

Montenegrin government, ruled by the Đukanović regime. For the first time in the recent history of this country, the SOC promoted itself, due to a legal controversy, into a principal political factor in the populist demonstrations against the government, a sort of 'prophetic civil religion.' This emphasised, in particular, cultural, identity-related factors, leading to a successful example of the political potential of neo-traditionalism and religious populism. It is also apparent that in a pronounced democratic context of replacing an autocratic regime by a legitimate, civil society-backed opposition, a pro-populist political culture affirmed itself instead of a western-type façade of democracy. Undoubtedly, the government of Milo Đukanović had an unambiguous pro-European and pro-NATO political orientation, despite his autocratic leadership. His democratic opposition – the 2020 governing coalition of parties, supported by the SOC and the authority of the late Metropolitan Amfilohije, was, on the other hand, much more grounded in neo-traditionalism.

Therefore, it would be reasonable to claim that the ecclesiastical events leading to the election of the new authorities in Montenegro represented an example of religious populism in the Western Balkans with some elements of neo-traditionalism. Theological and political language among the senior Orthodox clergy was a vital resource in the popular opposition movement's ideology. Religious themes and symbols played part in the social-political movement's criticism of the former regime. The populist rhetoric emphasised the nation's religious heritage and gave it a responsibility for moral action. The dominant ideological discourse of the Đukanović regime was obviously in crisis, indicating a more general social crisis that emerged soon after the proposal of the new law. Anti-elite messages were directed predominantly at the government, even as they derived from theological rhetoric. It is apparent that religion was a crucial interpretive resource in the Montenegrin social-political movement of 2019–2020, providing, thus, a basic ideological structure for political action. It gave this movement legitimacy within the bounds of Serbian Orthodox national(ist) discourse and articulated a language of communication with both supporters and opponents, invoking simultaneously transcendent symbols and a neo-traditionalist model for an exemplary society.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that neo-traditionalism and populism have been employed in the Western Balkans both by political and religious authorities as a means of political mobilisation. Today they probably represent a key internal development that has already had repercussions on democratic governance and rule of law. As a result, neo-traditionalism also compromises the EU's ability, credibility and legitimacy in promoting liberal democracy in the region. By supporting politically, economically or culturally external powers that challenge the international liberal order (most notably Russia and China) and by advancing exclusivist political processes and social identities, populist social-political movements and governments in Serbia, Montenegro and Republika Srpska weaken the EU's structural and organisational power.

The absence of a strong civil society and the dysfunctionality of liberal democracy in the Western Balkans are the principal conditions that nurture religious populism. In such a socio-political setting individuals and human rights are not adequately acknowledged. Instead, individuals and their rights are mainly reduced to ethno-national dimensions of society. Thus, populists 'hijack' not only religion, but also the public sphere in general by misusing confessional self-identification and the dissatisfaction of citizens for their own populist agendas and goals. In the context of the Balkans, in which religious institutions are expected to enrich the civic and pluralistic landscape, civil society does not thrive because religious leaders and their institutions in many cases are co-opted by the ruling political authorities. This condition also hinders the development of a democratic political culture. Therefore, in order to build a strong democratic culture and political system and avoid the advancement of religious populism, societies in this region need to develop a strong rational, critical, democratic and civic culture.

In a world characterised by major dislocations of ethnic, religious and cultural minorities, religious institutions are potent bearers of collective and group identities. This applies to societies undergoing transformation, such as Serbian society. Globally, religious and church institutions often respond to the challenges of modernisation and secularisation by a unique *religisation of modernity* (Vukomanović 2014: 141). However, any ethnification

or religisation of politics is a challenge to individual human rights. In post-socialism, the extension of religious rights and freedoms brought about a greater responsibility of faith institutions in many areas. It seems that in Serbian society in the 21st century a broader re-assessment of the political, social and cultural role of the church has taken place. In its 'protection of culture' the SOC, as well as the states in Serbia, Republika Srpska and Montenegro, started to participate in reshaping the classical modernisation concept by accommodating it to local, national and particular moulds.

However, the consensus regarding political values does not necessarily mean losing cultural identity or compromising cultural values and their uniqueness. This is where the SOC may find its place within the plural concept of modernity. In the West a plethora of different cultural identities coexist and that diversity is acknowledged as the state of affairs. At the same time, there is a need to reach a consensus about the *political* identity of political communities and states. The emphasis here is primarily on the consensus regarding democratic political culture. This model is inclusive for cultural and religious diversity, but it does not place ethnicity and the nation above democracy, rule of law and human rights of citizens living in a secular state.

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THE TWO DISSIMILAR CASES OF A RISE IN POPULISM: CASE STUDIES OF POLAND AND CZECHIA¹

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the attributes of voters favouring populist parties in Czechia and Poland, using European Social Survey data for 2012–2016. The study identifies slightly different patterns of a rise in populism in these two Centre-Eastern European countries. In Czechia, secular voters less favourable to welfare policies are found to support populist parties. In Poland, individuals open to authoritarian values who are discontent with policy delivery, and expecting the government to play an active role in addressing income inequality are confirmed to be more likely to vote for populist parties. Moreover, in Poland a general anti-immigration sentiment is identified as significant, while the main driver of the populist vote

¹ This research has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 765224.

in Czechia is an ethnic-based hostility towards migrants. This provides evidence that populism has country-specific features, complementing the previous region-wide assumptions on the general attributes of populist voters.

KEYWORDS: populism, voting behaviour, quantitative survey analysis, Czechia, Poland, Central and Eastern Europe

INTRODUCTION

The majority of the current literature on the determinants of populism focuses on cross-country and cross-time data, with a predominant focus on Western Europe (Algan et al. 2017; Guiso et al. 2017). The populist debate is also predominantly concerned with populist parties (Bornschier 2010; Dolezal 2012; Rooduijn, Akkerman and Tubergen 2017; Caramani and Manucci 2019; Fernández-García 2021) with a secondary focus on populist traits across electorates (Dolezal and Hutter 2012; Pauwels 2014). Nonetheless, we have a preliminary understanding of the determinants of the demand for populism in the West (Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales 2010; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Algan et al. 2017) with findings on regional variations of populism in Latin America (Sachs 1989; Doyle 2011) and North-Western Europe (Hellström 2016; Moffitt 2017; Jungar 2018).

Similar conclusions were reached by Guiso et al. (2017) and Inglehart and Norris (2016) with the latter arguing that a cultural backlash rather than the economy triggered the illiberal turn. When it comes to CEE, the nature of populism is argued to be more xenophobic and ethno-nationalist, and challenges the democratic constitutional order (Bugarcic 2008). Moreover, a study by Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017) identified CEE to be, in contrast to the global average, a region with a higher degree of mistrust towards authority, greater welfare policy expectations, and an unfavourable attitude to gender equality.

On the demand side, common regional traits of populist voters are even less evident. The anti-globalisation and economic grievance arguments are

said to be almost universal drivers of the populist vote in the West (Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales 2010; Inglehart and Norris 2016). Yet, its country-level components are arguably versatile. A case in point is Portugal, a country strongly transformed by post-crisis austerity measures, where up until 2019 no populist party had entered the parliament². We may also expect variety in populist traits within countries. For instance, a study by Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014) examined attitudes to populist parties in the case of the Netherlands. The authors note that, depending on a given populist party, voters exhibit slightly different attributes. Respondents voting for the SP (a left-wing populist party) tend to remain open to the opinions of others, while voters supporting the PVV (a right-wing populist party) are strongly exclusionist (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove 2014). We may therefore expect that the nature of populism differs across countries and potentially within them (Cianetti, James and Hanley 2018). Therefore, looking at specific country cases has a strong potential to provide us with new insights into the nature of populist demand in a given region. Yet, with the exception of Bartosiewicz (2019), Kovalov (2013), Bustikova and Guasti (2017), and Hanley and Sikk (2014), examinations of populist traits in Poland and Czechia are still infrequent.

The chapter is structured as follows. It begins with the theoretical expectations for country differences and the supply-side attributes of populism. Secondly, I justify the employed method and the case selection. I also explain why the chapter does not analyse the supply-side data and focuses on the demand side instead. The subsequent section presents the data, analysis and study findings. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the results in the context of the literature, drawing on policy implications.

² Chega, a far-right populist party entered the parliament in 2019 elections (Santos and Roque 2021).

JUSTIFICATION OF A CASE STUDY CHOICE

Due to the historical legacies of communist rule and the post-1989 transition, Czechia and Poland share desired temporal frames. They underwent a discursive institutional change of reinventing democracy, individual freedoms, a market economy, Europe and the nation (Kim 2021: 8). In macroeconomic terms, both walked along a similar path to open their economies and enter the EU. We may argue that both countries share milestone historical events, yet, as I will discuss below, their overall characterisation differs. The two countries share monumental historical temporalities, such as the memory of post-war communist rule, freeing up from behind the Iron Curtain and consolidating their reforms to become full members of the European Union in 2004. That offers the rationale for selection based on the diverse-case method, which requires a common timeframe for analysis, cases that offer a set of similar transformative historical events and provide a maximum variance along the background dimension (Gerring 2007). Table 1 summarises how the selected cases fulfil these criteria.

Based on the assumption that populism is a thin ideology (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013), one may expect certain individual features to differ across different countries and different contexts. That requires a case-by-case investigation of such determinants. Moreover, demand-side studies of Poland and Czechia are still infrequent. A vast majority of studies focus on the supply-side attributes (Skolkay 2000; Kaniok and Havlík 2016; Císař 2017; Hanley and Vachudova 2018; Bartosiewicz 2019; Guasti 2020). There is less attention spared to the specific characteristics from the demand-side perspective.

This leads to considerations on the specificity of the Polish and Czech electorates. As argued by Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017) CEE is a region with a low degree of political trust, higher expectations for welfare policies, strong anti-immigration sentiment and unfavourable views on gender equality when compared against the global average. We would expect these regional traits to also be present among Poles and Czechs. Let us look into the ESS data. The table below shows sample means for both these countries along with the CEE and EU averages.

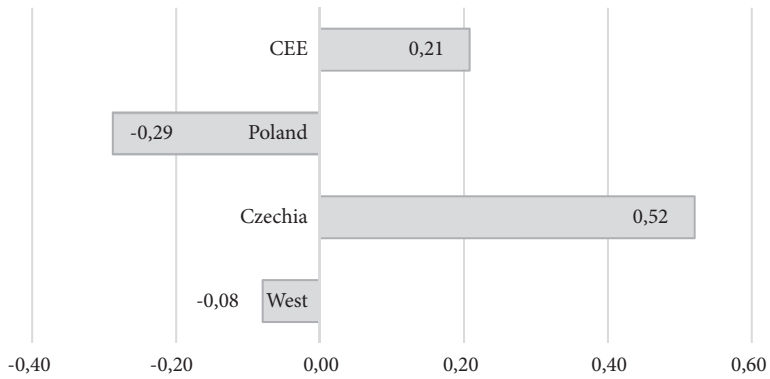
As shown in Figure 1, the mean of political trust in CEE is below the sample average (a negative standard deviation), while the expectation for a reduction of income inequalities, anti-immigration sentiments and anti-gender sentiments are all higher than the mean. Poles have a strong anti-gender sentiment with a positive half of standard deviation from the mean. For Czechs, we see a strong anti-immigration sentiment, a half of standard deviation from the mean, and a rather sceptical view of the need for governments to reduce income inequality. That invites further deliberation on the nature of populism in both these cases.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

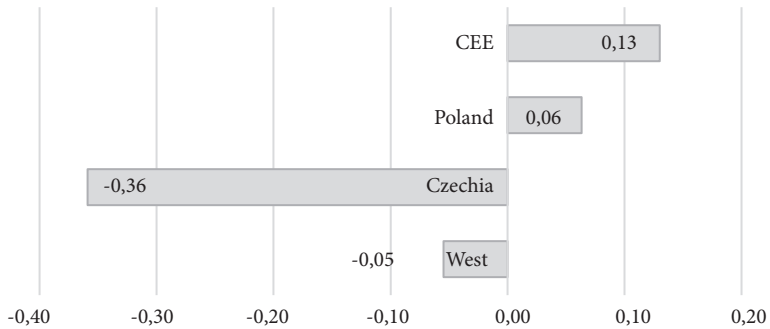
THE NATURE OF POPULISM IN CZECHIA

Populist discourse in the Czechia has had three consecutive phases, the anti-Communist, the post-November imaginary and, the most recent, post-2006 formation (Kim 2021). Firstly, the ‘People of the People’s’ camps, characterised by anti-communist, nationalist sentiments that followed the 1989 transition, embodied in the narrative of the Rally for the Republic – a Republican party of the Czechoslovakia (Kim 2021). It emphasised that the transition failed to sever the ties with the communist elites. It called for a true reinstatement of democracy, freedom, and a market economy for the benefit of the ordinary people (Kim 2021: 64). These claims gradually escalated, calling for the protection of the national interest in the second ‘Nationalist’ populism phase in which the Republicans openly discriminated against ethnic minorities, such as Roma people (Kim 2021: 68). The most recent wave of populist discourse in the Czechia is the most relevant for the considerations of this chapter. It can be divided into the following discursive features as summarised in Figure 2.

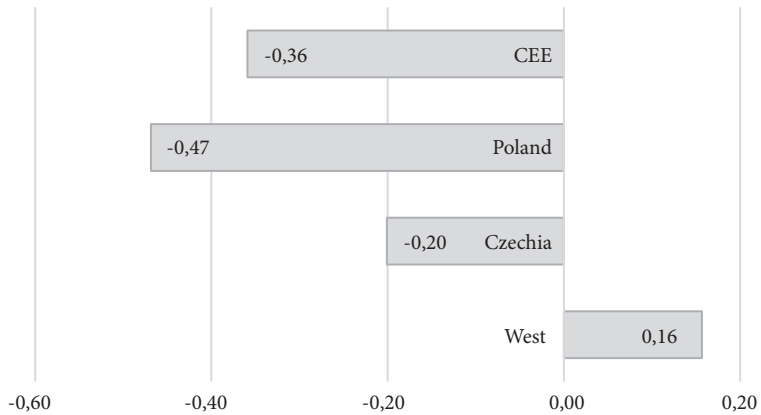
Anti-immigration sentiments



Gov't should reduce income inequalities



Political trust



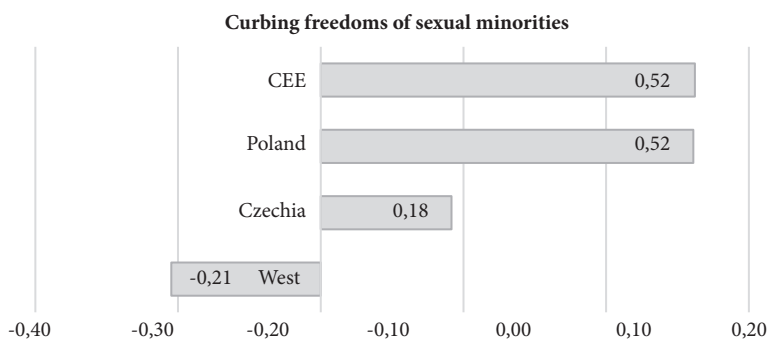
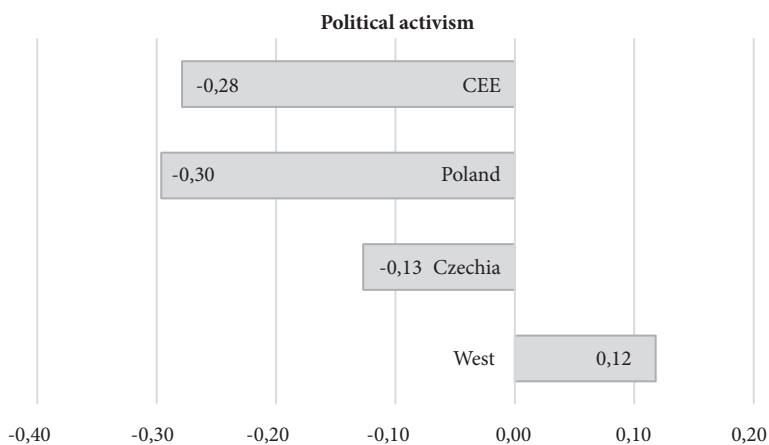
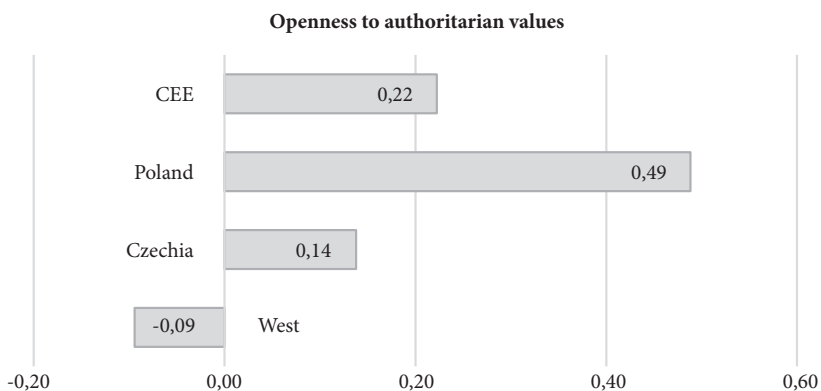


FIGURE 1. Aggregate averages on selected attitudes per region, standardised

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

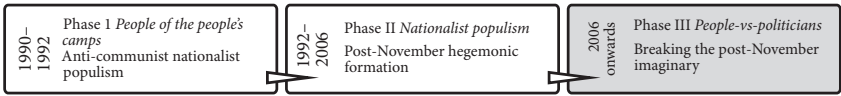


FIGURE 2. Discursive phases in Czechia

Source: own elaboration adapted from Kim (2021).

The most emblematic of that narrative is the populist party ANO (Table 1). It firstly consolidated substantial economic and financial potential before getting a solid grip on power (Hanley and Vachudova 2018: 278). The leader of the party, Andrej Babiš, also used media and personal ties to mount its political might. His political offer resorted to a technocratic, xenophobic narrative rather on the historical threat from the West. Therefore, Czech populism is argued to have entrepreneurial attributes unlike the rest of the region. The entrepreneurial populist narrative has also succeeded into appealing to a wider electoral base, which I also discuss in the following section (Hanley and Vachudova 2018).

TABLE 1. Populist parties in the national parliament of Czechia *

Party	Party acronym	Established-dissolved	Election Year	Vote share %	Mandates	Discourse	Features	Prevalence of discourse
Veci Verejné (Public Affairs)	VV	2001–2015	2010	10.88	24	Centrist populism	Opposition to the power block Welfarist Anti-elitist	2006–2010
Akce Nespokojených Občanů (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens)	ANO	2012–	2013 2017	18.65 29.64	47 78	Entrepreneurial populism	Representation by successful businessman to oppose corrupt elites Running the country as a firm (p.84)	2011–2013

Party	Party acronym	Established-dissolved	Election Year	Vote share %	Mandates	Discourse	Features	Prevalence of discourse
Úsvit přímé demokracie (Dawn of direct democracy)	Úsvit	2013–2018	2013	6.88	14	Economically neo-liberal nativist populism	Anti-immigratory Anti-elitist In defence of Christian cultural essence (p.92)	2013
Svoboda a přímá demokracie	SPD	2015–	2017	10.64	22	Neo-conservative nativist populism	Opposing the party mafias (anti-corruption) Anti-establishment	2017
Česká pirátska strana (Czech Pirate Party)	Piráti	2009–	2013 2017	2.66 10.79	4 22	Economically neo-liberal populism	Assuming business-minded politicians deepen kleptocracy Calling for direct democracy measures	2013–2017

* The total number of seats (mandates) in the Czech Lower chamber is 200.

Source: own compilation using Kim (2021) and electoral data (Český statistický úřad 2021).

ATTRIBUTES OF A CZECH VOTER

With regards to the electoral attributes of Czechia, scholars highlight two major features. Firstly, a heightened anti-immigration feeling. We have a sound degree of evidence that shows that individuals with strong anti-immigration feelings vote for populist parties (Inglehart and Norris 2016; Guiso et al. 2017). However, scholars identify Czechia as an extreme case of anti-immigration and Islamophobic sentiments in the region (Gerring 2007). The homogeneous ethnic composition of the country, historically with a meagre exposure to multi-ethnic migration and a strong scepticism to ethnic adaptation, has

led some to theorise that the anti-immigration sentiments in Czechia are more about the sense of ethnic belonging rather than a general opposition to free movement and globalisation (Law and Zakharov 2019).

Secondly, Czech voters support an entrepreneurial political offer, so-called technocratic populism (Hanley and Vachudova 2018). It attracts voters highly sceptical of the effectiveness of a democratic system of governance. By a political offer of running the country like one's own firm, this form of populism antagonises democratic checks and balances as an inefficient form of elitist governance. Technocratic populism's overarching principle is to safeguard the will of the majority, which becomes equated with the general interest of the people's putative will (Caramani 2017). These considerations allow us to hypothesise the following. Firstly, individuals with stronger, ethnically based anti-immigration sentiments are more likely to vote for populist parties in the Czechia. Secondly, given the degree of scepticism towards the effectiveness of democracy, dissatisfaction with policy delivery will be a significant driver of the populist vote.

THE NATURE OF POPULISM IN POLAND

A study by Kim (2021) summarised how Polish political division evolved over the following three phases: the Symbolic Saga of the People, the Divided Imaginary of the 1989 Transition and the Breaking of the Ideals phase. The first phase goes back to the emergence of national imaginary during the Congress of Poland in late the 19th century, through the Polish People's Republic (PRL), leading up to 1989. The second phase encompasses the political turmoil during the transition and in the early post-transition years. For the considerations of this research, the latest phase (2004 onwards) is the most relevant which I discuss in more detail below.

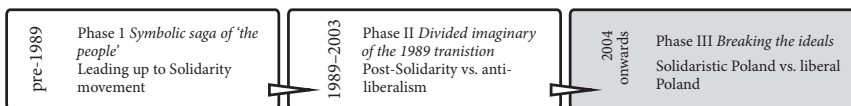


FIGURE 3. Discursive phases in Poland

Source: own elaboration adapted from Kim (2021).

The Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) ultimately reframed the bipolarity of the discourse in the early transition period. PiS shifted the narrative to a more divisive rhetoric of us, the true nation versus them ‘the liberal traitors.’ That re-established a direct link with the post-1989 imaginary, whereby the transition was deemed an unfinished process. PiS reinstated the feeling of illegal practices of the hidden communist networks that reaped benefits supposed for the ordinary people. The political narrative of the party has skilfully combined cultural conservatism, welfarism and incited scepticism towards the ruling, corrupt elites (Kim 2021).

The populist offer in Poland continues to be dominated by PiS, however, it also includes anti-liberal, nationalist calls against the ‘Republic of the Rich,’ an anti-clerical entrepreneurial populism of Palikot’s movement and the anti-party, nationalist, celebrity populism by Kukiz’s 2015 party. However, relative to PiS their vote share remains marginal, hence the major focus of this study is the narrative of PiS³. The discursive features of populism across these parties are summarised in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Populist parties in the national parliament of Poland

Party	Party acronym	Established-dissolved	Election Year	Vote share %	Mandates	Discourse	Features	Prevalence of discourse
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	PiS	2001–	2001 2007 2011 2015 2019	9.5 32.11 29.89 37.58 43.59	44 166 157 235 235	Anti-liberal nationalist and socialist- populism	Anti-corruption Anti-elitist Traditional Christian values Welfarist	2001– 2007 2007– 2014 2019–
Twój Ruch (Palikot’s Movement)	TR	2011–	2011	10.02	40	Anti-liberal nationalist Populism	Opposing the privileges of the Church Anti-establishment Anti-corruption	2010– 2011

³ A detailed description of discursive phases of populism in Poland is provided in Kim (2021: 165–190).

Party	Party acronym	Established-dissolved	Election Year	Vote share %	Mandates	Discourse	Features	Prevalence of discourse
Kukiz'15	K'15	2015–	2015	8.81	42	Nationalist, anti-party populism	Against party oligarchy Anti-establishment Against foreign capital Supporting direct democracy	2015

Source: own compilation using (Kim 2021) and electoral data (Polska Komisja Wyborcza 2020)⁴.

That leads to the discussion of the main features of PiS's latest political narrative. The bedrock of PiS's populist offer is welfare state expansionism. In the 2015 elections, the party gained electoral support thanks to the following three policy proposals: the 500+ programme,⁵ increasing the minimum wage, and decreasing the retirement age, which were a considerable departure from the liberal policies of the 'corrupt elites' (Markowski 2018). Similarly, in their 2019 campaign, PiS reinstated electoral fear that these benefits would be revoked should the party lost their mandate.

To summarise, Polish populist discourse was characteristically anti-elitist, pointing a finger at a network of corrupt elites responsible for the decay of public institutions and equating policy failures with the unfinished process of transition (Kim 2021). PiS gave an electoral promise to purge Polish politics of particularistic interests (Kim 2021: 191), and provide ordinary people with a welfare package that effectively obscured the constitutionally dubious policies of the party (Bunikowski 2019; Halmai 2019).

⁴ The total number of seats (mandates) in the Czech Lower chamber is 460.

⁵ ≈EUR100 universal benefit for every child.

ATTRIBUTES OF A POLISH VOTER

Polish voters generally orient themselves by comparing to their experience of communism and to the subsequent transition (Szawiel 2002; Skarżyńska and Henne 2011). Individuals on the political left are frequently equally positive about the transition and secularism. Those on the radical right frequently advocate breaching of the 1989 imaginary and support of an active role of the Church in public affairs. The second notable feature of the Polish voter is the alignment of the political right with the working class. There is a collective perception that the left is an elites' project (Szczerbiak 1999). Therefore, the political rationale is for the right to become an anti-elitist representative of the ordinary people. That can be illustrated by the alliance between the Solidarity Trade Union, the biggest labour group in the country, with the Law and Justice Party (Wenzel and Żerkowska-Balas 2021). The political readiness of the right to lobby for the interests of the working class is furthermore cemented by the welfare offer, which strongly underpins the cultural foundations of the political offer (Cześnik, Kotnarowski and Żerkowska-Balas 2015).

Given the nature of the populist offer and the general attributes of the Polish electorate, we may hypothesise the following. Firstly, given the strong linkage between transition and the populist rhetoric in the country, one may expect that populist voters have a positive attitude towards welfare policies and a desire for the government to reduce income inequalities. Secondly, voters on the right tend to be sceptical towards the outcome of transition, and are strongly in favour of Church intervention in public affairs emblematic components of the PiS's political narrative. We may therefore expect to find that populist voters are more conservative and open to authoritarian values. Lastly, positive relationship between members of the trade union and PiS allows us to stipulate that trade union members are more likely to support the populist party. We may assume that members of trade unions are therefore more likely to vote for populist parties.

METHODOLOGY

To address the hypothesised relationships, we must assume there is a set of individual attitudes that drive political preferences. That allows us to verify whether individuals with certain characteristics are more likely to vote for populist parties. Consequently, it is a viable research choice to independently examine the demand side of populism. This analysis is conducted in three steps. Firstly, to see associations between the survey items of interest we start with the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). EFA is a tool that reduces the number of variables, represented by linear combinations, for a better representation and easier interpretation of the data. The second step is a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which differs from EFA. CFA is a special case of a structural equation model (SEM) which is also a way to cross-validate the EFA results (Flora and Curran 2004; Costello and Osborne 2010; Hogado-Tello et al. 2010). The third step is to see how the identified factors influence the probability to vote for populist parties in both of these countries. Given that the dependent variable is dichotomous, a logistic regression is estimated.

DATA

The study uses individual-level data from the European Social Survey (ESS 2019) as summarised in Table 3. The sample includes 15,795 non-repetitive respondents from Poland and 18,799 respondents from the Czechia over the years 2002–2018. Czechia skipped one wave of the survey in 2006. The total sample has a balanced gender profile, with 47.1% male and 52.9% female respondents for the whole sample. The sample used for estimation was reduced to individuals with voting rights that are 18 years of age and above.

TABLE 3. Descriptive statistics of sample

Number of observations per each survey item	Country	
	Czechia	Poland
Gender		
Female	9974	8321
Male	8825	7474
Total	18799	15795
Highest level of education		
Less than lower secondary education	147	331
Lower secondary education completed	1474	3873
Upper secondary education completed	9545	5808
Post-secondary education completed	1071	617
Tertiary education completed	1865	2388
Other	14	9
Total	14116	13026
Placement, respondent's description		
A big city	5218	3764
Suburbs of a big city	844	619
Town/Small city	7308	5089
Country village	5251	6164
Farm of home in a countryside	76	111
Total	18697	15747
Religiosity dummy		
No	14325	1421
Yes	4296	14248
Total	18621	15669
Ethnic minority dummy		
No	18047	15339
Yes	453	281
Total	18500	15620

Number of observations per each survey item	Country	
	Czechia	Poland
OESCH class		
Higher-grade professional	2170	2401
Lower-grade professional	2948	2284
Small business owner	1588	2431
Skilled worker	7218	4694
Unskilled worker	3441	2914
Total	17365	14724

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

The chapter continues to measure populism as a form of discourse. It therefore does not engage with the policies of populist parties of the given countries, but rather provides an overview of the traits that are said to inflate the populist vote share. Populism is then understood following Shil's considerations, i.e.: as an embodiment of the 'supreme will of the people' – an overarching principle to safeguard the collective identity rather than representative rule (Shils 1996). Populist voters are therefore likely to be influenced by emotionally heavy-loaded narration of cultural backlash and economic insecurity (Inglehart and Norris 2016). The chapter uses a conservative coding of the dependent binary variable Rooduijn (2018). Votes classified as populist based on the Rooduijn (2018)'s included these cast for the Law and Justice Party, Self-Defence, Korwin platform, Kukiz'15 in Poland, and the Veci Verejné and ANO party in Czechia.⁶ That results in 4,525 populist votes and 17,640 non-populist votes for the whole sample.

⁶ The coding of the dependent variable is more conservative than the original classification as it captures governing populist parties or those in coalitions. As a robustness check, dependent variable also including the votes for the opposition party Úsvit in Czechia shows no departure in size of significance of the coefficients reported in the chapter. For Poland, the estimation is driven by the votes for PiS, as dropping Kukiz'15 and Korwin does not significantly alter the results.

ANALYSIS

CZECHIA

The Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) identified four factors, separating the satisfaction trust from social trust items and immigration sentiments as shown in Table 4. However, the analysis found loadings on items for more than one factor, particularly between factor 1 and factor 3, as well as factor 1 and factor 2. Given the high eigen values, dropping these factors is not a viable research choice.

TABLE 4. Czechia, exploratory factor loadings N = 9207

Survey question	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Uniqueness
How satisfied with the present state of the economy	0.62			0.48	0.29
How satisfied with the national government	0.64			0.40	0.28
How satisfied with the state of democracy	0.63				0.40
Trust in country's parliament	0.76				0.18
Trust in legal system	0.70				0.33
Trust in politicians	0.76				0.13
Trust in parties	0.75				0.15
Most people can be trusted	0.55		0.67		0.24
Most people try to take advantage of you	0.51		0.71		0.22
Most of the time people are helpful	0.53		0.61		0.33
Immigration bad/good for the economy	0.58	0.51			0.35
Country's cultural life is undermined/enriched by immigration	0.52	0.60			0.34

Survey question	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Uniqueness
Immigrants make country worse/better place to live	0.50	0.54			0.42
Allow many/few migrants of the same race		0.67			0.38
Allow many/few migrants of different race		0.74			0.27
Allow many/few migrants from poorer countries outside of Europe		0.74			0.29
Eigen value	4.41	2.35	1.64	1.45	
The highest inter-factor correlations is between factor 1 and 2 with $r = 0.49$. Blanks represent loading < 0.4 .					

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

CFA found the strongest correlation between trust in politicians and trust in the national parliament, satisfaction with democracy and trust in the legal system, as well as between the immigration items immigration's influence on the economy and expectations for immigration to be beneficial/harmful to cultural life⁷. Restraining these specific item-error term covariances has considerably improved the model fit approaching the saturated model. The fit indices of CFA allow loadings on five dimensions, separating satisfaction with governance from the political trust items, two-dimensions on immigration and a separate factor for the social trust items. These are the final five dimensions of the model:

$$Pr(Y_{ij}) = \beta_o + \beta_1 X_{ij} + \beta_2 Z_{ij} + ft + \epsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

Where the probability to vote for a populist party $Pr(Y_{ij})$ is estimated using a vector of usual socio-economic traits ($\beta_1 X_{ij}$) for individuals (i) in each survey wave (j), controlling for the vector of theorised dimensions ($\beta_2 Z_{ij}$), ft denotes fixed time effects, and ϵ_{ij} the random error term. In this way,

⁷ As a further check, for both Poland and Czechia a polychoric factor analysis was run replicating the results from EFA.

the estimation captures the average trend of attitudes influencing the populist vote over the defined period.

POLAND

Similarly, to the Czech sample, the EFA shows loadings for more than one factor with satisfaction and political trust items loading on one dimension as presented in Table 5. To double check these, I conducted confirmatory factor analysis. The CFA confirmed that including five dimensions and seven inter-error term correlations provides the best representation of the data⁸. The highest modification indices were identified for items logically linked. These are: trust in politicians, trust in parliament, satisfaction with governance and the legal system.

TABLE 5. Poland, exploratory factor loadings N = 10380

Survey question	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Uniqueness
How satisfied with the present state of the economy	0.68				0.44
How satisfied with the national government	0.73				0.34
How satisfied with the state of democracy	0.71				0.42
Trust in country's parliament	0.78				0.29
Trust in legal system	0.70				0.47
Trust in politicians	0.79				0.24
Trust in parties	0.76				0.28
Most people can be trusted	0.43		0.64		0.38
Most people try to take advantage of you	0.41		0.68		0.35
Most of the time people are helpful	0.42		0.65		0.40

⁸ However, these serve as a robustness check and are not reported in the main body of the chapter for the sake of clarity.

Survey question	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Uniqueness
Immigration bad/good for the economy		0.62		-0.41	0.33
Country's cultural life is undermined/enriched by immigration		0.71			0.33
Immigrants make country worse/better place to live		0.62		-0.44	0.31
Allow many/few migrants of the same race		0.78			0.24
Allow many/few migrants of different race		0.84			0.16
Allow many/few migrants from poorer countries outside of Europe		0.81			0.21
Eigen value	4.65	3.55	1.49	1.12	
The highest inter-factor correlations is between factor 1 and 4 with $r = 0.32s$. Blanks represent loading < 0.4 .					

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

In addition, the CFA identified a strong correlation between satisfaction with the economy, an expectation for immigrants to be good/bad for the economy and for immigration to influence cultural life positively/negatively. Restraining these strongly improved the model fit, approximating the AIC of the saturated model. Including the usual socio-economic traits and the theorised dimensions, the final model equation for Poland is as follows:

$$Pr(Y_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{ij} + \beta_2 Z_{ij} + \beta_3 R_{ij} + ft + \epsilon_{ij} \quad (2)$$

Where the probability to vote for a populist party $Pr(Y_{ij})$ is estimated using a vector of usual socio-economic traits ($\beta_1 X_{ij}$) for individuals (i) in given survey wave (j), controlling for the vector of theorised dimensions ($\beta_2 Z_{ij}$) and a dummy for membership in the trade unions ($\beta_3 R_{ij}$), ft denotes fixed time effects and ϵ_{ij} the random error term.

FINDINGS

CZECHIA

The logistic regression for Czechia found a sufficient amount of evidence for the following four results. Firstly, there is a negative relationship between self-reported trust in institutions (political trust) and the populist vote. Secondly, there is a contrasting result for satisfaction with governance, indicating that Czech voters who are content with policy delivery are more likely to vote for a populist party. Thirdly, a negative association between the expectation for the government to tackle income inequality and the populist vote exists. And lastly, there is an insightful finding on ethnic openness. While the coefficient on general anti-immigration sentiments is insignificant, the ethnic openness⁹ coefficient is positive and statistically significant indicating that this dimension of migration influences the populist vote in the country.

TABLE 6. Coefficients table, logistic regression, Czechia

Dependent variable: populist vote	Control	Dimensions
Response variables		
Gender (1 = male)	-0.0909	-0.0774
	(0.0851)	(0.123)
Age (>18)	-0.0186***	-0.0219***
	(0.00285)	(0.00440)
Education level	0.0265	0.0417
	(0.0524)	(0.0794)
Religiosity	-0.226**	-0.128
	(0.109)	(0.160)
Ethnicity	0.238	0.676
	(0.349)	(0.454)

⁹ Coded from allowing all migration (1) to allowing no migration (4), presented in Figure 4.

Dependent variable: populist vote	Control	Dimensions
Response variables		
Suburbs	0.122	0.389
	(0.218)	(0.281)
Small town	-0.0187	0.104
	(0.102)	(0.145)
Country village	-0.109	0.0248
	(0.113)	(0.163)
Farm	-0.638	-
	(0.598)	-
Lower grade professional	0.0305	0.245
	(0.143)	(0.213)
Small business	0.0950	0.406
	(0.164)	(0.254)
Skilled worker	-0.0951	0.174
	(0.0134)	(0.209)
Unskilled worker	-0.0666	0.284
	(0.0160)	(0.250)
Freedoms to sexual minorities	-0.0942**	-0.0692
	(0.0405)	(0.0572)
Gov't income policy		-0.113**
		(0.0592)
Authoritarianism		0.0487
		(0.0757)
Anti-immigration		-0.0615
		(0.0426)
Satisfaction with gov't.		0.121***
		(0.0402)
Political trust		-0.0666*
		(0.0380)

Dependent variable: populist vote	Control	Dimensions
Response variables		
Ec. Insecurity		0.0390 (0.134)
Political news		-0.0226 (0.0515)
Political activism		0.162 (0.123)
Social trust		-0.0125 (0.0324)
Ethnic openness		0.254** (0.106)
Constant	0.161 (0.315)	-0.719 (0.685)
Observations	4390	2605
Fixed time effects	Y	Y
Model fit		
Linktest (p-value)	-0.140(0.140)	0.022(0.800)
AIC(df)	3770.469(21)	1988.018(26)
BIC(df)	3904.598(21)	2140.513(26)
Hosmer-Lemeshow (p-value)	13.10(0.109)	6.23(0.621)
Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1		

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

The marginal analysis, as presented on the graphs below, furthermore supports the results. The predictive margin for ethnic openness shows a positive discrete unit change influencing the populist vote. Those unwelcoming to migrants from ethnic groups and poorer countries outside of the EU are significantly more likely to vote for populist parties. The predictive margin for satisfaction with governance (Figure 5) shows a positive relationship that is that individuals who are content with policy delivery are more likely to

vote for a populist party in Czechia. That constitutes a contrasting result to what was anticipated.

Predictive margins for the government to tackle income inequalities (Figure 6) shows a negative association with the dependent variable. That indicates that individuals likely to vote for populist parties in Czechia are less open to pro-socialist governments, which may be explained by theories on the specificity of the Czech electorate put forward by Hanley and Vachudova (2018). Lastly, the findings on political trust (Figure 7) show that Czechs distrustful to institutions and political representatives are more likely to vote for populist parties. That is aligned with theoretical expectations from previous studies.

POLAND

The model for Poland found sufficient evidence to provide results on the following five dimensions. Firstly, there is a negative association between satisfaction with governance and the populist vote. Secondly, those Poles who are likely to vote for the populist party are also likely to be open to authoritarian values. Thirdly, the estimation confirms a general anti-immigration sentiment, but not its potential ethnic dimension (the coefficient is statistically insignificant).

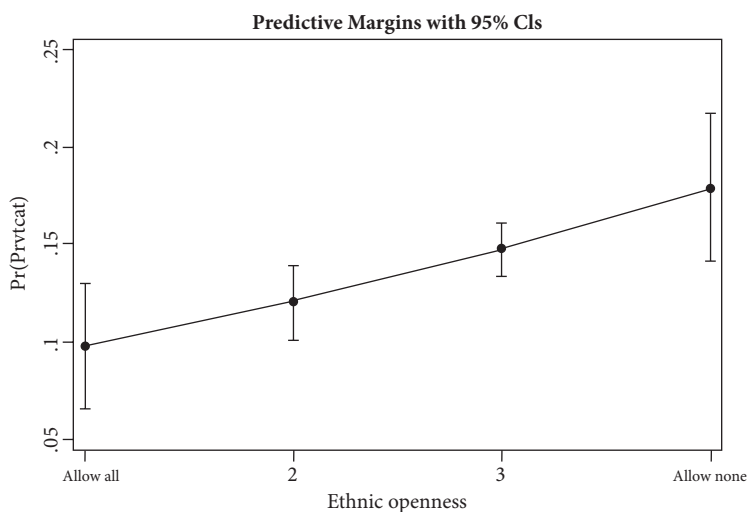


FIGURE 4. Predictive margins, ethnic openness, Czechia

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

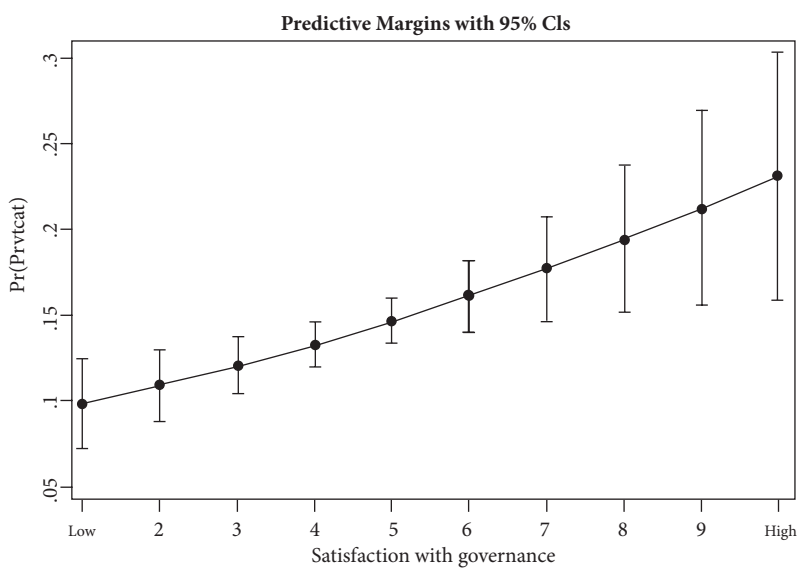


FIGURE 5. Predictive margins, satisfaction with governance, Czechia

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

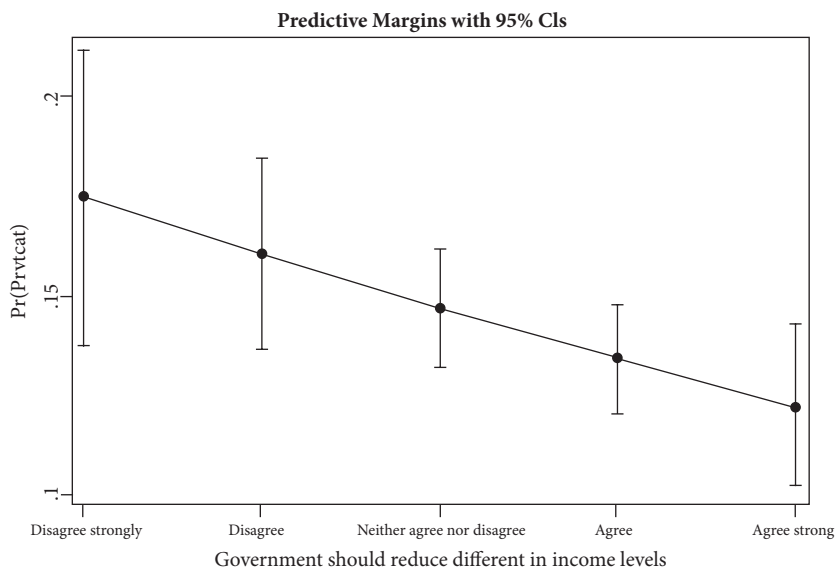


FIGURE 6. Predictive margins, expectation for gov't on income policy, Czechia

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

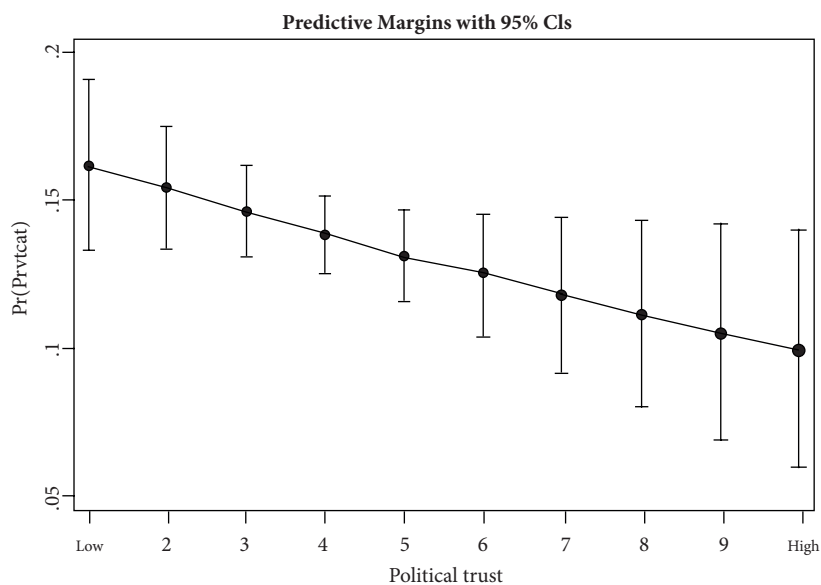


FIGURE 7. Predictive margins, political trust, Czechia

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

TABLE 7. Coefficients table, logistic regression, Poland

Dependent variable: populist vote	Control	Dimensions
Response variables		
Gender (1 = male)	0.0678	0.144*
	(0.0542)	(0.744)
Age (>18)	0.00388**	0.00724***
	(0.00197)	(0.00281)
Education level	-0.0745	-0.0270
	(0.0556)	(0.0380)
Religiosity	0.959***	1.180***
	(0.123)	(0.183)
Ethnicity	-0.114	-0.0842
	(0.196)	(0.266)
Suburbs	0.0324	0.0846
	(0.144)	(0.0183)
Small town	-0.0198	0.0104
	(0.0705)	(0.0961)
Country village	0.205***	0.235**
	(0.0718)	(0.0959)
Farm	0.302	0.313
	(0.290)	(0.452)
Lower grade professional	0.242**	0.0824
	(0.0989)	(0.125)
Small business	0.260**	0.183
	(0.117)	(0.135)
Skilled worker	0.223*	0.172
	(0.114)	(0.121)
Unskilled worker	0.362***	0.302**
	(0.133)	(0.142)

Dependent variable: populist vote	Control	Dimensions
Response variables		
Freedoms to sexual minorities	0.360***	0.335***
	(0.0266)	(0.0311)
Political trust		0.0188
		(0.0259)
Satisfaction with gov't		-0.194***
		(0.0250)
Authoritarianism		0.129**
		(0.0563)
Anti-immigration		0.0619***
		(0.0236)
Gov't income policy		0.267***
		(0.0403)
Economic insecurity		0.0383
		(0.088)
Political news		-0.0156
		(0.0344)
Political activism		0.172**
		(0.0860)
Social trust		0.0573**
		(0.0223)
Ethnic openness		0.0117
		(0.0593)
Trade union membership		0.000859
		(0.0867)
Constant	-4.031***	-5.928***
	(0.369)	(0.464)
Fixed time effects	Y	Y

Dependent variable: populist vote	Control	Dimensions
Response variables		
Observations	7902	4431
Model fit		
Linktest (p-value)	-0.315(0.321)	-0.11(0.002)
AIC(df)	8787.598(22)	4803.318(31)
BIC(df)	8941.046(22)	5001.606(31)
Hosmer-Lemeshow (p-value)		
8.77(0.362)		
14.26(0.753)		
Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1		

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

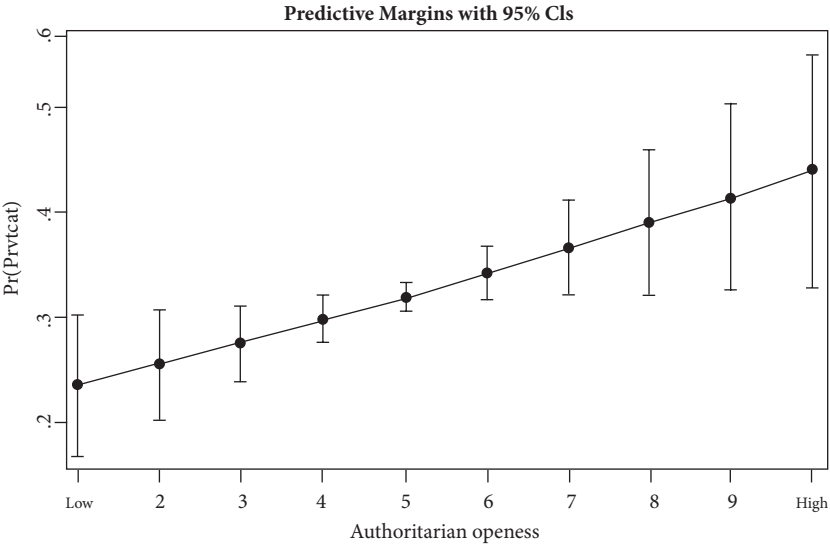


FIGURE 8. Predictive margins, authoritarian openness, Poland

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

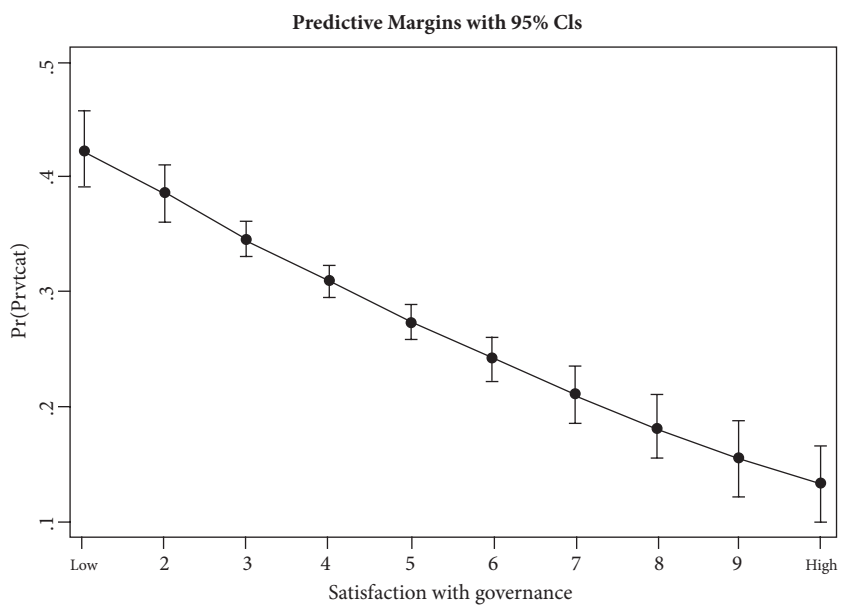


FIGURE 9. Predictive margins, satisfaction with governance, Poland

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

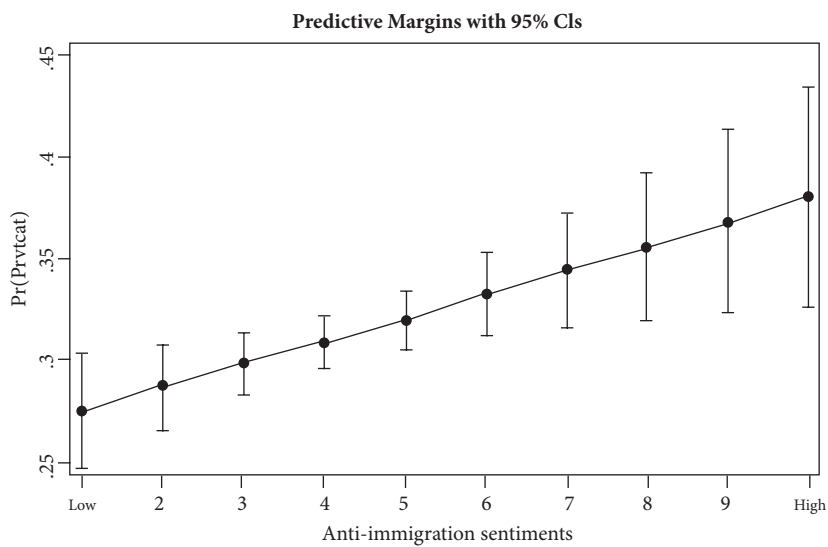


FIGURE 10. Predictive margins, anti-immigration sentiments, Poland

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

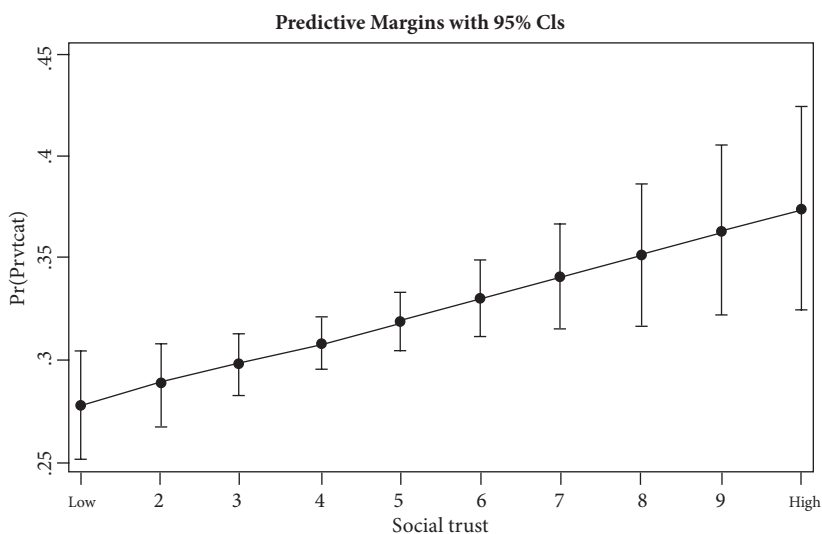


FIGURE 11. Predictive margins, social trust, Poland

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

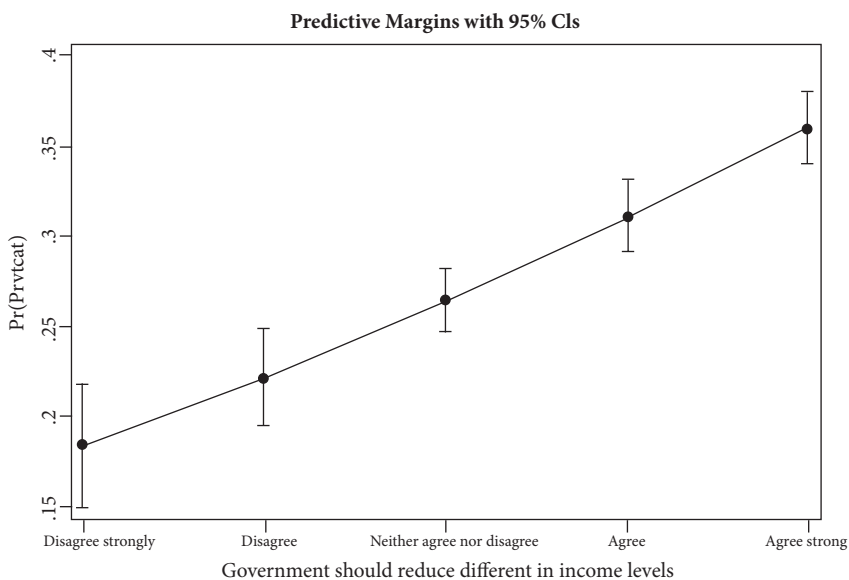


FIGURE 12. Predictive margins, expectation for the government to tackle income inequalities, Poland

Source: own elaboration based on ESS (2002–2018).

Individuals who vote for a populist party are more likely to be politically active and show a degree of trust towards their immediate environment. Lastly, there is not a sufficient degree of evidence to repudiate or confirm the theorised association between trade union membership and the populist vote (the coefficient is statistically insignificant). The predictive margins present a unit change in the estimated probability to vote for a populist party for this estimation. As theorised, populist voters in Poland are likely to be more open to authoritarian values (Figure 8) and strongly dissatisfied with the policy delivery of the government (Figure 9). Furthermore, every discrete unit change in general anti-immigration sentiments (Figure 10) increases the estimated probability to vote for a populist party. Interestingly, the model also confirms a positive association between social trust and populist vote, with a less dynamic trend depicted in Figure 11. Lastly, there is a positive association between the expectation for a government to tackle income inequalities and the populist vote, as presented in Figure 12. The estimated probability sharply increases for individuals demanding a reduction in discrepancies in income levels.

DISCUSSION

The study provided a substantial degree of evidence that attributes of populist voters vary across Czechia and Poland. Importantly, the study did not directly compare the countries of interest. It aimed to illustrate populism as a thin ideology, whose attributes differ from country to country. It also showed that some regional traits are present in national contexts, however, others contrast with the theorised attributes. That underpins the importance of country-focused studies of individual electoral drivers.

For Poland, it identified a pro-welfarist stance of voters, with an expected negative linkage between the degree of satisfaction with policy and the populist vote. Secondly, it equally showed that Poles voting for populist parties are more conservative and are generally sceptical of migration. In Czechia individuals voting for populist parties are rather unfavourable about

governments tackling income inequalities. That seems reasonably justified through the technocratic nature of populism in the country. Secondly, populist voters in Czechia are on average content with policy delivery, which departs strongly from the theorised relationship. Thirdly, the findings on attitudes towards ethnic minorities, interestingly show that general anti-immigration sentiments coefficient was insignificant; however, the ethnic-openness item was positive and statistically significant. That indicate that Czechs who are unfavourable towards migrants of different ethnicity than the majority, particularly from poorer countries outside the EU, are more likely to vote for a populist party. These attributes indicate what Kotwas and Kubik (2019) would refer to as 'cultural thickening' of populism.

These findings require further deliberation, particularly the striking result on political trust and satisfaction with governance. While in Czechia the estimation identified a positive link with the populist vote, in Poland discontented individuals are more likely to vote for populist parties. That indicates a strong contextualisation of these attributes and a potential time trend. Secondly, the findings on government policy on income inequality show that while, in principle, individuals in favour of welfarist governments were theorised to be more favourable towards populist parties, in this case study, the countries present a contrasting result. While Czechs are rather unfavourable towards socialist governments, Poles are strongly more likely to vote for a populist party that offers a pro-welfarist package.

The argument here is as follows. Populism is far from a unified phenomenon. It requires a careful case-by-case analysis, which captures the various attributes of voters across political spectra. In addition, one cannot undermine the socio-economic as well as historical background in assessing these trends. In this study, the explanation is based on the legacies of transition, and the shadow of communism, which justifies the difference between these cases. Admittedly, there is one remarkable difference between Czechia and Poland regarding their approach to reconciliation with their communist past, which explains the differences in the nature of populism in these countries namely the lustration process.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to illustrate the amorphous nature of populism using Czechia and Poland as case studies. This chapter linked a country-level analysis with considerations on regional traits. The theoretical framework is the legacies of transition and communism as argued by Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017). The chapter brought the following results. Firstly, a Czech populist voter is sceptical towards governments that tackle income inequalities, has a strong anti-ethnic sentiment, is mistrustful of political representatives, however, has a positive outlook on policy delivery¹⁰. In Poland, those who vote for the populist party, are on average dissatisfied with policy delivery, expect governments to address income inequalities and are open to authoritarian values. The findings exemplify that populism varies across political contexts and has a slightly different nature to what had been established on the regional level.

These findings invite further investigation, particularly regarding the matter of political trust and satisfaction with governance. Given the contrasting results of the average trends in political trust and satisfaction with governance among these countries, and the notable departure from the theorised negative relationship with the populist vote, the findings indicate a time-trend. It is highly plausible that, both political trust and satisfaction with governance vary across time and are influenced by exogenous factors. Given the nature of this research, that puzzle remains to be explored by other empirical examinations. Secondly, the attributes analysed in this study have a strong potential to differ across other countries in the region. A consequential case for analysis would be Slovakia and Hungary – neighbouring countries sharing common temporal frames, yet with a highly heterogenous political landscape.

Lastly, one must consider the departures from the anticipated results in this study. Firstly, trade union membership, which was a theorised driver

¹⁰ The estimated change in predicted marginal probability of the populist vote is positive for the satisfaction with governance (Figure 5) and negative for political trust (Figure 7).

for the populist vote in Poland, turned out to be an insignificant attribute. Secondly, general attitudes to migration were equally an insignificant aspect of the populist vote in the Czechia. However, a degree of hostility to migrants of distinct ethnicity had a positive influence on the populist vote. At the time of writing, there are no empirical evaluations that have reached similar results.

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POPULIST NEO-TRADITIONALISM AND ECONOMIC NEO-FEUDALISM IN THE CASE OF THE RUSSIAN CONQUEST OF THE SERBIAN OIL AND NATURAL GAS SECTOR FROM 2008 ONWARDS¹

ABSTRACT

Energy policy has been one of the most powerful Russian soft power instruments of foreign policy. In Serbia, this Russian soft power strategy has been materialised through the Energy Treaty signed in 2008. The official purpose of the Treaty was to provide full energy stability to Serbia. The Energy Treaty envisioned the construction of a new gas pipeline from Russia – the South Stream project – and the privatisation of the state monopoly and giant gas company,

¹ The chapter is the result of the author's work on the project of the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822682. It reflects only the author's view and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Naftna industrija Srbije. Soon enough, the South Stream project failed and was succeeded by the Turkish Stream Project. Naftna industrija Srbije was sold without tender below its market price, together with domestic reserves of crude oil and natural gas, as well as numerous assets in the form of concessions for oil exploitation outside the country, equipment and real estate. In political discourse, the Energy Treaty and the ensuing full takeover of the Serbian energy sector were supported and hailed by a populist neo-traditionalist and economic neo-feudalist narrative. In this concrete case, the neo-traditionalist narrative referred to Serbia's historical, cultural and religious ties with Russia and the neo-feudalist narrative to the traditionally close friendship of the Russian and the Serbian authorities as well as sincere and intimate private relations between certain Russian and Serbian politicians. In the end, in combination with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent tectonic geostrategic disturbances, instead of full energy stability, this Treaty brought Serbia to the verge of energy insecurity in the near future.

KEYWORDS: Russia, Energy Treaty, NIS, crude oil, natural gas, monopoly, neo-traditionalism, neo-feudalism

INTRODUCTION

Energy policy has been one of the most powerful soft power instruments of Russian foreign policy. The ultimate aims of this approach are obtaining monopoly prices and profits, the monopolisation of distribution infrastructure and domestic natural reserves, and consequently gaining enough political power in host countries to impose political and geostrategic interests as compared to Western countries. Namely, Russia understands quite well how energy such as natural gas and oil can be used as a weapon, more especially towards European markets which, in the case of most countries, do not produce any oil and gas and have no reserves. In addition, Russia's gas position in Europe has a real potential to shake relations within the European Union ('divide et impera'), between Northern countries (Germany, Poland,

the Višegrad countries and the Baltic States) who are all strongly dependent on Russian gas and among the South of Europe (France, Italy, Spain and Portugal), who are more orientated towards African resources.

In Serbia, this particular Russian soft power strategy has been materialised through the Energy Treaty signed in 2008. The official purpose of the Treaty has been to provide full energy stability to Serbia. In political discourse, the Treaty has been strongly supported by the neo-traditionalist narrative of a centuries-long Serbian-Russian brotherhood and the neo-feudalist narrative of a traditional close friendship between the Russian and Serbian authorities as well as sincere and intimate private relations between certain Russian and Serbian politicians.

However, in reality the Treaty produced profoundly deep negative economic effects for the Serbian side in the medium and long run: Serbia sold its state monopoly and gas giant company Naftna industrija Srbije (NIS) far below its market price; Serbia handed over its natural gas distribution infrastructure and domestic crude oil and gas reserves; and the exploitation of oil and gas without any limits was completely left to Gazprom at the lowest mining rent in Europe. The end effect is that today Serbia is almost completely dependent on Russian crude oil and gas production and consequently is burdened with its all-pervading political influences.

In the end, payback time has come. Russian aggression against Ukraine and, following a comprehensive set of European Union (EU) sanction packages against Russia, Serbia has been pushed into a zone of unsustainable balancing between Russia and the West and consequently into slippery energy ground. Hence, the world entered into a completely new phase of massive changes in the geostrategic positioning of allied blocks. Experience tells us that in midst of the conflict between world powers, peripheral countries usually perform badly.

In this chapter, we develop our argument as follows. The first section provides a chronology of the nascent and subsequent implementation of the Serbian-Russian Energy Treaty starting in 2008. The second section is devoted to dismantling the populist neo-traditionalist and economic neo-feudalist narrative widely used in the Serbian political discourse of praising and justifying this hazardous deal. The third section assesses the overall dependence of the Serbian economy on Russian oil and gas and the fourth section concentrates on the war in Ukraine and the future,

highly uncertain fate of the Serbian energy sector amid more and more restrictive EU measures against Russia over Ukraine. Our conclusions follow.

THE ENERGY TREATY

Russia uses energy as a crucial soft power measure to strengthen its position abroad. Serbia is no exception to the rule since, as we will see, Russia's role in the Serbian economy has been insignificant. Key Russian energy policy ventures in Serbia were the privatisation of Beopetrol² and the Energy Treaty.

The Energy Treaty signed in Moscow on the 25th of January 2008 envisioned the construction of a new gas pipeline from Russia – the South Stream project was expected to connect the Russian Federation with Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia and Italy through a gas pipeline. The official goal of this agreement was full energy stability of Serbia (Shchedrov 2008).

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the South Stream project is that Serbia was the only of the five countries on the planned route that agreed to be a minority owner in all companies established for the pipeline's construction. South Stream Serbia AG, one of these four companies that played a main role in building and finalising the project, was founded offshore – in Zug in Switzerland. On the other hand, all other countries on the route, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovenia insisted that the mutual company

² Beopetrol was established in Serbia in 1990 from organisational parts of Industrija nafte – INA company with its headquarters in Zagreb, known nowadays as the main Croatian petrol company. Beopetrol was registered as a state company when, in 2001, the Agency decided to change its owner. The plan was to offer stock packages covering 79.53% of the total capital via public tender. For this company, trading in petroleum products, with a turnover of about 400,000 tons per year and coverage of over 20% of sales on the Serbian market, Russian oil giant PJSC Lukoil Company offered 117m EUR (million euro) (plus an investment of 85m EUR in Beopetrol as well as a mandatory investment of 8m EUR in the so-called 'social assistance programme'). On the other hand, the second-ranked bidder, Hungarian MOL offered 101m EUR (plus an investment of 84m EUR in Beopetrol, as well as a mandatory investment of 5.35m EUR in the social assistance program). The acquisition contract was eventually signed in October 2003 with two PJSC Lukoil Company subsidiaries – Lukoil Europe Holdings B.V. with its headquarters in the Netherlands and Lukoil International GmbH located in Austria (Boarov 2003).

in charge of the project's implementation should be established under their jurisdiction (Insajder 2013a).

Despite Serbian officials proclaiming it as the 'business of the century,' the South Stream project was abandoned in December 2014 (Stević 2016), almost a year after the European Commission had announced that the bilateral agreements signed for building the South Stream pipeline between six EU member states, Serbia and Russia were not in accordance with the EU's Third Energy Package. To be more precise: according to this Package, the pipeline should be used by other gas traders, not just the companies that built the pipeline (European Commission 2009). In other words, in addition to Gazprom – an investor and seller of gas – competition in trade must be ensured by allowing other traders to buy via auctions the right to transport their gas through the South Stream gas pipeline. As this possibility was not foreseen by the South Stream project, Serbia was forced to give up.

After the South Stream project was abandoned in December 2014, a new project idea started to emerge. Initially called Turk Stream, the project afterwards changed its official name to Turkish Stream (Tekmor Monitor 2019). The first deliveries of gas to Turkey took place in January 2020. In November 2020 Bulgaria completed its section of the Turkish Stream pipeline and the Serbian part of the Turkish Stream pipeline was launched on the 1st of January 2021 (IntelliNews 2020; Novi magazin 2021).

As part of the construction of the South Stream pipeline, Serbia agreed to sell NIS, the Serbian state monopolistic company engaged in trade, distribution, production and processing of oil and gas to Russia through direct negotiations.

The initial plan was to sell NIS to the best bidder. According to the words of then-Minister of Energy, Aleksandar Popović, "...the winner of the tender will buy NIS. ...Everything will be transparent" (Radio-televizija Vojvodine 2007).

According to a study conducted in 2006 by Merrill Lynch and Raiffeisen Investments, the total value of NIS was estimated to amount between 1.2 and 1.6 billion EUR not taking into account the oil and gas natural reserves in its ownership. Based on this study, 51% of the shares that would be sold to Gazprom were worth between 612 and 816m EUR. Similarly, in 2008, the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia ordered a new study aimed at obtaining more precise information on the correct value of NIS. This study,

done by Deloitte, estimated that the total worth of NIS was about 2.2 billion EUR and, hence, 51% of the shares were worth about 1.12 billion EUR.

Eventually, on the 2nd of February 2009, Gazprom (owned by the Russian Federation with its share of 50.23%) bought, without tender, 51% of the shares of NIS. It had paid 400m EUR in cash with an obligation to invest 500m EUR more in the coming years to modernise and develop the company. The investment amount of 500m EUR was actually a credit given to NIS by Gazprom that was due to be paid back with interest every three months, until the last installment on the 15th of May 2023 (Insajder 2013b). Finally, if we subtract the interest amount from the purchase price, it is evident that Gazprom bought NIS for less than 400m EUR.

What is more, in 2010, the Serbian government decided to transfer one part of its share to Serbian citizens – precisely 19.2% of the total share, meaning the government now owned only 29.8% of the total shares. Gazprom used this situation to increase their share in the company and, in March 2011, bought an additional 5.15% in shares from Serbian citizens. As a result Gazprom now owns 56.15% of the total NIS shares (Radio-televizija Srbije 2011).

Besides that, under this agreement, Serbia also consented to handing over to the Russians numerous assets in the form of concessions for oil exploitation in Angola, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Venezuela, Libya, and various equipment and real estate (Petrović 2008),³ as well as the exclusive right to exploit its oil and gas reserves and its only gas storage facility in Banatski Dvor. Namely, oil and gas reserves in the Republic of Serbia are considered to be natural wealth in the ownership of its citizens. Companies tend to pay a mining rent for exploiting natural gas and oil reserves and concessions are usually signed with the host government for a period of 25, 30, 50 or more years. However, in this case, NIS Naftagas was among many other NIS assets sold to Gazprom and was responsible for exploiting oil and gas from natural resources. This actually meant that all natural oil and gas reserves in Serbia were sold to Gazprom (Boarov 2008; Transparentnost Srbija 2008; Insajder 2013a; 2013b; 2016; Radio-televizija Vojvodine 2014; Čongradin 2015).

³ However, the final list of these assets had never been concluded. We only know that by 2013 the government transferred to Gazprom over 3000 different facilities including motels, all gas stations, several tourist and recreation facilities and many others (Čongradin 2015).

Unfortunately, the story does not end here. In the rest of Europe, mining rent for exploiting natural reserves is far above the Serbian 3% – it is 22% in Russia, 18% in Slovenia and Germany, 15–22% in Austria, 12.5% in Bulgaria, 12% in Hungary and 10% in Croatia. In 2012, according to the new law, the mining rent in Serbia was raised to 7%. However, for NIS, the old mining rent of 3% has had to apply until the end of 2023 (Petrović 2013; Insajder 2018).

Not less importantly, it would be very informative to estimate the value of NIS's crude oil and natural gas reserves. According to NIS's statistical data, total reserve quantities were estimated at 10.5 million tons of crude oil and 4.35 billion cubic meters of gas in 2007. Taking the market price per barrel⁴ of oil in 2008, which was 97 USD,⁵ the value of oil reserves was about 7.7 billion USD. Also, the Russian Natural Gas border price in Germany in 2008 equalled 13.14 USD per million metric British thermal units of gas⁶ meaning that the natural gas reserves of NIS were worth about 2 billion USD. All in all, in the year when the Energy Treaty was signed, the total value of only crude oil and natural gas reserves was about 9.7 billion USD or approximately 6.9 billion EUR (Insajder 2013b; International Monetary Fund 2021; authors calculations).⁷

THE POPULIST NEO-TRADITIONALIST AND THE ECONOMIC NEO-FEUDALIST NARRATIVE BEHIND THE RUSSIAN TAKEOVER OF THE SERBIAN ENERGY SECTOR

In political discourse, the Energy Treaty and the ensuing takeover of the Serbian energy sector were supported and hailed by the populist neo-traditionalist and economic neo-feudalist narrative. As Benczes et al. (2020: 7) define it,

⁴ 1 tone of crude oil = 7.5 barrels of crude oil.

⁵ Average of three spot prices – Dated Brent, West Texas Intermediate, and the Dubai Fateh (International Monetary Fund 2021).

⁶ 1 million metric British thermal units of gas = 28.52 cubic meters of natural gas.

⁷ Again, according to some estimates, there are 170 million tons of undiscovered oil reserves in Serbia (Janković 2015).

the populist neo-traditionalist narrative⁸ is a route to escape from insecurity brought by "...rapid changes which followed the 1989 political and economic transformation..." and "dangerous new values and ways of life, which come to the region from globalisation and from the EU."

In the case of Serbia, the neo-traditionalist narrative refers to historical, cultural and religious ties with Russia, which have historically been perceived through the prism of its support for the independence of Orthodox Slavic nations and as Serbia's 'elder brother.' What is more, after the NATO bombing and Serbia's war defeat in 1999, Russia never recognised Kosovo as an independent state which contributed to a further strengthening of Serbian-Russian friendly and brotherly bonds.

Essentially, the purpose of the Serbian-Russian brotherhood neo-traditionalist populist narrative has been to present Russian relations with Western countries as purely based on economic purposes and with Serbia traditionally based on history, culture and religion without any economic or geopolitical Russian interest behind it.⁹ For instance, in 2008, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said that "...the position of the Russian Federation on resolving the Kosovo problem under the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 has

⁸ "In the most basic sense, traditionalism is a movement of appreciation of 'tradition' in contrast to modernity and its main goal is the *protection of authenticity* of culture that – it is assumed – provides stable, permanent and non-relative values to guide society. Neo-traditionalism, by contrast, is usually seen as an individual or collective strategy whose goal is to *return to what is claimed to be 'tradition'* after a period of disruption, in order to find the temporarily lost, albeit authentic roots of culture and eliminate unwanted elements of the way of life which were borrowed from or imposed by some 'aliens.' While traditionalism is predominantly a programme of *societal reproduction*, devised and implemented by such actors as communities, civil society organisations or specialised public-professional bodies, neo-traditionalism is mainly a strategy of *political reproduction*, practiced by governments or political parties." (Benczes et al. 2020: 5).

⁹ Religion was an especially potent stronghold for these narratives of brotherhood, friendship and traditional historical connections. Namely, Serbia and Russia are strongly rooted and still guided by the Christian Orthodox faith. The Serbian Orthodox Church and Russian Orthodox Church have much in common and are often presented as the two closest churches. Sharing the same view of the Serbian holy land of Kosovo and Metohija, the Russian Orthodox Church has been building strong relations with its Serbian counterpart. For example, during his visit to Moscow in 2013, the late Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Irinej said that "...the Church can only count on support from God and Moscow" talking about the recognition of Kosovo as an independent state (Kurir 2013). Also, Russia supported the construction of St. Sava's Temple in Belgrade, the second largest Orthodox Church in the world. The mosaic inside, worth 4 million EUR was made in Russia and was entirely paid for by Gazprom. 70 Russian and Serbian artists worked on the mosaic, having been described by Serbian President Vučić as a "...million of glittering pieces woven into a single message of brotherhood and solidarity" (B92 2018).

remained unchanged.” He then called the signing of the Russian-Serbian energy agreement “an epochal event,” and, during the visit of Serbian president Tadić to Russia, “...proof of the stable, progressive development of relations and the friendly nature of ties between Russia and Serbia” (B92 2008).

In parallel, on the Serbian side, during the discussion on the Draft Law on the Ratification of the Oil and Gas Agreement with Russia (September 5, 2008), numerous MPs echoed President Medvedev and spoke about the traditional Russian-Serbian friendship, but also about the strategic partnership with Russia in defending Serbia’s territorial integrity in Kosovo and Metohija (Vreme 2014).

Additionally, on the eve of the Serbian parliamentary elections and signing of the Energy Treaty with Russia in 2008, Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica and Serbian President Boris Tadić resorted to economic neo-feudalism – “...a distinct pattern of capitalism, which describes the emergence of personal dependencies providing security that occurs alongside the capitalist mode of production” (Benczes et al. 2020: 9). In this case, Serbia has depended on Moscow to provide energy security and, allegedly, only the Serbian leadership has had the power to secure a stable energy supply under favourable conditions thanks to its traditional and friendly connections with Russia. For example, during his presidential election campaign, Boris Tadić gave statements explaining how Serbia has to complete the gas pipeline “...to make homes warmer for people.” He also added that by “protecting the standard of our people who work at NIS, we have also fought for a social programme as one of the subjects of negotiations” (B92 2008). Furthermore, Vojislav Koštunica emphasised that, in the context of a better life for citizens, “...we want a modern gas pipeline agreed with Russia through Serbia” (Danas 2008).

The neo-traditionalist narrative of Russian-Serbian friendship especially intensified after 2012 with the coming to power of the right-wing populist Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*), which had previously been Milošević’s coalition partner. Its leader and the current President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić has on numerous occasions emphasised the importance of Russian-Serbian friendship and Russia’s support against Kosovo’s independence (Mondo 2019; Hamdočamo 2020; Radio-televizija Srbije 2021).

However, in real life, this neo-traditionalist narrative didn’t have any tangible effect on the economic field. For example, in early March 2020,

Bulgaria and Gazprom Export finalised an agreement for a 40.3% reduction of the price at which Russia supplies natural gas to Bulgaria, backdated to August 5, 2019. Bulgaria was the last of eight EU Member States in Eastern Europe (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) to strike a deal on a price cut with Gazprom, in the wake of a settlement reached in 2018 between the European Commission and the Russian monopolist on an anti-trust investigation (Serbian Energy 2020). According to this deal, the gas pricing formula was changed, setting as its main component the price on regional markets instead of that of petroleum derivatives, and the gas price was set monthly instead of quarterly (Tanev 2020).

In April 2020, the gas price for Bulgaria was 12 EUR/MWh (144 USD/1000 cubic meters calculated in 2020 according to the average USD-EUR exchange rate) and the one proposed for January 2021 was 12.8 euro/MWh (149 USD/1000 cubic meters calculated in January 2021 USD-EUR exchange rate) (Serbian Energy 2020). As for Serbia, from 2016 onwards the price of gas imported via Ukraine and Hungary was fixed at 24.23 EUR/MWh (282 USD/1000 cubic meters calculated according to the 2016 average USD-EUR exchange rate) (Boarov 2020). Interestingly enough, not only was the price Serbia paid for the Russian gas 100% higher than the price paid by Bulgaria, but also the price Serbia paid remained fixed (290 USD/1000 cubic meters calculated according to 2020 average USD-EUR exchange rate) despite the fact that the price of Russian gas fell by 27% in 2020 in comparison to 2016 (Figure 1).

Furthermore, at the opening of the Serbian part of the Turkish Stream on January 1, 2021, President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, stated that, thanks to this pipeline, Serbia would from now on import Russian gas at a price of 155 USD/1000 cubic meters (IntelliNews 2020; Novi magazin 2021). The Serbian president added that the transit tax for gas imports through Bulgaria would be 12-14 USD/1000 cubic meters, which was far below the tax charged by Hungarians of 30 USD/1000 cubic meters (Novi magazin 2021).

In the end, at his last gas price-related meeting with the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, which took place in Sochi at the end of November 2021, Aleksandar Vučić once again resorted to the neo-traditionalist narrative, but this time supported by the economic neo-feudalism argument. According to his words, President Putin agreed on a natural gas price that is almost four times below the market price (270 USD/1000 cubic meters), the best

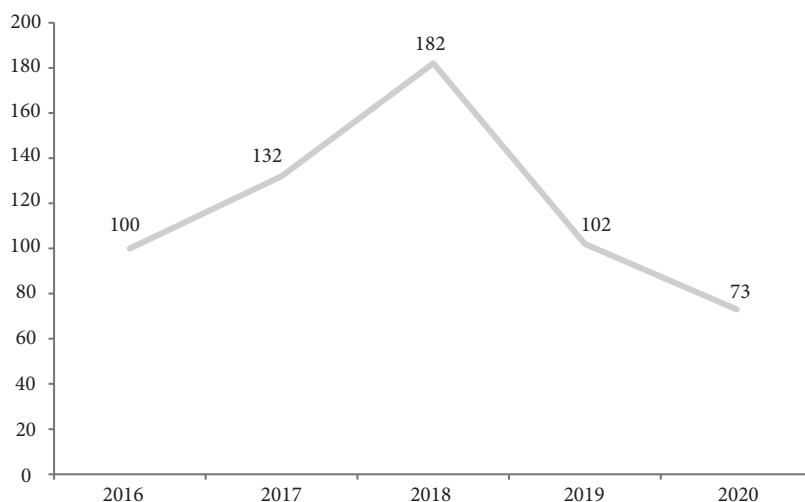


FIGURE 1. Natural Gas, Russian natural gas border price in Germany, USD per million metric British thermal units of gas (2016 = 100)

Source: own elaboration based on International Monetary Fund (2021); authors' calculations.

price achieved in Europe, thanks to Serbia's brotherly relationship with the Russians (neo-traditionalism) and his personal friendship with President Putin (economic neo-feudalism). He then added that this agreement guaranteed energy security for Serbia's citizens and the economy (economic neo-feudalism). Also, he stressed that this, four times below the market gas price, saved 300 million USD for Serbia which is, as any notorious populist would stress, enough to build a beautiful national football stadium ('panem et circenses') (Danas 2021).

Still, this price (270 USD/1000 cubic meters) is much higher than previously promised by president Vučić (155 USD/1000 cubic meters). What is more, it is not true that the Serbian president negotiated the best natural gas price in Europe. Germany – certainly not a country bound by history, tradition, friendship and fraternity to Russia – negotiated 250 USD/1000 cubic meters (Nova S 2021).

THE RUSSIAN TAKEOVER OF THE SERBIAN ENERGY SECTOR

In order to assess the overall dependence of the Serbian economy on Russian oil and gas, it is necessary to pair the intensified domestic exploitation of crude oil and gas with the import of crude oil and gas from Russia on an annual level and then compare it with the total annual oil and gas consumption in Serbia.

THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE EXPLOITATION OF CRUDE OIL AND NATURAL GAS FROM DOMESTIC RESERVES

Due to the very fact that Gazprom paid a low mining rent and became the owner of Serbia's natural oil and gas reserves, NIS significantly increased the exploitation of domestic reserves, without the accompanying progressive uplift in mining rent, which has been a common practice in all other countries (NIS 2010–2019).

As can be clearly seen from the available data, in 2008, the not-yet-privatised NIS produced 0.64 million tons of crude oil and 284.8 million cubic meters of domestic gas from domestic reserves (Insajder 2013b). In the first year after privatisation (2010), NIS increased oil production from domestic sources by 36% and gas by 37% (Figure 2). It reached its peak in domestic crude oil exploitation in 2013 when, compared to 2008, oil production from domestic sources increased by 70.1%, while domestic natural gas exploitation reached its peak in 2015 – when compared to 2008, its production increased by 79.1% (Energetski bilansi 2008–2019; NIS 2010–2019; authors' calculations).¹⁰

If we compare crude oil production from domestic reserves and total domestic crude oil consumption per year in the period 2009–2019, we see that domestic crude oil natural reserves covered, on average, 35.1% of total domestic crude oil consumption (Figure 3).

¹⁰ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in lockdowns worldwide and the resultant sharp decrease in demand for transportation and tourism services, consumption and prices of crude oil and natural gas prices also sharply fell. Therefore, we excluded the year 2020 from our analysis as an outlier.

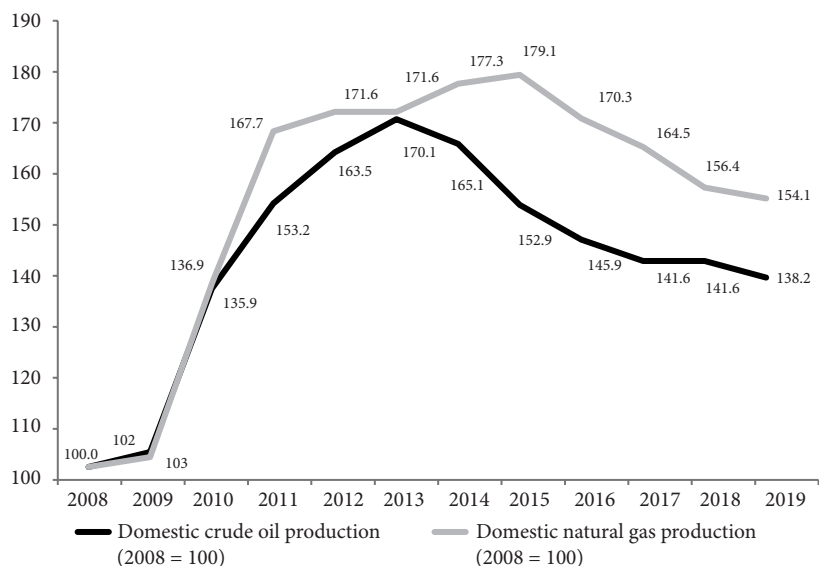


FIGURE 2. Crude oil and natural gas production from domestic reserves (2008 = 100)

Source: own elaboration based on Energetski bilansi (2008–2019); Insaider (2013b); NIS (2010–2019); authors' calculations.

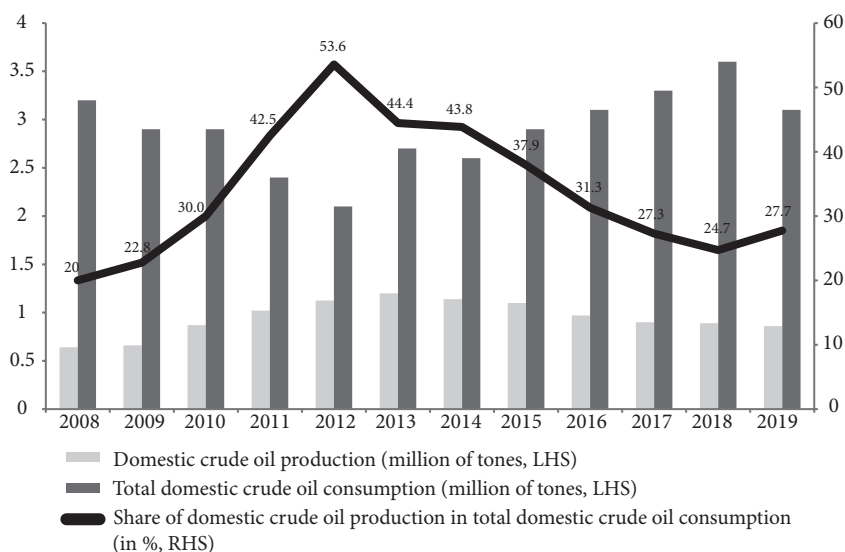


FIGURE 3. Crude oil production from domestic oil reserves, total domestic crude oil consumption and the share of crude oil production from domestic oil reserves in total domestic crude oil consumption

Source: own elaboration based on Energetski bilansi (2008–2019); NIS (2010–2019); authors' calculations.

Moreover, if we compare natural gas production from domestic reserves and total domestic natural gas consumption per year in the period 2009–2019, we see that domestic natural gas reserves covered, on average, 21% of total domestic natural gas consumption (Figure 4).

In other words, if such an agreement had not been concluded, Serbia would have been completely independent for 35.1% of its total oil and 21% of its total natural gas consumption (NIS 2010–2019; authors' calculations).

SERBIAN IMPORTS OF CRUDE OIL AND NATURAL GAS FROM RUSSIA

The Serbian economy conducts most of its trade with EU countries. For instance, by looking at the list of the ten countries Serbia exports to the most, we see that, in the period between 2007–2019, Serbia sent on average as much as 42.6% of its total exports of goods to EU countries which are in the top ten export destinations for Serbian goods. Similarly, in the observed period, Serbia imported an average of 35.6% of its total imports of goods from those top ten EU export destination countries. In total, the share of exports to the EU of total Serbian exports increased from 56% to 62% in the observed period, whereas the share of imports from the EU of total Serbian imports remained unchanged and equalled 55%. Over and above that, coverage of Serbian imports from the EU with Serbian exports to the EU (the foreign trade coverage ratio) hiked from 48% in 2007 to 82% in 2019 (Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije 2008–2020; authors' calculations).

On the other hand, Russia's participation in Serbian total foreign trade was very modest, despite the very favourable treatment of Serbian export products to the Russian market.¹¹ Thus, in the given period, the share of exports to Russia of the total exports of Serbia was on average only 6.1%, while the share of imports from Russia of total Serbian imports was as low as 11.4%. What is more, although the foreign trade coverage ratio with Russia

¹¹ The Agreement stipulates that goods produced in Serbia, i.e. which have at least 51% of value-added in the country, are considered to be of Serbian origin and exported to the Russian Federation customs-free. The list of products excluded from the Free Trade Agreement has been revised annually. The list of excluded products includes: poultry and edible waste, some sorts of cheese, sugar, sparkling wine, ethyl-alcohol, tobacco, cotton yarn and fabric, certain types of compressors, tractors and new and used passenger cars (Razvojna agencija Srbije 2012).

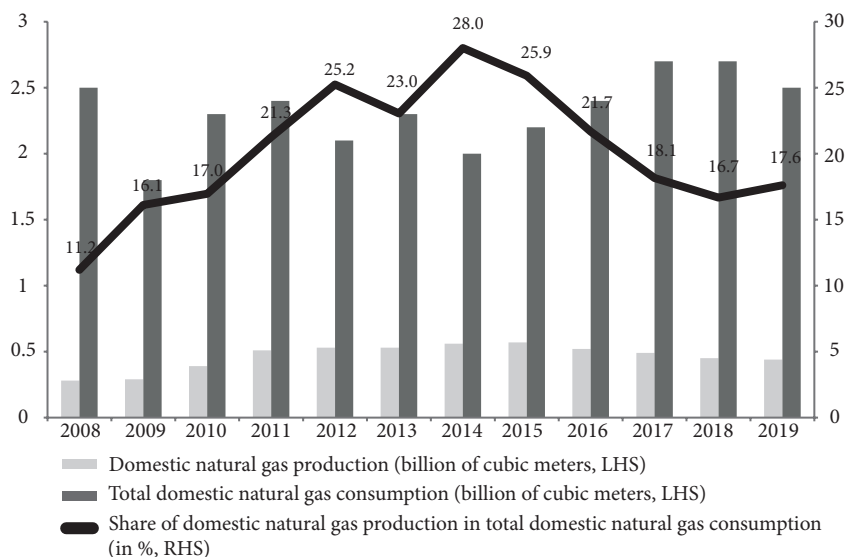


FIGURE 4. Natural gas production from domestic oil reserves, total domestic natural gas consumption and the share of natural gas production from domestic natural gas reserves in total domestic natural gas consumption

Source: own elaboration based on Energetski bilanci (2008–2019); NIS (2010–2019); authors' calculations.

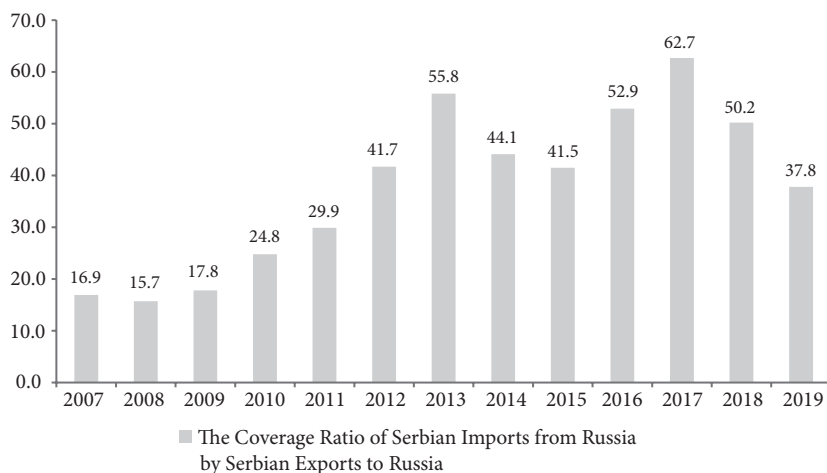


FIGURE 5. The Coverage Ratio of Serbian imports from Russia by Serbian exports to Russia (in %)

Sources: own elaboration based on Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije (2008–2020); authors' calculations.

increased in the observed period from 17% to 38% (Figure 5), it remained low (Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije 2008–2020; authors' calculations).

On top of that, when we take a closer look at the structure of imports from Russia, it is easy to see that it is largely reduced to imports of energy products (Figure 6). The share of crude oil and natural gas imports from Russia in total Serbian imports from Russia in the period 2007–2019 averaged 65.1%, with a tendency to decrease throughout the observed period from 70.4% in 2007 to 50.3% in 2019 (Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije 2008–2020; authors' calculations).

Similarly, the share of crude oil imports from Russia of total Serbian crude oil imports was high and averaged 70.6% in the 2009–2019 period. This share decreased from 88.7% in 2009 to 70.6% in 2019. Likewise, the share of natural gas imports from Russia of total Serbian natural gas imports was extremely high and averaged 89.9% in the 2009–2019 period. This share decreased only slightly, from 98.2% in 2009 to 89.9% in 2019 (Figure 7).

In total, the share of the sum of crude oil and natural gas imports from Russia of total Serbian crude oil and natural gas imports was rather high and averaged 77.4% in the 2009–2019 period and decreased from 91.7% in 2009 to 73.1% in 2019 (Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije 2008–2020; authors' calculations).

OVERALL DEPENDENCE OF SERBIA ON RUSSIAN CRUDE OIL AND NATURAL GAS

Taking into account NIS's exploitation of crude oil from domestic reserves and imports of crude oil from Russia, we may easily conclude that Serbia is almost completely dependent on Russia (Figure 8). Namely, in the period between 2009 and 2019 domestic crude oil consumption was on average 81.5% – covered by NIS's crude oil domestic production (35% on average) and crude oil imports from Russia (46.4% on average) (Energetski bilansi 2009–2019; NIS 2010–2019; Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije 2010–2020; authors' calculations).

Along the same lines, what can also be noticed is that Serbia is completely dependent on Russian natural gas imports and domestic natural gas production (Figure 9). In the period between 2009–2019 domestic natural gas consumption was on average 95% covered by NIS's natural gas domestic

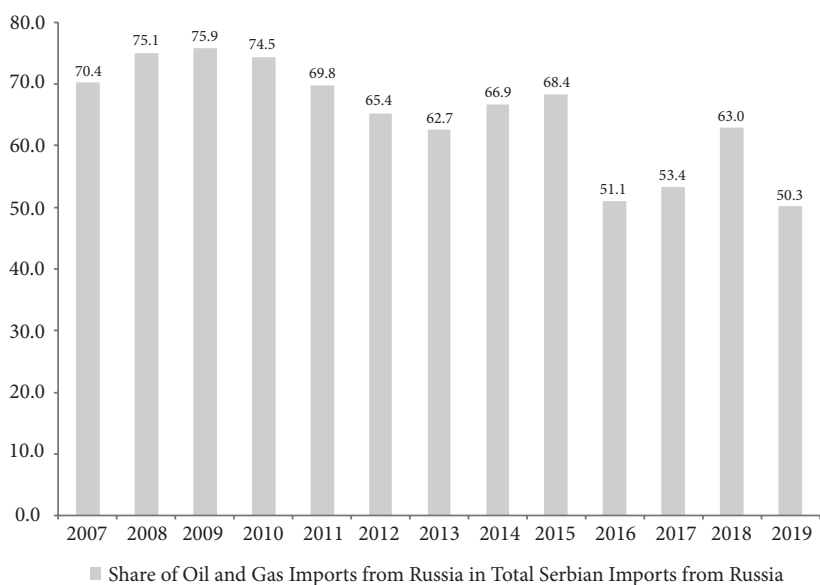


FIGURE 6. The share of crude oil and natural gas imports from Russia of total Serbian imports from Russia (in %)

Source: own elaboration based on Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije (2008–2020); authors' calculations.

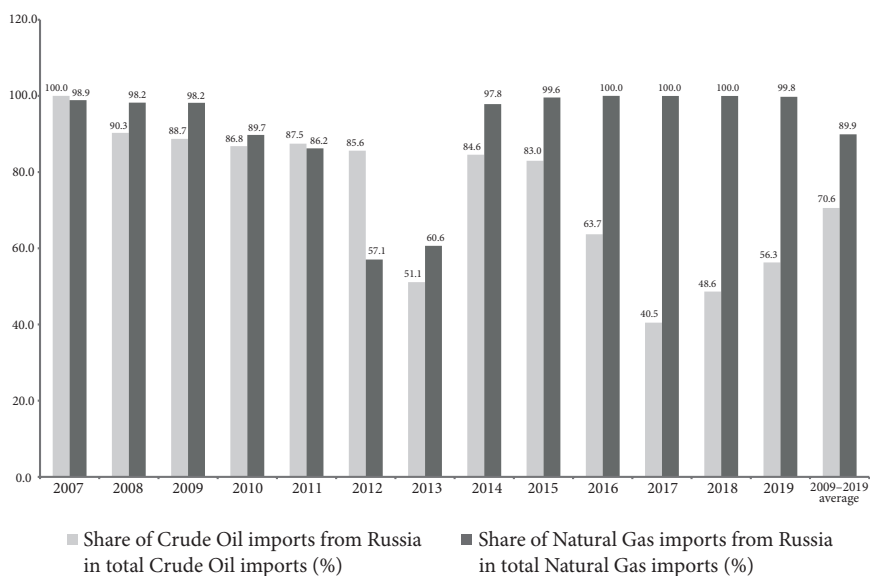


FIGURE 7. The share of crude oil and natural gas imports from Russia of total Serbian crude oil and natural gas imports (in %)

Source: own elaboration based on Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije (2008–2020); authors' calculations.

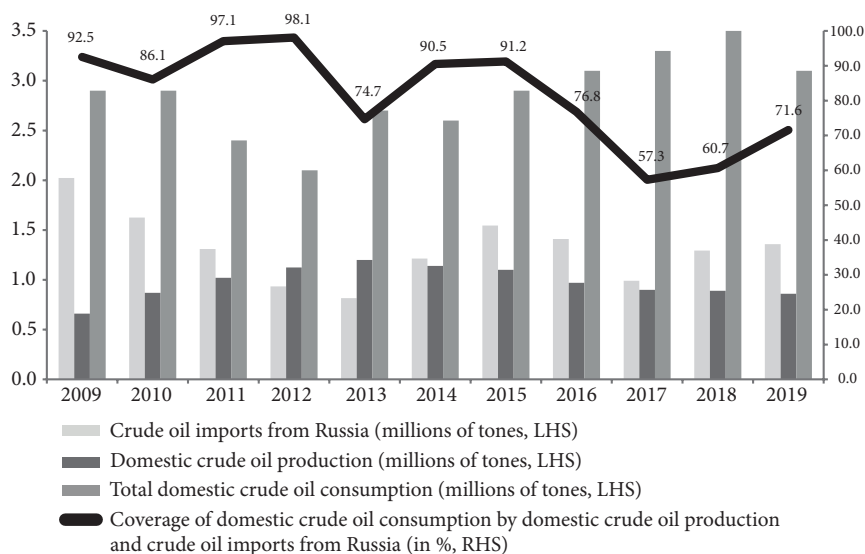


FIGURE 8. Domestic crude oil production, crude oil imports from Russia, domestic crude oil consumption (in millions of tons) and coverage of domestic crude oil consumption by domestic crude oil production and crude oil imports from Russia (in %)

Source: own elaboration based on Energetski bilanci (2009–2019); NIS (2010–2019); Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije (2010–2020); authors' calculations.

production (21% on average) and natural gas imports from Russia (74% on average) (Energetski bilanci 2009–2019; NIS 2010–2019; Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije 2010–2020; authors' calculations).

It would be useful to note that the imports of crude oil and natural gas from Russia directly depended on changes in domestic crude oil and natural gas exploitation (Figure 10) – as the face in the mirror, the increase in NIS's crude oil and natural gas exploitation was accompanied by a decrease in crude oil and natural gas imports from Russia and the decrease in domestic crude oil and natural gas exploitation was accompanied by an increase in crude oil and natural gas imports from Russia (Energetski bilanci 2008–2019; NIS 2010–2019; Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije 2009–2020; authors' calculations).

To conclude, having in mind the Russian crude oil and natural gas monopoly, it is no wonder that even 2010, Gazprom made a net profit of 16.5 billion RSD

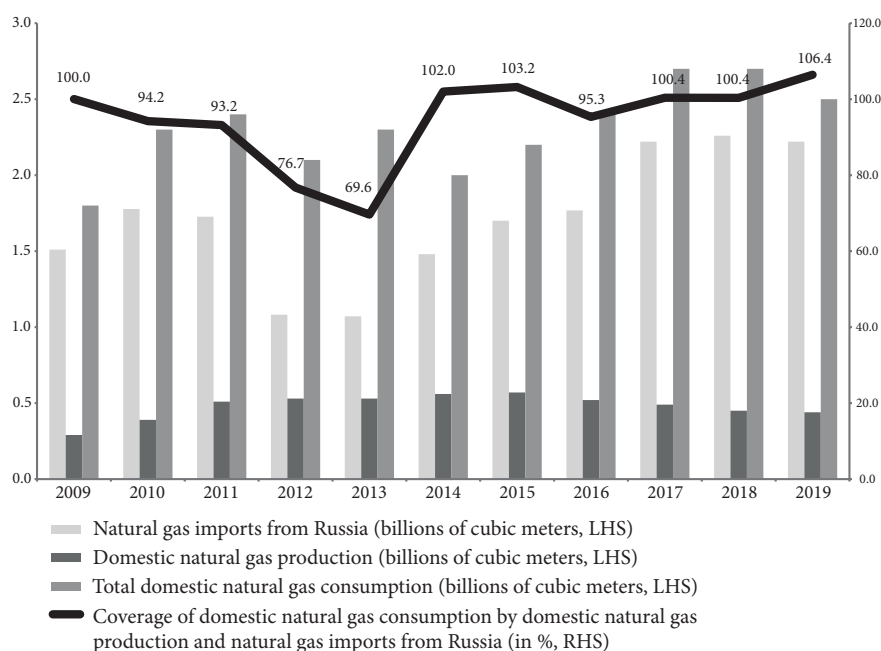


FIGURE 9. Domestic natural gas production, natural gas imports from Russia, domestic natural gas consumption (in billions of cubic meters) and coverage of domestic natural gas consumption by domestic natural gas production and natural gas imports from Russia (in %)

Source: own elaboration based on Energetski bilansi (2009–2019); NIS (2010–2019); Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije (2010–2020); authors' calculations.

(Serbian dinars) or 156.4m EUR and 40.6 billion RSD or 398.2m EUR in 2011 (Figure 11) – sufficient to repay the investment in the purchase of NIS. In comparison, a year before the privatisation (2008), NIS accumulated a loss of 4.4 billion RSD or 54m EUR indicating the highly inefficient management of this company (NIS 2010–2019; authors' calculations). Therefore, the main question was not whether this company should have been privatised, but at what price and under what conditions.

Just as importantly, NIS is one of the biggest and most important and most profitable companies in Serbia. The share of its sales revenues of Serbian GDP in the period 2009–2019 averaged 5.2%. Similarly, NIS directly employs 11,000 and indirectly (suppliers and other connected businesses) 22,440 people.

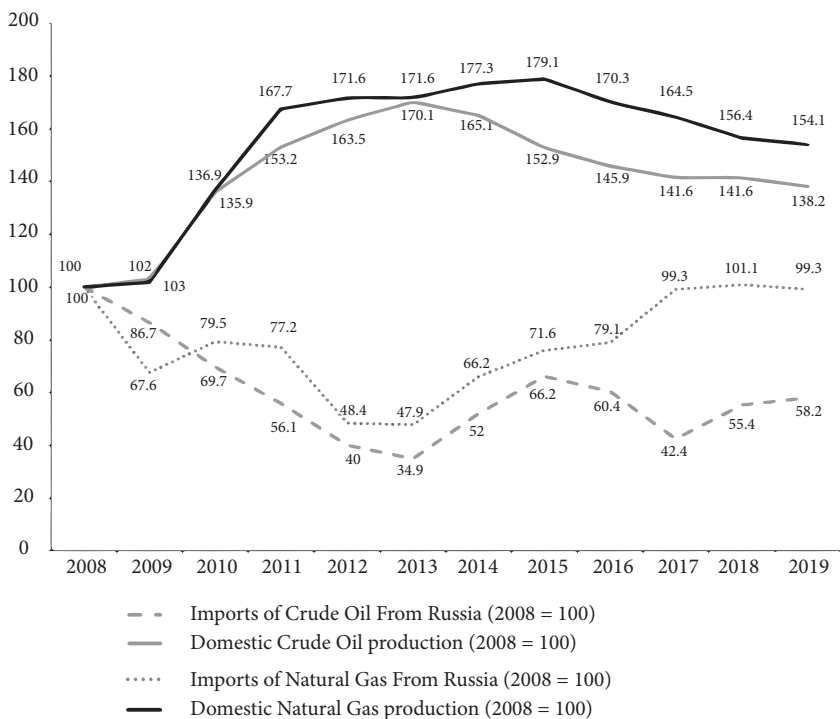


FIGURE 10. Imports of crude oil and natural gas from Russia and domestic crude oil and gas exploitation (2008 = 100)

Source: own elaboration based on Energetski bilanci (2008–2019); NIS (2010–2019); Statistički godišnjak Republike Srbije (2009–2020); authors' calculations.

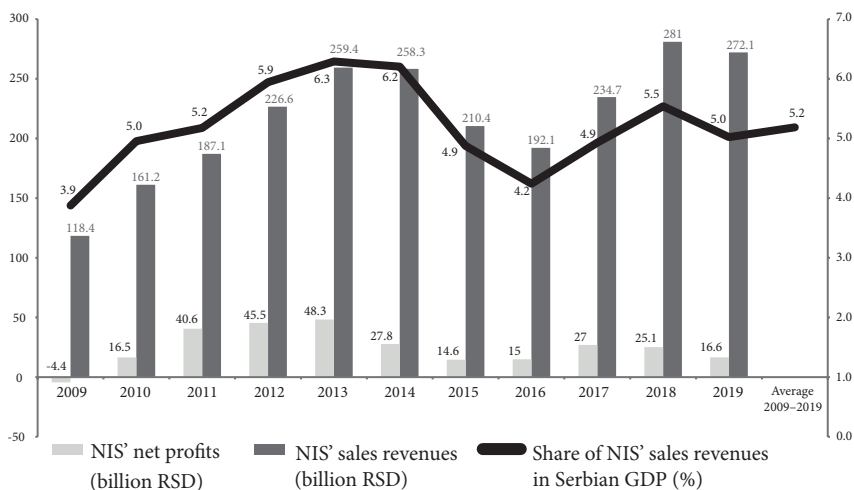


FIGURE 11. NIS's sales revenues and net profits (in billion of Serbian dinars) and the share of NIS's sales revenues in Serbian GDP (%)

Source: own elaboration based on International Monetary Fund 2021; NIS (2010–2019); authors' calculations.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE, EU SANCTIONS AND THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF THE SERBIAN ENERGY SECTOR

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU adopted a number of comprehensive and robust packages of restrictive sanctions. The latest package, COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) 2022/428, was adopted by the EU on the March 15, 2022 (EUR-Lex 2022). This package targets Russian energy investments and supplies, imports of Russian steel, exports of luxury goods, and dealings with Russian state-owned enterprises.

According to this regulation, starting from the May 15, 2022, among other things, it is prohibited to "...directly or indirectly engage in any transaction with: (b) a legal person, entity or body established outside the Union whose proprietary rights are directly or indirectly owned for more than 50% by an entity listed in Annex XIX" (Article 5aa, Paragraph 1).¹²

Since Serbia is part of the EU Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, this regulation was obligatory for Serbia even as a country outside the Union – and it directly referred to NIS, Yugorosgaz and Gastrans (formerly South Stream d.o.o.) in all of which Gazprom has been the majority owner. For instance, the chief distributor of crude oil for NIS is the state-owned Croatian oil pipeline company Janaf. In 2021, NIS contracted with Janaf for the distribution of 2.75 (+/- 10%) million tons of crude oil, which is equal to 83% of total Serbian crude oil consumption in 2020 (Energetski bilansi 2020; Telesković 2022; authors' calculations).¹³ Similarly, in January 2022, NIS contracted with Janaf distribution for 3.2 million tons of crude oil, equal to 97% of total Serbian crude oil consumption in 2020 (Energetski bilansi 2020; Danas 2022; authors' calculations). The point is that, under this regulation, Janaf was not allowed to do business with NIS, meaning that NIS would not be able to import crude oil at all. Interestingly enough, instead of the Energy Treaty promising full energy stability, Serbia fell into a nearly complete energy dependence on Russia and, thus, in light of the Ukrainian

¹² Gazprom is listed in Annex XIX.

¹³ Data on total crude oil consumption in Serbia in 2021 has not yet been published.

war and consequent tectonic changes in geostrategic relations, into a highly probable period of energy instability.¹⁴

However, since Serbia supported a United Nations resolution asking Russia to withdraw from Ukraine on March 2, 2022 (Popović 2022a), a new non-binding resolution at the UN General Assembly which called for Russia to end its war in Ukraine immediately on March 24, 2022 (N1 2022) and voted for the exclusion of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022 (Bjelotomić 2022), the next day (April 8, 2022), the EU decided to exempt Serbia from COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) 2022/428 (Spasić 2022).¹⁵ The latest information suggests that the EU is preparing a sixth package of sanctions that further targets Russian banks and proposes a complete import ban on Russian oil and refined petroleum products within the next six months (Popović 2022b). For a start, however, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria – EU countries highly dependent on the Russian oil – will be exempted from the planned crude oil imports ban (Krstović 2022).

CONCLUSION

Serbian officials announced the signing of the Energy Treaty with Russia promising full domestic energy stability as the “business of the century.” Serbian and Russian officials justified this agreement with neo-traditional fraternal relations and neo-feudal close friendly relations between Serbian and Russian authorities, as well as close private relations between certain Russian and Serbian politicians. With this Treaty, Russia completely took over the domestic sector of crude oil and domestic gas, which enabled it

¹⁴ At the same time, this regulation does not apply to the EU countries – for example, Hungarian MOL, Austrian OMV and even the Russian Lukoil in Bulgaria are allowed to continue business as usual, i.e. to import gas and oil from Russia without any impediments.

¹⁵ Some sources claim that the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) is interested in buying the majority share in NIS from Gazprom (Demostat 2022).

to freely enjoy monopoly profits. Namely, after taking over NIS, Gazprom significantly increased the exploitation of domestic crude oil and natural gas reserves, without the accompanying progressive uplift in mining rent. In contrast, Serbian imports from Russia are largely reduced to imports of energy products. To sum up, taking into account NIS's exploitation of crude oil from domestic reserves and imports of crude oil from Russia it becomes obvious that Serbia is almost completely dependent on Russia and completely dependent on Russian natural gas imports and domestic natural gas production. The final price of the Treaty came to light with the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the consequent evermore restrictive EU measures against Russia over Ukraine and following tectonic geostrategic disturbances. Instead of full energy stability, Russia's monopolisation of the domestic crude oil and gas market, its invasion of Ukraine and the resulting EU sanctions have led Serbia to a highly probable event of total energy instability.

Currently, pressured by war tensions, growing inflation, recession and the potential outburst of another debt crisis, the world is in retreat from globalisation. These are the periods of potential constructive resets, but also fertile ground for the blossoming of extremism. What will prevail remains to be seen.

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EU AS THE OTHER?

OTHERING EUROPE IN POLISH RIGHT-WING MEDIA POST-2015¹

ABSTRACT

Since the victory of national right-wing populists Law and Justice (PiS) party and its coalition partners in 2015 elections, Poland has witnessed an illiberal and nationalist turn. Polish public discourse has become more polarized and saturated with sovereigntist content. The images of national community promoted in the public populist discourse have most convincingly been painted through various the practices of othering, in which the Other has become increasingly more threatening. The Other was no longer only a Stranger, but oftentimes, an

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Enemy of the nation. The key role in content-building and the popularization of this discourse has been played by the right-wing media, which not only promote the populist narrative of the politicians (populism through the media), but they also actively contribute to the populist discourse creating constitutive frames of analysis (populism by the media).

This chapter focuses specifically on the strategies of othering of Europe and the EU used by national populists in Poland in the name of promoting (and defending) Polish national traditional values, which have been portrayed as endangered by the liberal, supranational values professed by the EU. The empirical part of the study is based on the analysis of magazine covers of two opinion-making right-wing weeklies: *Gazeta Polska* and *Do Rzeczy* (2015–2021). The goal of the paper is to explore and analyse the ways in which the national Self is contrasted with the European Other.

KEYWORDS: image of Europe, populism, media, Poland, othering

INTRODUCTION

The 1st of May 2004 was a joyful celebration in Poland. After nearly five years of accession negotiations and more than a decade since Poland expressed its willingness to join the European integration project, the country finally became a member of the European Union. News programmes that day broadcasted festive celebrations from many cities in Poland. The excitement of the crowd went hand in hand with an overwhelmingly positive narrative of commentators and politicians speaking to mark this occasion. In the material aired in the main edition of the evening news (*Wiadomości*, TVP 1, 7.30pm) optimistic statements of people attending ceremonies, who talked about hopes and possibilities now opening up for Poles, were intertwined with enthusiastic commentaries from Polish politicians who interpreted the EU membership of Poland as a milestone in the unification of Europe (Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time) and the fulfillment of the will of a previous generation

(Lech Wałęsa, former President, the legendary leader of the “Solidarity” movement). Journalists leading *Wiadomości* also enthusiastically reported on the “celebrations that continued throughout Europe.” Danuta Holecka (today one of the faces of national public television, TVP, controlled by the government) in the studio in Warsaw, proudly acknowledged that now “apart from Warsaw, we have our second capital in Brussels,” and Michał Adamczyk (another journalist on today’s TVP), at the time a foreign correspondent, reported on the “picnic atmosphere [which] was sensed all over the Brussels.”²

This year (2022) marked Poland’s 18th anniversary as an EU member state. Yet the atmosphere of this anniversary, as presented by the national media, could not have differed more from the one of 2004’s celebrations. Not only did the evening edition of *Wiadomości* (TVP 1, 19:30)³ relegate Poland’s EU accession to second-category news, giving priority to the festivities of Labour Day, but the coverage was also rather critical overall. The material was discursively based on clear oppositions containing normative judgements. Content-wise, the benefits of EU accession were contrasted with the costs, with the scales tilted towards the latter: “Despite the costs,” the punchline stated, “the takeover of entire sectors of the economy by Western capital and huge emigration, especially among young people, Poles positively assess membership in the Union.” Actor-wise, it contraposed government with opposition, maintaining a clear evaluative characterisation: the former acting constructively to secure Poland’s strong position in the EU and latter being destructive in terms of actions and elitist in terms of style. The material focused on Donald Tusk who appeared in a double role as the leader of the opposition and former head of the European Council. Named as the ‘face of Brexit,’ Tusk was portrayed as “conducive to breaking EU rules by blackmailing the states which, according to the Treaties, defended themselves against the imposition of German migration policy.” On the level of international relations – the interests of the nation states were contraposed with those of the EU. The key problem was the direction of European integration – the EU was presented

² Video material is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhb9owr2rXw&t=1s> [accessed: November 14, 2022].

³ Video material is available at TVP’s website: <https://wiadomosci.tvp.pl/59945040/unia-eu-ropejska-potrzuje-reformy> [accessed: November 14, 2022].

as an organisation leaning towards centralistic federalism, forcing itself onto the space of nation states “without the consent of the citizens [acting] in the interests of the European elite and oligarchy” as explicitly stated by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (Polish MEP, associated with PiS).

Such a critical portrayal of the EU has become a common practice in Polish public discourse following the change of political power in Poland in 2015, when the national conservative Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) party, leading the coalition of United Right (*Zjednoczona Prawica*), won both parliamentary and presidential elections, securing itself a significant majority in Parliament. The electoral results in subsequent elections (2019 parliamentary and 2020 presidential) did not bring any major change, except for the opposition obtaining, by a small margin, a majority in the upper chamber of the Polish Parliament (*Senat*). While PiS remains at its core a national conservative party of clear welfare state orientation, its polarising discourse, constant appeal to ‘the people’ whom the party claims to represent, and strong anti-elitist bias (visible in both its narrative and in substantive policies introduced post-2015) make it also a populist party, as it is typically referred to in the literature on populism (e.g. van Kessel 2015; Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Stanley and Cześnik 2019; Sadurski 2022; Gwiazda 2020; Bill and Stanley 2020; Zabdyr-Jamróż et al. 2021; Bill 2022; Zbytniewska 2022). From the perspective of international relations, United Right remains Eurosceptic, however, it is internally diverse, accommodating different positions on Polish-EU relations, ranging from moderate Euroscepticism to far more radical Euroscepticism, bordering on rejectionism of United Poland (*Solidarna Polska*), PiS’s smaller partner in the United Right coalition. Despite internal differences, on the whole, Polish populists in power have remained critical as to the direction of the EU and the involvement of European institutions in the internal relations of its member states. United Right’s politicians, from both PiS and United Poland, have often been reaching for arguments taken out of the sovereignist handbook, vocally opposing a federalist model of integration, emphasising nation-state prerogatives and the rights of the ruling majority (namely the United Right government), elected via a democratic process, to determine the direction of country’s policies when it comes to various matters that are not within the competences of EU institutions, such as the judiciary, education, organisation of the civil service, etc. This critical narrative has been further perpetuated by the media, especially the national

public media controlled by the government and, most of all, the right-wing press sympathetic to the conservative, sovereignist Eurosceptic position of the United Right, often acting as the government's mouthpiece promoting its programme and distributing the government's political message. The result of the confluence of dependencies between the (right-wing and national) media and the government and the ideological proximity between the two is the intensification of negative coverage on the EU and European institutions in Polish public discourse, palpable since 2015.

The increasingly negative image of the EU, fuelled by the government and today's mainstream media, is an important social and political issue, as its consequences might be far reaching. For one, the image of Europe plays a role in processes of identity formation. This association goes back to Social Identity Theory and Tajfel and Turner's hypotheses (1979) that the positive group images foster an individual's identification with the group. Their proposition was further confirmed by Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez's study on national and European identity (2001), who empirically proved that the positive image of Europe, among other factors (such as a high degree of cognitive mobilisation and education) translated into stronger identification with Europe. In the face of these conclusions, it is therefore not unfounded to suspect that the continuous negative coverage on the EU might undermine trust in EU institutions and the EU, in time translating into a decline in support for EU membership.

The other aspect is the importance of discourse in swaying public opinion. Functional in this context is the category of 'discursive governance' put forward by Korkut et al. (2015), which, in short, refers to the preference of discourse as a tool to bypass formal institutions in policy-making. As such, it is one of the fundamental practices of populists (Bartha, Boda and Szikra 2020) who use discourse not only to inform about policies and convince the public, but they actually initiate politics and transmit change through such a discourse. Discursive governance therefore transforms discourse, which is full of narratives, leitmotifs and metaphors, into a normative mechanism, which constructs social reality, defines policy frames and influences the public (Korkut et al. 2015).

Considering the above, in this chapter we analyse the image of Europe and the EU (as these terms are often used interchangeably) constructed within the framework of populist discourse. Building on the understanding

of populism as a thin-centred ideology (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012), which ‘thickens’ if combined with other ideological features (Mudde 2017), we follow what is known as an ideational approach to populism (cf. Rovira Kaltwasser 2014; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Mudde 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; 2018) which defines populism as an ideology that is based on the conviction that a society is divided into two opposing and in fact, antagonistic groups: ‘the (pure) people’ whom populists claim to represent, and ‘the (corrupt) elites’ (Mudde 2004). A fundamental aspect of populism is its divisive nature and the discursive need to differentiate. Populists thrive on polarisation, they evoke fear, divert attention and scapegoat. They also make extensive use of Manichean language and always need an enemy (or enemies) against whom they want to defend the people. By this understanding, populism is not only anti-elitist but also fiercely exclusionary. For this reason, in our study on images of Europe, we are especially interested in the strategies of othering, i.e. the presentation of Europe/EU as the Other. The empirical part of the paper is based on a systematic analysis of the covers of two opinion-forming right-wing weeklies: *Gazeta Polska* and *Do Rzeczy*, from 2015 to 2021. Both weeklies are closely related to the populists in power and they have proven instrumental in spreading a specific set of ideas on Europe and the EU, creating a framework for discussions about Europe and the EU in contemporary Polish public discourse.

CONTEXTUALISATION

The analysis presented in this chapter is based on two fundamental assumptions. The first one is concerned with the relationship between right-wing populism and Euroscepticism. Although these concepts are not identical, they are nonetheless related. Indeed, Euroscepticism has often been an integral part of the message of right-wing and right-wing populist parties (Taggart 1998; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008; Harmsen 2010; Dúró 2016; Styczyńska 2018b; Guerra 2020; Csehi and Zgut 2021). In Poland, the anti-European political message had a rather marginal effect and subsequent Eurobarometer

studies showed Poland as one of the most pro-European societies across the EU. However, support for the European Union can be assessed as rather superficial: according to Mach and Styczyńska (2021), belonging to the EU is seen more through the prism of economic benefits rather than as a community of values. The overall suspicion towards Western Europe which characterises Law and Justice, rooted in historical, political and cultural context, provides fertile ground for the distrust of the European Union. This distrust is manifested in several ways: on the one hand, the rhetoric of “rising from the knees” and “regaining sovereignty” which in fact is a move away from a federal model of integration to a stronger role of the nation state. On the other hand, the United Right government openly defies some key European values. It does so, for instance, by introducing reforms threatening the rule of law and independence of the judiciary, coming into direct conflict with Brussels. Even a threat to block European funds does not seem to stop the government from implementing judiciary reform (or rather, as it is often labelled, deform). Furthermore, the neo-traditionalist rhetoric regarding issues of equality, diversity and multiculturalism is followed by concrete actions, such as the (unlawful) introduction of the nearly complete ban on abortion in 2020, which brought criticism from the European public, many MEPs and some key EU officials. These are just a few examples of contentious issues between Poland and the EU. The discursive message displayed on the magazines’ covers clearly aim at presenting a polarised and exaggerated take on the divide between Poland and the EU, amplifying the existing differences. The EU is presented as a distant elite, a superior power threatening Poland’s sovereignty, but also a champion of values that are foreign to Poles, and from which those who consider themselves as patriotic should defend themselves. Law and Justice and its right-wing populist allies in other European states are presented as a hope for Europe – a force which may transform the European Union.

The second pillar of the analysis is based on the conviction that media play an active role in forming populist discourse. There is a growing body of literature analysing the link between populism and the media (e.g. Esser, Stępińska and Hopmann 2016; Moffitt 2016; Higgins 2017; de Vreese et al. 2018). We concur with Moffitt’s remark, that the “media can no longer be treated as a ‘side issue’ when it comes to understanding contemporary populism. It must be put at the centre of our analysis” (Moffitt 2016: 94). Consistently

with this observation, we believe – as Wettstein et al. (2018) emphasises – that the media may play different roles when it comes to populism, from being a ‘gatekeeper’ for populist actors, to acting as an ‘interpretator,’ constructing meanings and narrative frames, to actually being an ‘initiator’ of change (Wettstein et al. 2018). In this context, the so-called ‘mediated populism,’ defined as “the outcome of the close connection between media-originated dynamics and the rise of populist sentiments, and eventually of populist movements” (Mazzoleni 2008) might take different forms depending on the stage of development of populism – from laying the grounds for populism in the early phase to strengthening its legitimacy once populists get into power (Mazzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield 2003). The link between media discourse and populism is especially visible in relation to right-wing populism (cf. Mazzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield 2003; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Wodak, Khosravinik and Mral 2013; Wodak 2015) and discourses on othering.

The dual relationship between the media and populists is very well illustrated by the Polish case (cf. Szafrńska 2015; Stępińska et al. 2017; Stępińska 2020; Stępińska and Lipiński 2020). There have been visible efforts from the side of United Right to secure itself with proper media outlets. This has taken three forms. For one, soon after the elections, the party completely subordinated Polish public media (TVP, Telewizja Polska). Since Jacek Kurski, a former PiS and United Poland member, became TVP’s CEO in 2016, TVP has been transformed into a *de facto* government medium, manifesting strong bias towards government policy – the best examples are the controversial flatter headlines on the main evening news towards the government and critical (bordering on offensive) headlines about the opposition, leading to many complaints to the National Broadcasting Council (*Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji*, KRRiT). United Right politicians have also been given significantly more airtime than the opposition.⁴ Secondly, the populist government also took steps towards the so-called repolonisation of the media (presented to the public as media deconcentration). In November 2020, Orlen – the Polish state-controlled oil company – bought Ruch, a chain of kiosks that sell newspapers, which gave the company the right to control the distribution

⁴ See for example: <https://www.wprost.pl/polityka/10481841/tvp-pokazala-dane-dotyczace-czasu-antenowego-dla-politykow-pis-bije-na-glowe-reszte-ugrupowan.html> [accessed: November 14, 2022].

of printed press. In December the same year Orlen took over Polska Press, one of the largest local publishers, which owns more than 20 regional newspapers and 120 weeklies and has a strong presence in digital press, with a reach of approximately 17 million readers. Thirdly, the party capitalised on the strategy of building political and social support through the right-wing conservative press. It has mostly relied on *Gazeta Polska*, in circulation since 1996, which has openly supported the United Right government. Its local clubs, which have a strong presence in Polish towns, have built a significant strong grassroot support for the party (Ślarzyński 2018). The government also benefited from the support of other right-wing weeklies, such as *Sieci* (previously *wSieci*) and *Do Rzeczy* (established in 2013 by “Niepokorni” journalists), which share a conservative orientation with PiS, actively promoting its policies. It has also drawn from the support of Catholic weeklies, including *Gość Niedzielny*, which systematically publishes interviews with leading politicians from United Right.

The relationship between the populist government and the media has proven to be mutually beneficial. From the perspective of politicians, it has provided them with the necessary space to promote their ideas. From the perspective of the right-wing media, such a relationship gave them important financial benefits, as they could count on advertising contracts of state-owned companies, and it also gave them additional power: those media outlets (newspapers and weeklies) became true creators of the reality. Not only have they been choosing what and in what order to report (agenda-setting), but they have also been forming narrative frames, providing readers with meaning, showing them what and how to think about the issues discussed (agenda framing). In that sense, of the three, the latter, i.e. right wing weeklies, especially *Gazeta Polska* and *Do Rzeczy*, have come to illustrate what Esser et al. (2016) calls ‘populism by the media’ (as opposed to ‘populism through the media’) which emphasises the creative role of these media outlets in constructing, not only perpetuating, populist discourse.

Having established the relationship between Polish right-wing populism, Euroscepticism and right-wing media discourses, it is important to properly outline the key characteristics of Polish public discourse post-2015. This should allow us to place the discussion about Europe in the appropriate narrative context.

Following the political change in Poland in 2015, Polish political discourse has entered a new phase: it became increasingly polarised and saturated with a patriotic (nationalistic) narrative, full of invocations to 'nation' and 'sovereignty.' The central element of Polish political discourse has been its increasingly divisive rhetoric, converting, as a result, pre-existing social divisions into deep social cleavages. PiS mastered the art of communication in this respect on a number of levels. By operating constantly on categories of division (discursive 'us' versus 'them'), PiS ideationally created an image of the irreconcilable breakdown of society into two opposing categories. The impression of the duration of this division was further strengthened by the reuse (revival) of some old, divisive categories, which were previously used by the party and its leader. As an example, PiS returned to the notion of 'układ' (used by Jarosław Kaczyński back in the 1990s as a synonym of corruption and abuse, associated with the possession of economic and political influence of unknown provenience, most likely rooted in communist reality) linking it now with the category of 'the elites' (as the enemy of the people). At the same time, the party came back to the division used in the 2005 election campaign of 'liberal' Poland and 'solidary' Poland, which recalls the well-known division of Poland into Poland A and B, that refers to the geographic and social divide and corresponds to electoral preferences. By and large, Poland A is the part of the country that is located towards the Western border, it includes more densely populated areas and a number of large cities; it tends to vote liberal. Poland B covers the area to the East, with more rural zones and small towns and votes conservative. The liberal versus solidary Poland was a strongly normative division: liberal came to signify non-solidary and egoistic; solidary Poland, on the other hand was virtuous, and represented the people. Transferring these categories onto the antagonism between the people and the elites, constitutive for populism, we end up with a particular type of conceptual amalgam. It is based on the division into two opposing groups (1) the liberal elites ('liberal Poland'), who are pro-capitalistic, pro-western and cosmopolitan, and at the same time post-communist (relation to 'układ'); and (2) regular, hard-working people, who were oppressed by the communists, then side-lined by the forces of liberal post-communist transformation, and later forgotten and used by the liberals.

Those discourse divisions were linked with the increasingly national(istic) narrative. An important part of PiS's discursive policy-making, reinforced by the conservative right-wing press, has been the portrayal of the 'sovereign,' 'the nation,' and 'the people' as one. This triple relationship stems from the supposed homogeneity of the people, who are imagined as a collective unit (thus equating 'the people' with the nation) and a majoritarian character of the people (the people constitute the electorate, they give legitimacy to those who rule in their name, thus 'the people' equals 'the sovereign'). The key lies therefore in the choice of fundamental values that define the nation. In line with United Right's Catholic conservative profile, the Polish nation as the subject of politics (nation as sovereign, the basis of the legitimisation of PiS power) and its main object (nation as the people in whose name the party is ruling), was discursively constructed as the community built on traditional values (the Catholic Church, traditional Polish family with clearly-defined social roles of men and women) and imaginatively located in small towns and the Polish countryside. The rhetoric used by the populists and perpetuated by the media was based on a simple and clear division: traditional local Poland was contraposed with the pluralistic ('not truly Polish') Poland of fast-paced secular cities. 'The local' was contrasted with 'the global,' 'the Polish' with 'the foreign,' 'the patriotic' with 'the cosmopolitan,' 'the people' with 'the elites' – us with them.

The central figure of this highly divisive political discourse was the Other, imagined not as a friendly neighbour, but an enemy – a dangerous and potentially threatening Other. PiS time and again reached for a 'besieged fortress' rhetoric to define its politics under the umbrella of national security: to protect the nation against threats that might come from the outside, be it in the form of refugees (as a cultural other), foreign countries which may want to impose their power (as the political other), or foreign companies that might push out national players (as the economic other). The Other existed also inside Polish society, representing all those who were not-truly-Polish Poles; the liberal elites and members of unpopular minorities. The practice of Othering, as the way to define and single-out and eventually exclude potentially dangerous Others, became the key discourse practice used by political actors and even more so by the right-wing press, which had established a practice of using such a rhetoric in the initial stage of laying grounds for populist rule.

CONCEPTUALISATION

The key conceptual term used in this study is the aforementioned category of *othering*, which we understand as a process of differentiation and boundary building which differentiates between in-group (and what the in-group stands for) and the out-group. It is primarily a discursive practice, a form of storytelling, through which differences that exist between people acquire special meaning: othering transforms otherwise often ordinary peculiarities into an axis of division that separates 'us' from 'them.' Qualities that may serve as those divisive attributes may include a wide variety of aspects, ranging from age, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, sexual orientation, through occupation, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, professions and group affiliation. Essentially, everything in the right circumstances may be converted into a differentiating element. By operating on a structural dichotomous level between the Self ('us') and Other ('them'), othering is functionally crucial for identity formation: it defines the difference, draws the boundary and provides frameworks of interpretation.

The process of othering has numerous particularities. First of all, it is relational and intersubjective: the 'other' can only exist relative to the 'self.' Identity (who I am) and othering (who I am not) are therefore two sides of the same coin (Staszak 2009). This interdependency between Self and Other, on the level of group identification ('us' and 'them'), is portrayed through the dynamics between belonging and othering (Powell and Menendian 2016).

Secondly, othering is contextual, who the Other is, what importance it has, which Other is significant and which is not, are all a matter of context. Just like the identity construction process, the practice of othering depends on both the circumstances in which it occurs as well as on the subject, on who drives the narrative. Being a discursive process, othering is always a part of someone's story. Who the storyteller is and who the audience is by no means less important as the content itself.

Thirdly, othering is hierarchical. There is an implicit asymmetry of power involved in the process. Othering is conducted from the perspective and through the prism of an in-group which sets itself in a superior position towards the Other. This superiority/inferiority dimension, intrinsic to othering,

manifests itself through a positive valuation of the in-group (attributing it with positive characteristics), and the lack of such (or ascribing negative traits) in the out-group (them). This clearly asymmetric relationship is based upon strong stereotyping which is fuelled by an out-group homogeneity bias (the belief that people who do not belong to the in-group are alike) and, at the same time, in-group favouritism (a tendency to favour members of one's own group over the others), both of which are well-studied phenomena in social psychology (e.g. Billig and Tajfel 1973; Tajfel 1982; Allison and Messick 1985; Cadsby, Du and Song 2016).

Fourthly, the process of othering produces a particular type of Other. The very category of the Other has been a subject of much scholarly inquiry produced within the field of philosophy, psychoanalysis, social psychology and sociology, where it was always inextricably linked with the process of defining the Self. While the relationship between the Self and Other is often marked by tensions, the Other does not necessarily need to be negatively evaluated. It is, in fact, a capacious concept that might evoke divergent attitudes of the speaker towards the Other, who can be either a friend, a neighbour, a stranger or a foe. Yet, the Other portrayed through the process of othering is never a positive (or neutral) designation, but it irresistibly brings negative connotations. Othering is never concerned with a friendly Stranger but a suspicious Other, one that threatens (factually or implicitly) the well-being of the ingroup. To put it simply, the Other that emerges in the process of othering is someone who is not only not like us, who does not belong to us, but one who is disruptive and potentially dangerous.

The process of othering has a long-standing tradition in power relations, the sociology of nations and nationalism and (post)colonial studies, where the dichotomous division between the Self and the Other, the 'known' and the 'foreign,' the 'coloniser' and 'the colonised' (e.g. Said 1978; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000; Fabian 2002; Spivak 2006) have been a focal point of the analysis. In all cases, it is the dominant discourse that defines the Other assigning them a subordinate position as a passive object, which is described and represented in a simplistic homogenous manner (Sadecka 2020). Even in cases when the Other might at first appear to be valued, as is the case with exoticism, its portrayal is always stereotypical, it is "staged and transformed into merchandise [...] the colonial world offered up as a spectacle, as in orientalist paintings, human zoos... and exotic dance"

(Staszak 2009: 6), all presented for our pleasure and only perpetuating our sense of superiority. In such discourses of othering, the Other is always dominated, subordinated and estranged.

STUDY APPROACH & METHOD

In this study we analyse images of Europe in populist discourse in Poland post-2015. We focus on two leading weekly political magazines that have been known to either explicitly or more implicitly support the populist right-wing government, namely *Gazeta Polska* and *Do Rzeczy*. Our aim is to determine, in the first place, how Europe (and/or the EU) is portrayed in the right-wing media and, secondly, what the relationship between Europe and the national community is (is there any relationship presented, and, if so, is it harmonious or antagonistic?). If the relationship between Europe (the EU) and Poland is antagonistic and Europe is othered, the question is: what are the grounds for othering and how and why is Europe being othered?

The research method is based on the analysis of magazine covers, as they provide excellent material for studying agenda setting and framing of discourses, and include ample textual and graphic material. The covers speak not only to readers of the magazines, but are displayed in kiosks, press corners, etc., becoming part of the everyday landscape. They function similarly to memes in social media as they are posted, circulated and commented on by internet users. They create a frame of analysis for current events that is achieved through a variety of methods. At the most basic level it is done through the front cover which indicates the main topic and immediately creates a frame for interpretation – thanks to graphics, headlines, colours and an appropriate arrangement of elements on the page. The content of the journal is filtered by the reader through the prism of the frame created by the cover.

This analysis is part of a larger study, as a result of which a rich database of magazine covers was created, containing covers of two magazines from the period between 2015 and mid-2022. The selection begins in 2015, as it is the year when the right-wing Law and Justice and its allies came to power, winning

both the presidential election in May 2015, and the parliamentary elections in October 2015. For the purpose of this chapter, two magazines were selected, as best representing two types of right-wing discourses. These are *Gazeta Polska*, catering to a somewhat older, more traditionally conservative population, often making references to Catholic faith and the Church, and *Do Rzeczy*, which aims at rallying a younger readership by using more frequent references to popular culture and more creative, meme-like imagery. Both magazines do not refrain from scandals, controversies, divisive and even offensive language, as well as attacks on the liberal opposition that can be considered rather brutal (e.g. portraying Donald Tusk in a Nazi uniform). The database contains a total of 766 covers: 380 of *Do Rzeczy* and 386 of *Gazeta Polska* (all issues from years 2015–2021, and 24 or 25 issues from the first half of 2022). Among those 56 covers featured themes related directly to European Union (referring to Europe, the EU or represented by its flag or its colours). Those covers were grouped according to the way the EU is represented and evaluated: in a positive, negative or neutral sense. The choice of covers was based on qualitative analysis and interpretation and, as such, it is marked by a certain subjectivity.

TABLE 1. Overview of the database of the analysed magazine covers of two weeklies: *Do Rzeczy* (DR) and *Gazeta Polska* (GP)

	DR	Covers on EU				GP	Covers on EU			
		Pos.	Neg.	Neutr.			Pos.	Neg.	Neutr.	
2015	52	1	1		52	0				
2016	51	6	4	2	52	1	1			
2017	50	4	4		52	4	4			
2018	50	1	1		51	5	5			
2019	50	3	3		51	1	1			
2020	52	4	4		52	5	4	1		
2021	51	7	7		51	7	1	6		
2022	24	3	1	1	25	4	4			
Total:	380	29	2	24	3	386	27	1	25	1

Source: own database of weekly magazines, including the results of interpretative analysis of the relevance of the EU and attitudes towards the EU on the weekly magazine covers.

On the whole, the coverage on the EU has been predominantly negative (see Table 1), with the exception of a recent *Do Rzeczy* (further abbreviated: DR) cover showing the EU and US as allied in the conflict with Russia (DR 11/2022). Even when a cover is seemingly positive, for instance *Gazeta Polska* (GP) 5/2021, showing Polish and EU flags side-by-side, and a smiling John Paul II, the title hides a veiled criticism: “Time for a Polish Europe.” It is thus suggested that the EU is lacking in Catholic values and morality, and Poland, represented by the heritage of the former pope, will make it better. We can also observe some changes over time. While in 2015, hardly any covers referred to the EU, as the focus was on matters of national interest (particularly the electoral campaign before the presidential and then parliamentary elections), after the United Right coalition came to power in fall of that year, the coverage (mostly negative) increased. In the following years, approximately 1–5 covers each year in each of the magazines were related to the EU. In 2021 the number seems to increase to 7 in both *Gazeta Polska* and *Do Rzeczy*. The fact that in 2022 there are already 3–4 covers that deal with the EU in each of the magazines, shows that a similar increase seems likely across the year. This is in line with the intensifying conflict between the Polish government and EU institutions over the rule of law, other instances of democratic backsliding and EU funds. While this increase is still not very strongly observable, it is likely to increase if the current Polish government decides to heighten the conflict, or to decrease if it adopts a more moderate stance towards Brussels. A more in-depth analysis, using frames of interpretation related to the concept of othering, was performed on the covers that were identified.

ANALYSIS

Analysing both the visual and textual media discourses for representations of Europe reveals four dimensions of othering. By and large, they are constructed as binary oppositions between the collective Self and Other. What the Other is, the Self is not – and the other way round. Such simple dichotomies – Self/Other, cool/uncool, patriot/traitor, are typical

of the contemporary magazines, with their goal to provide entertainment and an emotional reaction (Bartoszewicz 2017: 106). As such, weekly magazines are an ideal outlet for populist entrepreneurs. They create, strengthen and multiply images of various Others and enemies, which threaten the people understood as the nation, with its traditions, values, identity and world-view. These oppositions can be divided into four types, based on the logic of othering as: 1) populist (thin), 2) populist (thick), 3) axiological, and 4) identity-related. The research findings will be discussed using these four types of binary oppositions.

1. (THIN) POPULIST OTHERING: PEOPLE (NATION) VERSUS ELITES (EU)

The first dimension can be labelled as a rather typical, thin populist othering on the axis of 'the people' versus 'the elites.' In this dimension, the nation (in these discourses, the Polish nation) is positioned in opposition to a distant, European elite. This form of othering frequently refers to EU institutions, EU-level politicians, technocrats and lobbyists, who are part of a global elite. It may take milder forms, for instance underlining distance by the use of the pronoun 'they,' or terms such as 'Brussels technocrats,' 'EU chiefs,' 'Eurocommissairs,' etc. However, even these terms have ideological connotations. A *Do Rzeczy* cover features Donald Tusk, the right-wing's political opponent, who took the position of President of the European Council as "Their Man in Brussels" (DR 11/2017). It is implied that Tusk represents the opposing party or even an unspecified interest group (global elites, foreign powers, etc.). The leaders of the EU are generally presented as corrupt and succumbing to lobbying of billionaire George Soros (a favourite figure of conspiracy theorists). One of the covers features Soros as a proud and condescending lord, with a ruff in colours of the European flag – the headline says: "Eurocommissioners on Soros' Leash" (GP 7/2021). Members of the European Commission are thus deemed as lacking independence, autonomy and integrity, and are owned by a powerful master. Another cover appeals to perhaps older readers with an anti-communist worldview, suggesting that some EU leaders have "red roots" (DR 49/2017). The image depicts well-known EU politicians (Barroso, Mogherini, Juncker, Moscovici) against a blue background, circled by yellow stars, one of which is painted red. The reference to the Soviet red star is very obvious, especially to readers

who remember the communist era. Therefore, it is not only a mechanism of presenting EU elites as a distant Other, but these elites are also deemed to be ideologically biased and corrupt.

Members of the Polish liberal opposition, who hold positions in Brussels, are a special subcategory, particularly often singled out in the right-wing media coverage. They are often shown as traitors of the nation, showing greater loyalty to the European Union than to Poland. The prime example (unsurprisingly, being the leading political opponent of Law and Justice) is Donald Tusk. On the 32/2017 cover of *Do Rzeczy*, Tusk is seen in a red and white football outfit, whispering in the ear of Frans Timmermans (Vice-President of the European Commission), donning a blue outfit – it can be assumed that Polish politicians play for the other team. The headline does not leave any ambiguity: “DENOUNCING POLAND: Opposing the government, the *total opposition* does not hesitate to harm our state [act against the national interest]” (DR 32/2017). Another figure accused of disloyalty to Poland is EU Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska, given the nickname “Lady Treason” (GP 40/2018), as well as the entire Civic Platform party, which allegedly “pushes Poland out of the EU” (GP 47/2018). Here, the laughing Donald Tusk and Grzegorz Schetyna (former and current leaders of the party) use a sling to shoot out the Polish red-and-white star out of the circle of yellow EU stars. This simple imagery implies that, for the liberal elites, belonging to the EU is just a childish game, and they are willing to gamble away the national interest (to remain in the EU) for their short-term political goals. What has to be underlined is that, in spite of the narrative accusing the EU to be elitist, being a member of the Union is still underlined as being in the Polish national interest.

2. (THICK) POPULIST OTHERING: SOVEREIGN NATION VS DICTATORIAL, SUPRANATIONAL ENTITY

While the opposition between the people and the elite is an almost *sine qua non* condition of populism, in the analysis of right-wing populist media discourses, a symbolic thickening can also be observed (Kotwas and Kubik 2019). In the context of the relationship between Poland and the EU, the part of the people oppressed by a powerful elite is played by Poland, one of the EU’s member states, fighting for its sovereignty and independence,

while the EU is cast as a dictatorial, supranational entity, wanting to dominate and subjugate the Polish state. Among tensions regarding infringements of the rule of law in Poland and subsequent rulings of the Court of Justice of the EU, *Gazeta Polska* accuses the Court of abuses of power. The Polish acronym for the Court – TSUE – is shown as standing for *Trybunał Satrapów Unii Europejskiej*: “Court of Satraps of the EU” (GP 44/2018), associating the EU with a classic notion of a satrap, understood as a tyrant, a despotic ruler, that delegitimises the Union’s critique of legal changes in Poland after the right-wing populists’ coming to power. Another powerful image features on the cover of *Do Rzeczy* in January 2020: a foot wearing a shoe in the colours of the EU flag is about to step on the building of the Polish parliament (DR 2/2020). The headline is short and simple: “Brussels’ Dictate” (DR 2/2020). The idea of crushing Polish sovereignty and overpowering the decisions of Polish lawmakers is emphasised here with the symbolic soiling of Poland through the EU shoe trampling over Polish democracy.

The effectiveness of such rhetoric and imagery is further increased by inscribing the conflict between Poland (or rather, the current Polish government) and the EU in the history of Polish struggles for independence. The European Union is often depicted as a German-dominated entity. On the cover of *Gazeta Polska*, three well-known figures are shown: Róża Thun (a Polish MEP married to an Austrian), Guy Verhofstadt (Belgian MEP) and Donald Tusk (European Council President with Kashubian heritage) (GP 4/2018). They point their fingers at the reader, and the headline says “Raus!” (meaning “out!” in German). None of these people are actually German but their real or imagined Germanic connection, coupled with the fact that they have expressed criticism of the Polish right-wing government, is enough to instill fear. In other instances, the covers emphasise the Polish struggle for independence in the context of the EU. This is done, for instance, by featuring Marshall Józef Piłsudski asking “Poland – independent in the European Union?” (DR 45/2018) – notice the very telling question mark. Another example is the cover showing an (in)famous right-wing celebrity, Wojciech Cejrowski, with a gun, ready to shoot out the European flag (DR 3/2019). The headline quotes his words: “Poland deserves independence” (DR 3/2019). The critique of the European Union seems to intensify over time. While membership of the EU was not openly questioned in the earlier part of the analysed period, over time, the term *Polexit* starts to be used. One of the covers accuses the liberal

opposition of blocking any debates on such a possibility – “Polexit Blackmail” (DR 13/2019). Such an escalation is in part due to the logic of discourse on sovereignty: if the EU is indeed a successor of German occupiers and if it truly subjugates Poland by taking away its sovereignty, freeing the nation from the tyrant is the only patriotic solution. It also is a response to steps taken by the EU to protect its fundamental values, such as the rule of law and liberal democracy, against the illiberal or even autocratic tendencies of the right-wing populist governments in Poland and Hungary.

3. AXIOLOGICAL OTHERING: NATIONAL, TRADITIONAL VALUES VS LEFTIST, FOREIGN AND SECULAR VALUES

Undeniably, the tensions between Poland and the EU are shown as a conflict of values. It is not only a discussion about legal reforms, endangering the principle of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. It is a discussion on heated topics related to core European values: the protection of individual rights (in particular, rights of women and sexual minorities), on the role of religion in the public sphere, or on migration. The EU is portrayed as the champion of leftist ideology and, in this regard, is a successor of the Soviet Union (“All Power in the Hands of Feminists. From Red Moscow to Rainbow Brussels,” DR 51/2020). It supports feminist and LGBT+ leaders, who – in right-wing narratives – are shown as a threat to public order and as dangerous, deviant and amoral individuals (DR 11/2021). Poland supposedly defends traditional values against the “terror of the progressives” (DR 28/2016). One of the *Do Rzeczy* covers presents leading right-wing journalists, Tomasz Terlikowski and Jan Pospieszalski, in shiny silver armours and a Polish border post in the background. The headline is: “Poland versus the Homoempire” (DR 28/2016). The cover may very well refer to crusader knights standing in defence of Christian values, but its aesthetics reminds rather of one of the Star Wars movies, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). The mix of traditionalism and popular culture tropes is a common characteristic of the visual representations of *Do Rzeczy*.

Another common theme on the right-wing magazines’ covers is the association of the European Union with the issue of migration. The EU is portrayed as too open to migrants, particularly Muslim ones. As a result, there is no place for Christian values anymore. A *Gazeta Polska* cover issued around

Christmas 2021 features the Holy Family against the backdrop of the European Parliament building in Strasbourg, and headline: “There Is No Place For You” (GP 51–52/2021). The secular EU is accused of banishing Joseph, Mary and the new-born Jesus in an analogy to the biblical story of Holy Family fleeing Palestine ruled by Herod to Egypt. However, a different religion is supposedly taking prominence in the EU: Islam. Not only, it is said, do refugees bring “deadly diseases” to the EU (GP 30/2017), but they also bring with them their religion, shown only in a negative light. Another cover of *Gazeta Polska* (35/2017) features the Eiffel Tower with a crescent on top, surrounded by the EU stars. The headline does not leave any doubts on what is going on: “Caliphate Europe” (GP 35/2017). Hence, the EU not only represents different values by virtue of being secular, but also it is becoming “Islamised,” according to the right-wing magazines. Nevertheless, there is a possibility of salvation: the EU should follow the Polish example. Indeed, “Poland is an island of hope for Europe” (GP 15/2017) and it will save the EU. Former Pope John Paul II can be the face of such a transformation. *Gazeta Polska* shows his figure against a blue background with yellow stars, announcing: “Time for a Polish-style Europe” (GP 5/2021).

The vision of Poland as the saviour of nations, rooted in Romanticist nationalism, is a powerful narrative. As it was a nation struggling for its independence when subjugated by three large empires, the survival of the collective identity was strongly linked to the power of spirit and allegiance to the Catholic faith and national values. Romantic poets believed that once Poland would rise from the ashes, it would become ‘a Messiah of nations’ and inspire other nations to become free. Hence, the idea of contemporary Poland becoming a champion of traditional, Christian values, which can overpower the leftist and secular outlook of the EU, undoubtedly resonates with the right-wing magazines’ readers. Furthermore, the concept of a spiritual leadership is followed by more pragmatic appeals to a political and ideological right-wing counterrevolution. It is supposedly feared by “trembling European leftists” (DR 7/2016). One of the covers portrays Jarosław Kaczyński as Superman, charging forward and pushing the rainbow-coloured star out of the EU’s flag (DR 7/2016) or Viktor Orbán as Napoleon Bonaparte, who “gave us the example on how to fight for our cause” (DR 12/2017). Central European leaders are presented as part of a broader right-wing coalition, together with Italy’s Matteo Salvini and Spanish Vox party leader, Santiago

Abascal (DR 23/2019). The headline asks: “Counterrevolution. Will the right wing save Europe?” (DR 23/2019).

Thus, the EU as a structure may be seen as distant and bureaucratic, but the right-wing narratives do not fully dismiss it – they want to transform it. It is a perverse demonstration of allegiance to the idea of Poland’s membership in the EU. Not only does Poland – in right-wing narratives – want to belong to Europe, but also make it better. Such a mission can be inscribed in the long history of Polish ‘messianic’ beliefs, central to the formation of national identity. These visions of grandeur, even among strongest hardships, are nurtured by the Polish right-wing in an attempt to present a counternarrative to (more fact-based) liberal opinions, claiming that Poland under the leadership of Law and Justice is becoming marginalised and isolated in the EU.

The notions of counterrevolution, used explicitly by right-wing ideologues and popularised by the right-wing media present the populist movement as a rebellion against the liberal and democratic *status quo*. Scholars talk of an illiberal turn (Bustikova and Guasti 2017), a cultural backlash to post-materialist and postmodern values (Inglehart and Norris 2016), a revolt against liberal democracy (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018), or counterrevolution against the 1989 anti-communist revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe (Zielonka 2018). Indeed, the populist attacks on Europe and the EU in right-wing magazines analysed here rupture the consensus held by almost all mainstream Polish parties until now, that European integration is a priority for Poland. While Euroscepticism or various forms of critique of the EU could be observed among different political parties in Poland over time (Styczyńska 2018a), questioning the very membership of Poland in the EU seems to be a dangerous game that PiS is playing.

4. IDENTITY-RELATED OTHERING: PATRIOTIC POLES VS COSMOPOLITANS

Finally, the fourth aspect of Othering Europe is placing national identity in opposition to European identity. Ignoring that identity is a dynamic, multi-layered and relational phenomenon, the right-wing magazines create a false division. On the one side, there are patriotic Poles, loyal to their nation, on the other side, there are the mysterious ‘EU-nians,’

people who value the EU higher than their nation. On a *Do Rzeczy* cover, several well-known figures of the liberal opposition are branded as “EU-nians of Polish origin: Politicians, for whom Brussels is more important than Warsaw” (DR 30/2021). The expression “of Polish origin” is widely used in right-wing discourses to denote political opponents and question their patriotism. Thus, they are not called Polish politicians, but politicians of Polish origin. In this case, public criticism of the Law and Justice-led government for its illiberal policies and democratic backsliding is branded as disloyal and treacherous. Polish politicians who express such criticism, for instance during debates in the European Parliament, are deemed unworthy of being called Polish. Such a division goes further and is applied to Polish society as a whole. Another *Do Rzeczy* cover shows Poland divided into two halves. One of them is in the colours of the Polish flag, the other in the colours of the EU. People represented in these halves look opposite ways from one another. The headline is: “The Second Nation: Poles versus EU-nians of Polish origin” (DR 48/2021). The division of society into “true” Poles and more cosmopolitan, “EU-nians of Polish origin,” refers to the social and political polarisation in Poland and again presents a collective identity based on a binary opposition of two models: Polish and European. It exacerbates the existing divides and presents a multi-layered identity, composed both of national and European identification, as impossible. A citizen has to choose where their loyalty lies, even if, in reality, it is a false choice.

The idea of a “second nation” is in itself problematic and strongly charged. It refers to a subcategory seen as inferior – a subtype of Poles – who are not the true, patriotic Poles. They are the subtype that is often accused of supporting liberal elites or the left, of living empty and consumerist middle-class lives, without spiritual and national values (*lemingi*). When political need demands it, and in the context of ongoing events and debates, the criticism of these groups intensifies and uses highly charged, if not offensive, terms. Those raising the issue of climate change are called “ecoterrorists,” those supporting LGBT+ rights: “homopropagandists,” and those who join protests in defence of women’s rights in times of the COVID-19 pandemic: “sowers of death.” In such cases, the liberal Other, already positioned as radically opposite to the ideal-type of a patriotic, religious, conservative Pole, becomes a target of a massive discursive attack. The invention of a new

label, “the EUnians,” promoted and repeated by *Do Rzeczy*, refers to yet another dimension in which liberal Poles reveal themselves as unpatriotic and unworthy of being called Poles.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of right-wing magazines’ covers post-2015 reveals that the European Union is presented in overwhelmingly negative terms. While the current Polish government may not intend for Poland to leave the EU, the media that are its close ideological allies, circulate images that not only offer a critique of the Union’s institutions or politicians, but also associate it with moral and political corruption, historical guilt, excesses of power and hegemonic ambitions. However, these visions are often contradictory. Sometimes, the EU is associated with Nazi Germany (see GP 26/2016, illustrating a swastika emerging from the European flag), and sometimes with the Soviet Union (e.g. a red star as part of the yellow stars of the EU flag, DR 49/2017; or the idea that the “rainbow Brussels” is a continuator of “red Moscow,” DR 51/2022). EU officials are accused, at times, of having excessive power (DR 40/2021) and, at other times, they are presented as mere puppets of global forces, supposedly steered by George Soros (GP 7/2021). When the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, the EU was shown as the main power, together with the United States, to oppose Russia (DR 11/2022), but is also accused of complicity with Russia (GP 5/2022 states that “Germans finance the Russian war”). These contradictions are related to differences in the profiles of the two outlets, but also show that the image of the EU among the right wing of the media landscape is not uniform. It appears that anti-German tropes are more frequently observable in *Gazeta Polska* than *Do Rzeczy*, as the latter tends to underline the ideological threat of the left. *Gazeta Polska*, with an older readership, makes references to the history of the Second World War and Nazism, while *Do Rzeczy* is more likely to refer to the period of socialism, conflating the pre-1989 socialists with present-day leftist activists. *Gazeta*

Polska more frequently employs Catholic motifs, as it caters to an older, more religious readership. In spite of these differences, it is clear that the EU emerges from these media representations as a supranational entity threatening the sovereignty of the state, and an ideological opponent.

These media messages correspond to United Right politicians' criticism of the EU and the magazine covers amplify their message. The four dimensions that were identified above, 1) thin populist, 2) thick populist, 3) axiological and 4) identity-related, are fairly consistent with the broader patterns of representation of the EU in the right-wing discourses. We argue that the European Union is being othered, presented as an external entity, in opposition to the collective self. The degrees of this othering may vary but, overall, the EU is shown as a distant, and sometimes threatening Other – not a community to which Polish society belongs. The appearance of discussions on the so-called Polesxit is also indicative of a certain challenge to a widely held consensus about the benefits of Poland's membership in the European Union. While Polesxit may not happen, bringing this topic up on the covers may be used as a feeler – a test on how readers will respond to this idea. Even if the magazines discussed here do not represent the views of the majority of Poles, they act as powerful opinion-forming platforms that have the power to form and sway public opinion and, at the same time, impact the tone and content of public debate in Poland. The fact that Polesxit is even discussed and that the EU is constantly presented in negative terms will have consequences, impacting Poles' attitudes towards EU institutions and the EU as a whole. Undoubtedly, what we are observing now is a significantly different perspective on the EU compared to the enthusiastic tone adopted – sometimes by the very same journalists – at the time of Poland's accession to the EU in 2004.

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POPULIST EUROSCEPTICISM IN POLAND: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS¹

ABSTRACT

EU membership and European integration have generally enjoyed consistent and relatively high support among the public and political elites in Poland. Recent years, however, have seen EU contestation become an increasingly prominent feature of Polish politics. The 2015 election victories by Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) have resulted in the strengthening of the Eurosceptic and populist political discourse, as well as in a conflict with the European Commission concerning the rule of law in Poland. Euroscepticism is often considered to be

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closely related to populist politics as many populist slogans are, at the same time, anti-EU. The recent increase in EU contestation in Polish politics has been linked to a surge in populism in Europe in general, and to an increase in populist and illiberal politics on the domestic level. Although the body of literature in the field of populist and Eurosceptic politics is growing, there is still room for discussing the theoretical approach to the study of populist Euroscepticism. In this chapter, we analyse the state of play in the field of populist Euroscepticism in Poland and the rest of Europe, and, based on the existing research, we suggest the most useful approach to define and study populist Euroscepticism observed in Poland.

KEYWORDS: populism, Euroscepticism, party politics, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Opposition to European integration emerged in post-communist new EU member states alongside the process of EU accession but has long remained a relatively marginal phenomenon in post-communist politics. EU membership and European integration, which accompanied the processes of transformation, and the general trend of globalisation, have generally enjoyed consistent and relatively high support among the public and political elites in Poland (Styczyńska 2021; Zuba 2021). Recent years, however, have seen EU contestation become an increasingly prominent feature of Polish politics. The 2015 election victories by Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) have resulted in a “radical intensification of criticism of the EU” (Zuba 2021: 398) by the Polish government, as well as in a conflict with the European Commission concerning the rule of law in Poland. A number of consecutive European and global crises have further intensified the debate on EU membership and its relation to national sovereignty. Yet, despite the increased contestation of European integration in Polish politics, public opinion of EU membership has remained consistently high over the past decade. According to the 2022 Eurobarometer, more than 80% of Poles feel attached to the EU (European Commission 2022). This discrepancy between the broad pro-EU attitude

of the public and the Eurosceptic tendencies of a large part of the political scene makes anti-EU populism especially interesting in the case of Poland.

Euroscepticism is often considered to be closely related to populist politics (Lasoń 2011; Pirro and Taggart 2018). Many populist slogans are, at the same time, anti-EU, and the recent increase in EU contestation in Polish politics has been linked to a surge in populism in Europe in general, and to an increase in populist and illiberal politics domestically in particular (Jakubowski 2020: 232; Zuba 2021: 394). This is not only the case in newer member states, but also in countries such as Austria, the Netherlands and France. However, anti-EU populism is especially interesting in the case of Poland, a new member state that is the greatest beneficiary of EU funds and one of the most pro-European societies in the EU.

Support for populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) increased from 9% in the early 2000s to almost 35% in 2017 (Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 289), but still, most knowledge about populists comes from research focusing on populists in Western Europe. Similarly, the case of Euroscepticism in CEE requires more scholarly attention. Although Euroscepticism and populism are fashionable terms, the relationship between them seems to not have been fully examined. In order to understand them we need a systematic approach to the correlation between the two phenomena. In this chapter, we analyse the state of play in the field of populist Euroscepticism in Poland and the rest of Europe, and, based on the existing research, we suggest the most useful approach to define and study populist Euroscepticism observed in Poland. The chapter, along with others in this book, is a result of work conducted within the POPREBEL Horizon 2020 project and the empirical study of populist Euroscepticism in Poland will follow based on the proposed framework.

POPULISM

DEFINING POPULISM: THE IDEATIONAL APPROACH, THIN-CENTRED IDEOLOGY OR DISCOURSE?

Populism can be considered an “essentially contested concept” (Mudde 2017: 27; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 2) and, for that reason, several different understandings of the nature of populism exist. Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2017) identify three approaches to the study of populism:² the ideational approach, the political-strategic approach, and the sociocultural approach. The ideational approach considers ideas to be of central importance to the phenomenon of populism, as expressed through political rhetoric and discourse (Mudde 2017). The political-strategic approach, in turn, “focuses not on what populists say, but on what they actually do, especially how they pursue and sustain political power” (Weyland 2017: 50), for example, through different modes of personalistic leadership. Finally, the sociocultural approach to populism studies sees populism to be “characterised by a particular form of the political relationship between political leaders and a social basis,” which is achieved by using a certain type of appeal and is mediated by a country’s socio-cultural historical context (Ostiguy 2017: 73).

The set of ideas at the core of populist politics is commonly referred to by scholars as an ideology or a discourse. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (Mudde 2004; 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017) describe populism as a “thin-centred ideology,” or an ideology that relies on a limited number of core concepts but which can be combined with other sets of ideas in a process referred to as “thickening” (Mudde 2007; 2017; Hawkins et al. 2018). As such, populism may be married with varying worldviews, such as nationalism or socialism. Right-wing populism, for instance, can be seen as a product of populism thickened with the ideologies of nativism and authoritarianism (Freeden 1996; Mudde 2007; Hawkins et al. 2018; Kubik 2020: 6). The process

² Other differentiations also exist. Gidron and Bonikowski (2013; 2016), for example, identify three traditions in populism research, each relying on different ontological assumptions: populism as a political strategy; populism as an ideology; and populism as a discursive style. These do not fully align with the three approaches as defined by Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2017).

of thickening of populist ideology is “one of the central conceptual foci” (Kubik 2020: 6) of the POPRBEL programme (Bešlin et al. 2020: 4). We consider this process to primarily take place through the definition of ‘the people’ – by people political actors often draw from cultural resources that vary according to the specific context (Bešlin et al. 2020: 5).

Some scholars prefer to speak of populism as a ‘discourse’ rather than a thin-centred ideology. Hawkins (2009), for example, considers populism to combine elements of ideology and rhetoric, and refers to the phenomenon as a discourse (Hawkins 2009: 1042–1047). The (subtle) differences between populism as a discourse and a thin-centred ideology are further debated by Stanley (2008), Hawkins et al. (2018: 3–6) and Mudde (2017: 30–32). However, it is generally agreed that a significant overlap exists and that any conceptual differences matter little in empirical research (Hawkins 2009: 1043; Hawkins et al. 2018: 420; Mudde 2017: 31). In POPREBEL, in particular, we consider the thin-centred ideology of populism to primarily be a ‘discursive strategy’ which constructs elite-people antagonism (Bešlin et al. 2020: 4).

CORE FEATURES OF POPULISM

At its core, the ideational approach considers populism to be a set of ideas that sees politics as “a Manichean struggle between the will of the common people and an evil, conspiring elite” (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 2). The essence of the populist worldview is a Manichean and moralistic cosmology, meaning that it “assigns a moral dimension to everything, no matter how technical, and interprets it as part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil” (Hawkins 2009: 1043; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Mudde 2017). Populism is not the only political movement distinguishing the people from the elite, but what defines populism is the *morality* it ascribes to this division. In principle, the people and the elite are fundamentally opposed not based primarily on their socioeconomic class or ethnicity, but rather based on their ‘moral character.’ The elite is seen as corrupt and inauthentic, while the people are considered ‘pure’ and authentic (Hawkins 2009). Membership of the corrupt elite, more than anything, is considered to be a willing choice induced by special interests and impure morals, and hence something reprehensible (Mudde 2017: 32–33). Morality therefore provides a central axis to the populist worldview, to which all of its other components relate.

The central concept to populism is that of ‘the people.’ In its essence, ‘the people’ can be understood as “an idealised conception of the community” (Taggart 2004: 274; Mudde 2017). It is considered to be a homogenous and morally pure group, but its remaining characteristics are not predetermined and depend on the context of the populist politics in question. The definition of ‘the people’ is thereby closely tied to the concept of ‘the heartland.’ This is a utopian vision of reality often constructed with reference to specific (mythologised and romanticised) locations, people or periods in the past (Taggart 1998; 2004). The heartland is seen to embody the essential virtues of the community. However, neither the heartland nor the people are all-inclusive categories but rather a constructed sub-set of the population (Mudde 2004: 546; 2017; Wirth et al. 2016: 10).

It is from ‘the people’ that other core concepts such as ‘the elite’ and the ‘will of the people’ depart (Mudde 2004: 544). In the populist worldview, ‘the elite’ is considered to be fundamentally opposed to ‘the people’ on a moral dimension (Hawkins 2009). However, other characteristics and categories can be and often are ascribed to both the people and the elite as well – such as differences in class or ethnicity (Mudde 2017: 32). Translating this social categorisation to policy preferences, populist politicians motivate their policies with reference to ‘common sense’ – i.e. “the honest and logical priorities of the (common) people” (Mudde 2017: 33–34), while denouncing the interests and preferences of their opponents as motivated by ‘special interests’ (Mudde 2017). Populists hence present themselves as representatives of ‘the will of the people’ or the ‘general will,’ and ‘the elite’ as opposed to it (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). The will of the people is considered to be sovereign, and any limitations to its expression ought to be rejected. This makes populist politicians often hostile to institutions of liberal democracy that place limits on the executive and legislative branches – such as the judiciary, international treaties or institutions of minority rights protection – and sometimes makes them advocates of drastic, ‘revolutionary,’ system change (Mudde 2004; Hawkins 2009).

The specific nature of post-communist populism in CEE is analysed by, among others, Rupnik (2007) and Stanley (2017), as well as by the POPREBEL programme (Bešlin et al. 2020; Kubik 2020). In CEE countries, populism is mostly found in the centre and on the right-wing of the political spectrum, with very few active populist left-wing parties found in the region (Stanley

2017; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 288). When researching populism in CEE, one needs to take into consideration the processes of post-communist transformation and Europeanisation. While in Western Europe populism emerged on the fringes of the political spectrum and is often stimulated by disappointment with democracy, multiculturalism and liberalism, the case of CEE is different. Here, populism occupies the mainstream of politics, as it developed together with the construction of democratic institutions during the transformation period (Lutovac 2017: 61; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 289). For this reason, some authors claim that we should rather speak of 'populist democracy' (Pappas 2014) than of 'liberal democracy' in Central and Eastern Europe, as populism became a 'pathological normalcy' in the region (Mudde 2010). On the other hand, the extent and influence of populism in the political landscapes of CEE should not be overstated. Non-populist parties remain politically dominant across the region and significant variation between countries makes generalisations difficult (Stanley 2017).

Another interesting feature of populism, especially in CEE, is neo-traditionalism and its relation to populism. Neo-traditionalism is understood as a "conscious, often politicised, return to tradition and the rejection of modern cultural patterns and values already widely present in the society" (Mach 2022: 30). It aims to purposefully and selectively construct and reproduce ideas of 'tradition,' and revive 'authentic' culture, practices and institutions in order to contest 'modern,' liberal visions of culture and society. Neo-traditionalism is a reaction both to processes of modernisation and to influences seen as 'foreign' or external. It is understood to be a strategy of *political* reproduction, rather than one of *societal* reproduction, and is therefore primarily practiced by governments or political parties (Mach 2019: 93). When studying contemporary CEE, neo-traditionalist political narratives are often placed in the context of the post-communist transformation and closer integration with Western Europe. These processes went hand-in-hand with rapid social, economic and political change, which started to question or even replace the existing order. The destabilising nature of this change produced an opportunity for political actors to employ neo-traditionalist political narratives to oppose what they consider to be 'westernisation,' 'Europeanisation,' as well as the introduction of more liberal, cosmopolitan values, culture and policies (Benczes et al. 2020: 6).

Neo-traditionalist discourse has been used to further define the categories of the ‘people’ and the ‘elites’ in populist narratives. In Poland, populist politicians use neo-traditionalist frames to appeal to the *traditional* culture and values of the common people in opposition to the *modern* and liberal politics of the ‘alienated’ (or ‘alien’) elites (Rupnik 2007; Stanley 2017; Benczes et al. 2020: 6). The idealised ‘heartland’ of neo-traditionalist populists in Poland is characterised by ‘ordinary Poles’ who nourish traditions, respect the country’s history, attend church and cherish the family as the foundation of social life (Melito 2021: 38). The liberalism of the elites, in turn, is often explicitly connected to ‘the West’ or Western Europe, and framed as a threat to Polish traditional values and identity. These narratives often contest the hegemony of ‘Europeanisation’ and the EU, the latter of which is seen to represent the ‘elites’ culpable of moving Poland towards its model of liberalism since the end of communism (Melito 2021: 37; Mach 2022: 25). The EU and European integration, therefore, take up an important role in neo-traditionalist populist discourse in Poland, and an analysis of populist discourse on European integration needs to take neo-traditionalist ideas and narratives into account as well.

THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEMPORARY POPULISM IN POLAND

Populism in Poland displays features common to other post-communist countries as well as “distinctly idiosyncratic elements” (Stanley and Cześniak 2019: 67). As in most countries in CEE, contemporary populism in Poland finds its origins in the transition away from communism in the late 1980s and 1990s. Early forms of populism in Poland could be observed both in the communist regime as well as within the anti-communist popular movement (Stanley and Cześniak 2019: 68–70). The anti-communist Solidarity movement in the 1980s adopted a binary political imagery, imbued with religious content, of the ‘good religious people’ opposing the ‘bad secular authorities.’ The religious characterisation with deep historical roots and wide support across the population allowed the Polish people to easily identify themselves as a community while also serving as a delineation from the communist rulers (Kotwas and Kubik 2019). Moreover, the key symbols of the movement did not reference the ‘people’ as defined in contrast to other ‘people,’ but to the ‘authorities.’ In essence, while the discourse of Solidarity

was polarising, most of the time it refrained from defining the 'other' in ethnic or religious terms; the enemy was the communists and 'their' system.

In the period following 1989, Polish politics was mostly dominated by conflicting ideas about the communist regime, but with broad support for the reforms under Poland's political and economic transition. Only a small number of early populist parties emerged on the political scene, which remained largely unsuccessful. Yet, by 2001, two populist parties – Self-Defence (*Samoobrona* – SRP) and League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin* – LPR) – experienced electoral success. While the SRP adopted quintessentially populist positions and narratives, the LPR is characterised as a radical right-wing party, combining fundamentalist Catholicism, nationalism and hard Euroscepticism with populist ideology (Stanley and Czeński 2019: 70). These messages were furthermore amplified by the Catholic *Radio Maryja* media network, expressing something Stanley (2015) describes as 'populist Catholicism.' Although the effects took time to become visible, this 2001 electoral breakthrough ultimately reshaped Polish politics fundamentally: among others, it disrupted the post-communist political divide and political culture for which the removal of the communist regime still stood central, replacing it with a politics more focused on the perceived present-day effects of the ongoing transition reforms. The attention the populist party leaders received moreover influenced political communication in Poland (Stanley and Czeński 2019: 72).

The popular support of populist political parties in Poland seems in large part to be determined by sociocultural variables and sentiments about national identity (Ding and Hlavac 2017; Kotwas and Kubik 2019; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020). Based on an analysis of public attitudes in Central Europe, Ding and Hlavac (2017) find that cultural imagery rather than anti-establishment sentiments strongly predicts support for right-wing populist movements, in particular in Poland and Hungary (Ding and Hlavac 2017: 441). These movements "draw on moral beliefs in the cultural purity of nationhood and its centrality to the preservation of national identity" (Ding and Hlavac 2017: 429). Santana, Zagórski and Rama (2020) identify anti-EU sentiments and to a lesser extent nativism as well to be the strongest predictor of populist radical right-wing voting. Contrary to the understanding of populist movements in Western Europe, support for populist radical right-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe is

not primarily determined by anti-establishment sentiments or economic deprivation (Smilov and Krastev 2008; Ding and Hlavac 2017; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020; Vachudova 2020; Zgut 2021).

According to Kotwas and Kubik (2019), cultural entrepreneurs in Poland “deliberately engineer public culture” (Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 442) through a process they refer to as the “symbolic thickening of public culture.” This entails the image of the national community moving from one based on a set of loosely associated symbols which have a broad extension (a ‘thin symbolic system’) to one based on a larger set of intricately interrelated symbols, which is thus rich in content but has a much narrower scope (a ‘thick symbolic system’). In the case of Poland, Kotwas and Kubik (2019) observe that symbolic thickening among others took place “in subcultures infused with religious elements” (Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 460) and entailed the “interrelated intensification of exclusionary Catholicism and assertive nationalism” (Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 460). These narratives were strengthened and mobilised by various sectors of society, including right-wing populist actors, social movements, intellectuals, the Catholic clergy and some media (Kotwas and Kubik 2019).

While a thick symbolic system in principle resonates with fewer people than a thin system, certain political conditions can result in a larger part of society accepting the ‘thickened’ definition of the national community. In response to the symbolic thickening of public culture in semi-religious subcultures, right-wing populist political actors in Poland combine their populist narratives with (interrelated) religious and nationalist ideas – a process of ‘thickening’ populist ideology (Mudde 2004; Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 460). This iterative interchange between symbolic thickening in civil society and ideological thickening in politics played a significant role in shaping a specific understanding of Polishness and in enhancing the popularity of right-wing populism.

EUROSCEPTICISM

PROBLEMS WITH CONCEPTUALISATION

Generally speaking, we may define Euroscepticism as opposition to the European Union and European integration. However, similar to populism, there is an ongoing, dynamic debate in the literature about how to precisely conceptualise and operationalise the phenomenon – to the extent that Euroscepticism can be considered a ‘contested,’ or even a ‘problematic’ or ‘exhausted’ concept (Crespy and Verschueren 2009: 381; Vasilopoulou 2017: 22; Bijsmans 2020: 4).

For over two decades, scholars have been proposing not only different conceptualisations of this phenomenon but also several typologies. One of the best-known was offered by Paul Taggart (1998) who explained Euroscepticism as an “idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart 1998: 366). A few years later Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) proposed the first typology of Euroscepticism, pointing at differences between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ opposition to the EU. Another popular typology was delivered by Kopecký and Mudde (2002), who proposed four stances on the EU and European integration: Euroenthusiasts, Eurosceptics, Europragmatists and Eurorejects. In a similar vein, Flood and Usherwood (2005) proposed six categories on EU alignments (from maximalists to rejectionists), while stressing the importance of ideology in adopting a certain position. The value of these proposals notwithstanding, it seems that none of the early definitions and typologies was sufficient enough to describe this complex phenomenon, especially considering that the definitions also depend on the examined actor (whether it’s a political party, media or public opinion). The multifaceted nature of Euroscepticism has become even more visible during the recent crises the EU has faced, in particular the refugee crisis and Brexit.

Various factors make the conceptualisation of Euroscepticism difficult. As the term finds its origin outside of academic literature, its common, imprecise and normative usage in daily parlance obstructs many attempts at a specific and objective definition (Crespy and Verschueren 2009; Leconte 2015:

254). Euroscepticism is furthermore understood to be multifaceted in nature, meaning that it can be directed at the entire process of European integration or against specific policies of the European Union, or anything in between. This broad range of ‘Euroscepticisms’ risks any definition to be either too inclusive, too exclusive, or too involved (Leconte 2015: 254–255; Vasilopoulou 2017). Another problem is the fact that Euroscepticism is essentially negatively defined: it exists *in opposition to* European integration but does not contain a clear set of independent ideas on international relations or politics (Leruth, Startin and Usherwood 2018: 4). Any definition of Euroscepticism, therefore, depends on a definition of European integration, and as “the EU means different things to different observers” (Leconte 2015: 255), it is hard to universally determine *what* precisely Eurosceptics oppose or, in turn, propose (Leconte 2015: 254).

Currently, researchers struggling to explain the phenomenon focus on either public-based or party-based Euroscepticism (Vasilopoulou 2017: 28; Bijsmans 2020: 7). Our study focuses on the latter when examining the political actors opposing the EU. In doing so, we adopt the conceptualisation and typology of Euroscepticism as developed by Vasilopoulou (2011). This typology goes beyond a mere definition of Euroscepticism and places opposition to the EU in the broader context of attitudes towards European integration (or ‘EU attitudes’). This is done by identifying a party’s positions with regards to various distinct aspects of European integration. Based on these positions, various types of EU contestation can be differentiated. This approach allows for a more granular differentiation of EU contestations, thereby more accurately capturing the multifaceted nature of Euroscepticism. By determining not only points of opposition, but also of support, EU attitudes are able to provide a more complete and substantive description of a party’s relation to European integration. The typology was originally developed to study radical right parties, but we believe it is useful in a broader political context as well (Vasilopoulou 2009; 2011), especially that in Poland (similarly to other Central European countries) Euroscepticism is the domain of the political right.

The four aspects of EU attitudes provided by Vasilopoulou (2011) are as follows:

- **A common cultural definition of Europe.** This entails the belief in a common identity of European peoples, or “the feeling of cultural, religious

and historical bonds among the European nation-states” (Vasilopoulou 2011: 229). These bonds are often defined with reference to Christian, Roman, and Greek traditions. A common cultural definition does need to supersede national identities. Rather, they are often considered a common denominator of otherwise independent European nations. This cultural definition is also commonly used as a marker to distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them’ and to exclude certain countries or regions from Europe, such as Turkey (Vasilopoulou 2011).

- **The principle of cooperation at a European multilateral level.** Support for the principle of European integration indicates a political actor’s willingness for cooperation at a multilateral level within the EU framework. The principle of European integration refers to “a multifaceted multilateral agreement with a political character within the EU structures, even if the reform of the latter is actively pursued” (Vasilopoulou 2011: 230). Support for bilateral or trilateral cooperation, or multilateral cooperation on specific policies that do not require deep political commitment, are not a sign of support for the principle of European integration. Consequently, rejection of the principle of European integration is not merely a rejection of the current status quo of the governance of the EU, but rather a fundamental rejection of the very idea of multilateral, political integration on a European level. Rejection of the principle of European integration corresponds to the concepts of ‘hard Eurosceptic’ (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004) and ‘Euroreject’ (Kopecký and Mudde 2002).
- **The current EU policy practice and institutional structure.** Support for the ‘practice’ of European integration entails support for “the overall body of EU law and institutional framework, which include the policies administered at the European level as well as the nature of decision-making” (Vasilopoulou 2011: 231). This includes the “balance between the intergovernmental and the supranational governing of the EU” (Vasilopoulou 2009: 6) and accepting policies which are currently managed at the European level (Vasilopoulou 2009). The current practice of European integration, in turn, is rejected when the current body of EU law – the *acquis communautaire* – or the division of powers between member states and European institutions is called into question or outright rejected – while not necessarily opposing the principle of political integration in the framework of the European Union.

- **The desire to build a future European polity.** Support for the making of a European polity entails a strong willingness to “promote European cooperation within the EU political framework with the general aim of creating an ever-closer union” (Vasilopoulou 2011: 231). This is understood to include a deepening integration by transferring more policy competencies to the European level (Vasilopoulou 2009: 6).

Based on these four dimensions to EU attitudes, different attitudes towards European integration can be derived. Vasilopoulou (2009; 2011; 2018) identifies three types of Euroscepticism common among the European far right.

- **Rejecting Euroscepticism.** This comprises parties who accept the existence of common cultural European characteristics, but who are against all aspects of European integration. These parties reject the very principle of cooperation, reject the current practice of integration, and reject any future European polity-building (Vasilopoulou 2009: 7; 2018: 232).
- **Conditional Euroscepticism.** These parties accept that there are common cultural and historical bonds among the European peoples and may approve of the principle of European cooperation. However, they reject the current policy practice and the idea of building a European polity. ‘Conditional’ Eurosceptics generally accept the system, but desire reform “to the extent that supranational institutions do not compromise state sovereignty” (Vasilopoulou 2018: 232). Decisions made by European supranational bodies are often rejected and the idea of reforms which increase the role of nation-states is endorsed.
- **Compromising Euroscepticism.** This type of Euroscepticism accepts that a common European heritage is accepted, as well as the principle of European multilateral cooperation and, by-and-large, the current policy practice of integration. Such parties may not be enthusiastic about European integration but accept that it is necessary for the prosperity of its member states. However, ‘compromising’ Euroscepticism rejects the notion of the building of a European polity. When presented with the opportunity, they will resist further delegation of power to the supranational level and prefer intergovernmental over ‘federalised’ cooperation (Vasilopoulou 2018: 233).

Vasilopoulou (2018) notes that, among far-right political parties, we can also observe the strongest anti-EU stances, as the right-wing can be

associated with nationalism that somehow naturally contests deeper EU integration. She identifies three far-right party models, which are interrelated with the party's approach to democracy and the electorate. According to Vasilopoulou (2018: 2–3), each of these party models corresponds with one of the types of Euroscepticism. *Anti-system* far right parties tend to be *rejectionist* Eurosceptics, *anti-liberal* far-right parties tend to be *conditional* Eurosceptics, and *normalised* far-right parties tend to adopt a *compromising* Eurosceptic position on the EU. These models and their EU attitudes are highly determined by the domestic political context (Vasilopoulou 2018: 3–5).

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN EUROSCEPTICISM

The distinct experience of CEE with communist rule, and in particular the more recent post-communist transformation and the process of EU accession, have created particular conditions that are likely to shape the attitudes of the public and elites in this region with regards to European integration (Stoyanov 2017; Styczyńska 2018: 140; Cilento and Conti 2021: 604). Indeed, regional differences can be identified in EU attitudes between Western Europe on the one hand and CEE on the other (Garry and Tilley 2007; Stoyanov 2017: 120; Cilento and Conti 2021), along with common features among CEE countries (Stoyanov 2017: 103; Styczyńska 2018). At the same time, significant differences in EU attitudes exist *within* the region of CEE (Styczyńska 2018; Cilento and Conti 2021; Vogel 2021) so that, according to some studies, CEE is “less characterised by regional similarities but rather by country differences with regard to both the degree of Euroscepticism and its linkage to the issue of immigration and conceptions of democracy” (Vogel 2021: 30). The regional specificity of CEE Euroscepticism therefore remains a “contentious matter” (Cilento and Conti 2021: 605) in the literature.

Early studies on CEE Euroscepticism identified a “large and positive elite consensus on the issue of European integration” (Kopecký and Mudde 2002: 317) and concluded Euroscepticism was “a minority component of nearly all those party systems” (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004: 21), mostly manifest as ‘soft’ Euroscepticism and with almost no political relevant parties that entirely rejected EU membership (Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001; 2004; Styczyńska 2018). Recent years have seen a rise in Euroscepticism across all of Europe, expressed among others in an increase of Eurosceptic

parties in the European Parliament since 2014, as well as the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum (Bijsmans 2020; Treib 2020). Public Euroscepticism and the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties increased between 2009 and 2019 across Central Europe as well, with some exceptions,³ but does not seem to stand out within the EU (Bojinović Fenko et al. 2019: 399; Vogel 2021: 42). Elites in CEE are shown to be somewhat less supportive of deeper integration today than elites in Western Europe, although this regional divide should not be overstated, as “the differences between elites in the two regions are of intensity more than direction” (Cilento and Conti 2021: 618–619). Having said that, in the past years, numerous public conflicts have emerged between the European Commission and governments in Central Europe, in particular Hungary and Poland, and to a lesser extent the Czech Republic. However, actors in the region appear to contain this anti-EU rhetoric primarily to specific issues, such as national identity, migration policy, democracy and the rule of law, and do not necessarily follow “a coherent anti-EU strategy” (Lorenz and Anders 2021: 323–324, 335).

Several qualitative differences between Euroscepticism in Central Europe and in Western Europe can be identified as well. Where criticism of the (supposedly negative) economic consequences of EU membership and of the common currency has been an important feature of Euroscepticism in Western Europe, it is much less so in Central Europe, where the EU’s economic effects are viewed more positively, where fewer countries have adopted the euro and where there is a substantial investment from the EU’s structural and investment funds (Dąbrowski, Stead and Mashhoodi 2019: 709; Csehi and Zgut 2021). Furthermore, where the nativist and nationalist arguments of Eurosceptics in Western Europe often revolve around secularism and Islamophobia, Central European Euroscepticism is focused more on historical trauma, national identity and tradition (Styczyńska 2018; Csehi and Zgut 2021). According to Csehi and Zgut (2021:56), the recent memory of anti-communist resistance has allowed for an ‘anti-imperialist’ Eurosceptic narrative to emerge and resonate in Central Europe, emphasising national sovereignty and resistance against powerful neighbours and

³ Public Euroscepticism appears to have decreased between 2009 and 2019 in Hungary (Vogel 2021: 42) and the vote share for Eurosceptic parties has remained consistently low in Slovenia between 2004 and 2018 (Bojinović Fenko et al. 2019).

supranational authorities (Cilento and Conti 2021; Csehi and Zgut 2021). These common aspects in the region notwithstanding, much variation can be observed in the determinants of Eurosceptic attitudes between countries in CEE. For example, preferences for restrictions on migration were related with Euroscepticism in Poland and Hungary, but not in the Czech Republic or Slovakia (Vogel 2021: 46). Similarly, the effect of various crises on Eurosceptic attitudes differed among countries, with the Eurozone crisis affecting Euroscepticism in Hungary and Slovenia, but less so in other Central European countries (Bojinović Fenko et al. 2019: 412).

POPULIST EUROSCEPTICISM

DISTINCT BUT INTERSECTING PHENOMENA – HOW TO DEFINE POPULIST EUROSCEPTICISM?

Evidence from the field demonstrates that the two thin ideologies – Euroscepticism and populism – interact and strengthen one another. There is a notable correlation between Eurosceptic and populist political actors, discourses and agendas (Taggart 1998; Lasoń 2011; Hartleb 2012; Kaniok and Havlík 2016; Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018; Kneuer 2019; Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019). Recent years have seen “populist and Eurosceptic waves break together” (Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018: 379), as European crises, such as the financial, refugee and Brexit crises, offered opportunities to both populist arguments of elite failure and to Eurosceptic arguments against European integration and interdependence (Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018: 379; Kneuer 2019). Especially in CEE, voters who are more Eurosceptic have a significantly stronger tendency to vote for populist radical right-wing parties (Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 296).

Studies of Euroscepticism and populism emerged more or less simultaneously in the late 1990s and early 2000s, yet they developed mostly independently from each other in the subsequent decades (Dechezelles and Neumayer 2010). Although both concepts share conceptual vagueness and theoretical similarities, there is a lack of communication between

populism and Euroscepticism studies (Kaniok and Havlík 2016: 22; Kneuer 2019). The relation and interaction between the two concepts is rarely truly investigated (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 14; Roch 2020; Csehi and Zgut 2021) and it has been subject to little empirical research (Kaniok and Havlík 2016). As such, our understanding of how precisely Euroscepticism and populism relate to each other remains “conflated, confused and understudied” (Csehi and Zgut 2021). While recent years have seen an increased interest in populist Euroscepticism in academic literature, the field continues to be understudied and deserves closer theoretical and empirical attention (Harmsen 2010; Kaniok and Havlík 2016; Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019; Roch 2020; Csehi and Zgut 2021).

The relation between populism and Euroscepticism has been qualified in various ways. Some scholars emphasise the similarities between the two concepts, suggesting that populism and Euroscepticism are similar phenomena, or even variations of the same phenomenon. Eurosceptic and populist arguments are often underpinned by the same logic, namely defiance against mainstream parties and a perception of ‘losing out’ (Leconte 2015: 255). Similarly to how populism can be considered a response to the technocratisation of domestic politics, Euroscepticism can be seen as a reaction to the depoliticised nature of European integration and the ‘democratic deficit’ of the EU. Euroscepticism, therefore, may be a particular *form of populism* that has emerged as a result of European integration and has the ambition to democratise and re-politicise that very process (Leconte 2015: 255–256). Euroscepticism, as a concept, thus inherently connected to populism, is not considered to be particularly committed to specific ideas about European integration, but is rather conceived as a “discursive formation constructed in opposition to the legitimising efforts of the EU” (Sørensen 2020: 164).

But while many Eurosceptic parties use the EU issue to form a populist critique, Euroscepticism is not the prerogative of populist parties only (Taggart 1998: 377). Although these are the exception to the rule, it is possible to find critical EU discourses which do not involve a populist frame or ideology, such as by the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom (Hartleb 2012: 49). Euroscepticism can therefore not be seen as simply a sub-set of populism (Harmsen 2010: 334; Lasoń 2011; Hartleb 2012; Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018; Kneuer 2019; Roch 2020). An emerging consensus in the literature, therefore, is to see populism and Euroscepticism as “distinct but intersecting

phenomena” (Harmsen 2010: 333; Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019; Csehi and Zgut 2021). This perspective acknowledges that populism and Euroscepticism “can often be observed in tandem” (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 1), but denies that the two concepts should be virtually equated. Instead, a number of essential differences between populism and Euroscepticism can be identified. For example, the ideas central to populism are more abstract and refer to a *relationship* between the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ defined in normative terms (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 4; Csehi and Zgut 2021: 55). The precise meaning and interpretation of those categories varies according to the context and the populism’s host ideology. Euroscepticism, in turn, is in principle much narrower and concrete, and specifically entails opposition to the process of European integration or the structure of the EU. Populism is therefore generally considered an ideologically-defining feature of a political party, whereas Euroscepticism is rather seen as a party’s position on a specific policy issue. The two phenomena do often coincide and interact but not always (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 4, 7–8).

Having established that populism and Euroscepticism are in principle distinct concepts, it is worthwhile to provide an independent definition for ‘populist Euroscepticism,’ as a phenomenon in which populism and Euroscepticism somehow coincide. Csehi and Zgut (2021: 55) define ‘Eurosceptic populism’ as a particular type of populism that combines “anti-EU sentiments with populist interpretations of the world.” The EU is thus equated with ‘the corrupt elite,’ which stands in opposition to ‘the pure people.’ The ‘people,’ in the populist Eurosceptic worldview, can be defined in different terms. When directed at a domestic audience, ‘the people’ is often equated with the citizens of a certain member state but in other contexts it can manifest as a pan-European conception of the people (‘the European people’) as well (Csehi and Zgut 2021; Roch 2020; Sørensen 2020).

As the study of populist Euroscepticism is still an evolving field, a critical reflection on this definition is warranted. While portraying the EU or its representatives as ‘the corrupt elite’ by implication turns it into something that should be opposed, not every opposition to a ‘European elite’ necessarily entails outright opposition to European integration as a whole. Insofar as we understand Euroscepticism to be a form of ‘opposition to European integration’ and a rather concrete policy position, a populist Eurosceptic statement would therefore need to convey opposition not merely to the persons,

institutions or countries presented as the ‘European elite,’ but also to the very principle, practice or polity-building of European integration (Vasilopoulou 2011). Therefore, it is theoretically possible to distinguish, on the one hand, a discourse in which the populist worldview is projected onto the context of the EU from, on the other hand, one in which the populist logic is applied to the EU *as part of* a political argument against European integration.

The former can be considered a type of ‘Europe-level’ populist discourse. As populism adapts to different contexts, it can be adapted to the European context as well. ‘The elite’ is then defined as, for example, the EU (‘Brussels’), certain European institutions or specific individuals or groups of people in these institutions. ‘The people,’ in turn, can be defined as ‘the European people,’ a specific national community or a socio-economic class. The logic of this Europe-level populism follows that of other populist discourses, but is not married to a specific position with regards to European integration *per se*. Similarly to how populism can be combined with both left-wing and right-wing ideologies, Europe-level populism can be combined with both Eurosceptic (opposing European integration) and pro-European (supporting European integration) narratives and policy preferences. An unusual example of Europe-level populism that does not fundamentally oppose European integration is found in the Spanish left-wing populist party *Podemos* (Roch 2020). In a 2014 speech by Pablo Iglesias, the EU issue was presented as a choice between a Europe of the people or a Europe of the elites.⁴ In this example, the populist frame is not used to oppose European integration as a whole, but rather to advocate for a far-reaching European-wide social policy – arguably even a form of deeper integration.⁵

⁴ Excerpt: “We love Europe if Europe means freedom, equality and fraternity, we love Europe if Europe means social rights, we love Europe if Europe means human rights. The problem is not Europe, the problem is that the president of the European Central Bank is called Mario Draghi and he was representative of Goldman Sachs in Europe [...]. Europe’s problem is called Durão Barroso [...] that’s why we say along with other southern Europeans that we want to recover the dignity and the future of our peoples and our countries.” (Campaign speech in Sevilla by Pablo Iglesias, May 2014. Available at: https://youtu.be/Uw7_GrvxBPk [accessed: November 3, 2022]. From Roch (2020)).

⁵ Excerpt: “Immediately adopt a shock plan to eradicate child poverty and exclusion throughout the European territory, strictly observing the application of the European Social Charter, and with a Community programme for social housing which includes a ban on evictions from first homes within the Community territory; a European Health Charter guaranteeing the right to public health for all in the territory of the EU, and the strengthening of the European Area of Education and

Yet, this Europe-level populist discourse is often used to form a political argument explicitly opposing European integration or EU membership. These cases clearly present a form of ‘populist Euroscepticism.’ We propose to determine whether an argument qualifies as ‘opposing European integration’ based on the typology as developed by Vasilopoulou (2011). We call a certain stance a ‘populist Eurosceptic’ when it both shows features of populist discourse, and expresses opposition to one or more of the four aspects of European integration. Examples of populist Euroscepticism as understood here are abound, but perhaps nowhere more prevalent than in the United Kingdom around the 2016 Brexit referendum. The leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) Nigel Farage, for example, regularly linked a people-elite antagonism in Europe with the purported necessity for the United Kingdom to resign from its EU membership.⁶

Differentiating between ‘Europe-level populism’ and ‘populist Euroscepticism’ is important because it allows for the untangling of populist and Eurosceptic messages. If we understand populism and Euroscepticism to be ‘distinct but intersecting phenomena,’ it is important to not only identify the intersections but also the distinctions between the two concepts on the European level.

A number of case studies on populist Euroscepticism have been conducted in recent years. To inform the research design of empirical investigation, a brief overview is provided of the different methodologies employed in similar case studies in the literature.

Among the case studies on populist Euroscepticism, roughly three types of research objectives can be differentiated. A first group of studies investigates the electoral success of certain populist and/or Eurosceptic

Culture.” (Podemos, 2016 general election manifesto. ‘Un país para la gente. Bases políticas para un gobierno estable y con garantías.’ Available at: <https://podemos.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/un-pais-para-la-gente.pdf> [accessed: November 3, 2022]. From Roch (2020)).

⁶ Excerpt: “Because what the little people did, what the ordinary people did – what the people who’d been oppressed over the last few years who’d seen their living standards go down did – was they rejected the multinationals, they rejected the merchant banks, they rejected big politics and they said actually, we want our country back, we want our fishing waters back, we want our borders back. We want to be an independent, self-governing, normal nation. That is what we have done and that is what must happen. In doing so we now offer a beacon of hope to democrats across the rest of the European continent. I’ll make one prediction this morning: the United Kingdom will not be the last member state to leave the European Union” (Farage, 2016).

parties. Kneuer (2019) and Carrieri and Vittori (2021), for example, analyse the effect of the major European crises on the performances of populist Eurosceptic parties in elections, while Pasquinucci (2022) and Öner (2020) explain the rise of the Italian parties *Lega* and *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S). A second group of studies is primarily interested in testing whether populist and Eurosceptic features of political parties actually correlate. Kaniok and Havlík (2016), Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro (2018) and Cremonesi and Salvati (2019) position political parties on axes of populism and Euroscepticism, and assess to what extent these features are ‘two sides of the same coin’ or rather wholly independent ideologies. Finally, a third group of studies intends to understand the interaction of populist and Eurosceptic ideas and discursive frames by political actors. Pirro and van Kessel (2018), Roch (2020), Sørensen (2020) and Csehi and Zgut (2021) focus on the use of populist and Eurosceptic discursive frames, and they investigate how key concepts, such as ‘the people,’ ‘the elite’ and ‘Europe,’ are framed and combined by political actors.

The case studies in the literature moreover make use of different types of data and research methods. Some studies rely on quantitative data from datasets to analyse and compare political parties, such as the PopuList (e.g. Taggart and Pirro 2021), the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (e.g. Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro 2018), the Global Party Survey and the European Election Studies (EES) dataset (e.g. Carrieri and Vittori 2021). Other studies operationalise ‘populism’ and ‘Euroscepticism’ by quantifying primary, qualitative source material. Hawkins (2009) proposes ‘holistic grading’ as a valid and efficient method to measure the level of populism in a political text. This entails the reading of an entire political text and then scoring it on a scale from 0–2 on its ‘degree of populist content.’ This method and other, similar approaches have been adopted by, among others, Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro (2018), Kaniok and Havlík (2016) as well as Taggart and Pirro (2021). Yet other case studies primarily use qualitative methods such as content analysis and discourse analysis. Roch (2020) and Sørensen (2020) analyse party manifestos or convention speeches using (corpus-assisted) discourse analysis, interrogating the framing of key concepts in these political texts. Pirro and van Kessel (2018), similarly, categorise populist Eurosceptic parties according to what discursive frames and types of arguments they use.

Lastly, the case studies vary in the scope and timeframe they adopt. Some studies focus on one or a few parties or politicians, studying and comparing these in-depth. For example, Roch (2020) studies the parties *Podemos* and *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), Csehi and Zgut (2021) focus exclusively on Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński, while Cremonesi and Salvati (2019) compare the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and *Movimento Cinque Stelle* – with a special interest in their leaders. However, many other studies adopt a wider scope, studying all parties in certain countries (e.g. Kaniok and Havlík 2016; Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro 2018; Plaza-Colodro, Gómez-Reino and Marcos-Marne 2018; Pasquinucci 2022) or all of Europe (Kneuer 2019; Sørensen 2020; Taggart and Pirro 2021). In terms of timeframes, most parties study populist Euroscepticism over one or several years, with 2014 (European Parliament elections) and 2015 (refugee crisis) particularly common.

CONCLUSIONS

The chapter demonstrates that both populism and Euroscepticism, although popular terms, would benefit from more detailed research. It especially shows that Central and Eastern European (CEE) Euroscepticism is understudied (Stoyanov 2017; Csehi and Zgut 2021) and perceived through the prism of Western European research. We know from the existing literature that both phenomena interact and strengthen each other but are also very context-specific. Populist Euroscepticism in a post-communist environment takes slightly different forms than in Western Europe. Studying the Polish example, one needs to take into consideration the specific historical legacy and socio-cultural issues, but also the process of Europeanisation, political and economic transformation and globalisation.

Moreover, while general CEE populist Euroscepticism may be not be much stronger than in Western Europe, a major difference is that those Eurosceptics are more often in power. When looking at countries such as Poland or Hungary, we notice a challenge in analysing the dichotomy

between ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupted elite.’ In countries with populists in power the elite is often portrayed as something external – either within the country (opposition, secret services) or outside (European Union, powerful neighbours, the United States).

Following the reasoning laid out in the POPREBEL frameworks (Bešlin et al. 2020; Kubik 2020), we suggest adopting the ideational approach to researching populism. The ideational approach applies a specific focus on the ideas of populist parties and movements, as it considers these to be the key features of populism and the distinguishing feature of the parties and movements in question (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 2). Meanwhile, when it comes to Euroscepticism, we suggest following the typology provided by Vasilopoulou (2011), as it allows for identifying three types of Euroscepticism common among the European far right based on four dimensions to EU attitudes. Keeping this in mind, we stress the importance of a detailed look at the correlation between populism and Euroscepticism which are often assumed to be ‘distinct but intersecting phenomena.’ We argue that differentiating between ‘Europe-level populism’ and ‘populist Euroscepticism’ is essential because it allows for the untangling of populist and Eurosceptic messages.

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THE NEXUS OF NATIONALISM AND EGALITARIANISM IN POPULIST NARRATIVES AND VALUE ORIENTATIONS IN SERBIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY¹

ABSTRACT

Populism as a ‘thin ideology’ implies that populist rhetoric is easily combined with different ideological orientations and narratives. In our chapter, we examine the nexus between right-wing messages and ideology (nationalism), and left-wing egalitarian populist narratives in Serbia (an ex-socialist country) after the consolidation of electoral democracy in the 21st century. We do not consider populism as an ideology that is exclusively ‘imposed’ from above, but we accept

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the theoretical position that pleads that it is a reversible process of placing populist messages, but also supporting and accepting such messages due to the wide representation of certain values. Using a triangulation of different methods, we tried to detect how nationalism and egalitarianism, both as messages (from above) and as value orientations (from below), have shaped the modern political life of Serbia. Bearing in mind the possible interconnection between the narratives of politicians and value orientations of the people, we wanted to simultaneously analyse these two. We analysed nationalism and egalitarianism in the political messages (slogans, commercials, party election programs) of the two parties (or coalitions) that won the most votes in parliamentary elections since 2000. To measure respondents' nationalism and egalitarianism, we used data gathered during past 20 years in the World Values Survey and European Values Study. Value changes and changes in political messages are analysed separately and, after that, the relationship between these two is discussed.

KEYWORDS: Serbia, Serbian Radical Party, Serbian Socialist Party, Serbian Progressive Party, Democratic Party, nationalism, egalitarianism, populism

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we decided to focus on nationalism and egalitarianism, since they played an important role in populist narratives in Serbia's recent past, especially during the 1990s (Dajč et al. 2022). We understand populism as a thin ideology and a discursive strategy that creates an image of a society radically divided into two categories: 'the common people' versus 'the corrupt elites' (Dajč et al. 2022: 3). From this viewpoint there are only friends and foes, therefore political, ethical or ideological 'others' are, in a way, representations of evil (Mudde 2004: 544). Since populism is a thin ideology, it can be easily combined with other ideologies, such as nationalism and egalitarianism. Namely, in their efforts to present themselves as part of 'authentic' exponents of the 'common people' populists often use some elements of nationalism and egalitarianism.

If nationalism is defined as “an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that non-native / non-national elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state,” it is obvious how nationalism and populism can easily intertwine (Mudde 2007: 19). In populist narratives, belonging to one national group often becomes a criterion for differentiation between the ‘common people’ and the ‘other,’ i.e. evil. Bearing this in mind, as well as the fact that nationalism was heavily used in the 1990s, it is anticipated that nationalism is a crucial part of populist narratives in contemporary Serbia. Mudde’s hypothesis is especially important for the context analysed in this text, as together with egalitarianism (in economic terms), nationalism supported the development of populist narratives in Serbia.

One of the strongest ideas from the beginning of the breakup of Yugoslavia until today remains that the nation is exclusively an ethnically homogenous group, and hence the only political framework in which individuals can act (Dajč et al. 2022: 5).

Leaders should be nationalistically oriented and insist on a rhetoric aimed at preserving national consciousness, national values, internal coherence, etc. The foundation of such values and policies was perfectly conducive to the development of authoritarianism and the rise of populist leaders who would make discursive distinctions between ‘us’ (Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks) and ‘them’ (those who are not ‘our nation’) (Dajč et al. 2022: 5).

Another important element of populism is egalitarianism since it is convenient for creating division between the ‘common people’ and ‘corrupt elites.’ This is especially true in the case of Serbia, which inherited a socialist legacy from Yugoslavia. Even before the Second World War egalitarianism was among the most important topics within the People’s Radical Party that dominated Serbian politics in the late 19th and early 20th century. Additionally, socialism in Yugoslavia had a specific format – it retained a kind of quasi-market, while there was also a system of self-government that influenced the development of ideals of egalitarianism among Yugoslav citizens (Dajč et al. 2022: 6).

Scepticism about liberal economic reforms and distrust towards capitalism continued in the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which is clearly seen in confusion regarding economic liberalism as a value orientation among

the population (Pešić 2017: 53). To be able to understand well-rooted egalitarianism we should take into consideration that the People's Radical Party managed to keep the fundamental idea of creating an egalitarian 'people's state,' close to the interests of Serbia's peasant society, as one of the most important elements of its programme and that was also very appealing to Serbian society, as it was largely a peasant society in the 19th century (Perović 2019: 350). In the interwar Yugoslav state, the 'agrarian question' was one of the most important issues that helped the Radical Party to mobilise its electorate through its egalitarian narrative.

The foundations for populism in Serbia were laid in the 19th century by one of the most prominent Serbian political leaders, Nikola Pašić, and the party he founded – Narodna radikalna stranka (National Radical Party). This party developed under the very strong influence of the Russian Narodniks and the egalitarian traditions of Svetozar Marković's socialist doctrine (Perović 2019). The party can be considered a catch-all party, which combined both left-wing and right-wing populist ideas: a model of a state economy that would provide egalitarianism, crucial for its rural supporters, was combined with nationalism and the need for a strong leader (Dajč and Ajzenhamer Jovanović 2022: 123).

This was additionally important as an egalitarian 'people's state' was opposed to the much-reviled capitalist development of the Western world. This was connected to the 19th-century Serbian *love hypnosis* with Russia (Đorđević 1906: 5–9) that continued after the creation of Socialist Yugoslavia in 1945. It can be claimed that the very strong egalitarian narrative that the People's Radical Party developed in Serbia before 1945 paved the way for the very rapid and successful sovietisation of Yugoslavia which broke only after the split between Tito and Stalin in 1948. Therefore, the importance of egalitarianism as a significant constitutive element of populist discourse in Serbia must be emphasised.

Another important catalyst for the growth of nationalism and egalitarianism in Serbian society was the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars that marked most of the 1990s. The period between 1986 and 1999 can be defined as one of intense ideological preparation and homogenisation of the national-populist matrix in Serbia (Bešlin and Žarković 2022: 86). Two dominant

parties were the Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistička partija Srbije*) and Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*). The former kept its main narratives of nationalism and egalitarianism from the 19th century, while the former, as the rebranded Communist Party of Serbia kept advocating egalitarianism and used nationalism for mobilising not only the electorate but also as the main driver for its war aims during wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. These two parties and their epigones (Serbian Progressive Party [*Srpska napredna stranka*] after 2010) have dominated Serbian politics to this day.

Some authors even suggest that Milošević stayed in power as long as he did mainly because he successfully used nationalism and destroyed its alternatives (Gordy 2010), because he focused on the production of enemies in SFRY and later Serbia (Milosavljević 1996: 399), or because the centralism through his leadership, under the guise of thinly-veiled Serbian nationalism, successfully grew (Mujanović 2018: 74–75). The use of nationalistic motives remained strong after the Milošević era and, in Serbia, it was usually perceived as inseparable from traditionalism and conservatism (Stojiljković 2011: 115). Nonetheless, the Serbian Progressive Party which has been dominant on the Serbian political scene during the past 10 years, has managed to present itself as a pro-European party and has “avoid[ed] identity questions as a baseline of their recognition ... without renouncing nationalist politics” (Stojiljković and Spasojević 2018: 123). Additionally, recent studies show the growth of nationalism among political elites during the second decade of the 21st century (Petrović and Radoman 2016: 168). Egalitarianism in the political sphere is seldom analysed in contemporary Serbia, although there are some papers showing its importance for populist narratives (Dajč et al. 2022: 27). Additionally, studies show that values that are expected in a liberal market economy are not “accepted as undoubtedly dominant” among Serbian political elites (Lazić 2011: 138). Economic liberalism (as the opposite of egalitarianism) is in some instances less accepted among political elites than among the general population. As such, the acceptance of private property as the preferred type of property is less apparent among political elites than among the general population (Pešić and Svilanović 2016: 128).

Even though egalitarianism and nationalism are undoubtedly part of the narratives of politicians and they present solid voter bait in Serbia,

to understand the dynamics of populism, it is necessary to pay attention not just to the narratives of politicians but also to the value orientations of the people. In other words, the relationship between ‘supply’ (populist discourse placed from above) and ‘demand’ (value orientations of wider social strata that receive/accept populist narratives) should also be considered to fully understand the role that nationalism and egalitarianism play in populism in Serbia. Serbia’s political evolution was marked in the first three years after the fall of Milošević in October 2000 by the very optimistic forecast during the premiership of Zoran Đinđić. But after his assassination in March 2003 and the first government of Vojislav Koštunica in early 2004, each Serbian government maintained European accession as one of its priorities while relations with Russia strengthened – mirroring the growth of nationalistic narratives (Samardžić 2022: 97). This conflicting practice eventually led to the majority of people in Serbia being against EU accession in April 2022 with 44% of the population being opposed to EU accession with 35% being in favour (Baković 2022). Having this schizophrenic situation in mind, which has been marked by an official pro-EU policy of each Serbian Government since the democratic change in 2000, along with a narrative that is dominated by nationalism and egalitarianism, as well as a foreign policy that has deviated from EU foreign and security policy increasingly since 2008 (Samardžić 2022: 112); we came to the conclusion that further research on nationalism and egalitarianism in populist narratives was much needed.

RESEARCH GOAL AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter our aim is to analyse to what extent nationalism and egalitarianism were part of the populist narratives of politicians in Serbia during the first two decades of the 21st century. Bearing in mind the possible interconnection between the narratives of politicians and value orientations of the people, we simultaneously analyse these two and answer the following questions: (1) how nationalism and egalitarianism were used in messages

of political parties in the past 20 years; (2) how did nationalism and egalitarianism as value orientations change among the people during the first two decades of the 21st century. Additionally, we aimed to better understand the relationship between value orientations and political messages, i.e., to analyse if the changes in value orientations could be manifested in different political messages, or, on the other hand, could political messages lead to different value orientations.

In order to analyse political narratives, political messages during parliamentary election campaigns were analysed. We analysed nationalism and egalitarianism in the political messages of the two parties (or coalitions) that won the most votes in each parliamentary election (2000, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2016). The elections that were held in 2020 were not analysed since most of the opposition boycotted these elections, therefore they were hardly comparable with other elections. The elections of 2014 were not analysed either, as they set a new trend of the ruling coalition organising a snap election despite having full control of parliament – the same happened in 2022 when the ruling coalition held parliamentary elections despite having full control of the legislature. More precisely, in this chapter, we rely on analyses of slogans (14 slogans were analysed – at least one for each party), party election programmes if they existed in written form (eight programmes were included in the analysis) and videos of commercials which were especially useful for more recent elections (11).

To measure respondents' nationalism and egalitarianism, we used data gathered in World Values Surveys (the fourth, fifth and seventh waves of the survey) and the European Values Study (the fourth and fifth waves of the survey). Since questions relevant for measuring nationalism and egalitarianism are identical in both studies (European and World Values Survey, see more in: Inglehart et al. 2018a; Inglehart et al. 2018b; Haerpfer et al. 2020; EVS 2022; EVS/WVS 2022) we were able to group data ($N = 6477$) across different periods: Period 1 – the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century (2001); Period 2 – the second half of the first decade of the 21st century (2006, 2008); Period 3 – the second half of the second decade of the 21st century (2017, 2018) (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Sample size and structure

Study	Period 1 (WVS4 – 2001)	Period 2 (WVS5 – 2006, EVS4 – 2008)	Period 3 (WVS7 – 2017, EVS5 – 2018)	Total
EVS	0	1512	1499	3011
WVS	1200	1220	1046	3466
Total	1200	2732	2545	6477

Source: own elaboration based on World Values Survey and European Values Study

In order to measure respondents' nationalism, we used answers to the following two questions: "How proud are you to be a member of your national group?" (Answers being: Not at all proud, not very proud, quite proud, very proud) and "Would you be willing to fight for your country?" (Answers being: yes and no).

Concerning the acceptance of egalitarianism, we analysed respondents' answers to the following questions, which are otherwise used to measure economic liberalism: "How would you place your views on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means that incomes should be made more equal and 10 that we need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort?" and "How would you place your views on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means that competition is harmful because it brings out the worst in people and 10 means that competition is good because it stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas?". While a larger score on these two questions meant an acceptance of economic liberalism, a lower score was interpreted as economic egalitarianism. In order to test if there were differences between periods, we used the chi-square test for questions regarding nationalism and an analysis of variance (Bonferroni's post-hoc test) for questions regarding egalitarianism.

To sum up, as presented in Figure 1, this chapter is based on an analysis of political messages during six elections (from 2000 to 2016), while value orientation surveys conducted across three periods (2001 to 2018) were also analysed (Figure 1).

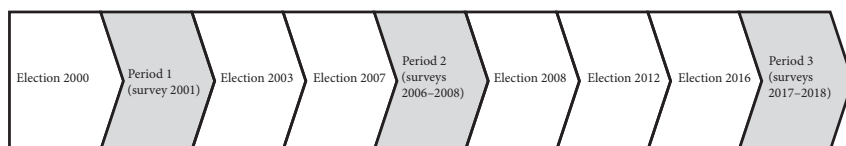


FIGURE 1. Timeline

Source: own elaboration.

RESULTS: POLITICAL MESSAGES DURING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Parliamentary elections held in December 2000 were the first after the fall of the Milošević regime and the atmosphere was mainly dictated by the success of the opposition at the presidential election that were held in September (Styczyńska and Dajč 2022: 148). According to public opinion research, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) were favourites before these elections and indeed they won the most votes (over 64%). Second place was taken by Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) which gained less than 14% of votes (Zavod za statistiku 2001). The DOS campaign drew strength from its previous successes during the Yugoslavian presidential elections. In that vein, some of their slogans included: "Let's ride to the finish" (*Da isteramo do kraja*) and "DOS, normally." While the DOS wanted to build on its victory with another, the SPS asked voters to rethink decisions they made in the previous election with slogans such as: "Think well" and "Reason – it's not too late." As there are no references to people, ethnic groups, or social topics, it could be argued that nationalism and egalitarianism were not the most important topics during these elections. However, despite topics related to nationalism not being the centre of attention, it should be mentioned that the SPS campaign emphasised the successes of their government in organising life after the NATO bombing and celebrated their 'honest war' against NATO. Additionally, Milošević said that only his party was "a factor of true protection of national and state interests" and that his was the only party that could fight against the "disassembling of country, economy

and people” (Stevanović 2000). On the other hand, “the plan for the first 100 days” that the DOS offered did not contain nationalistic topics and dealt with structural changes that they proposed (in the economy, justice system, foreign policy, etc.). When it comes to egalitarianism, even though there was a section on social security and the health of citizens, the most dominant topics in the DOS’s plan were privatisation and the liberalisation of markets.

The next elections were held three years later (December 2003), just nine months after the assassination of Prime Minister Đinđić. Though it was expected that Đinđić’s social-democratic Democratic Party (DS) would win most of the votes, these elections were marked by the success of the right-oriented Serbian Radical Party (SRS – 28% of votes) and the centre-right Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), which managed to form a government with 18% of the votes (Zavod za statistiku 2003). Though both parties had a strong nationalistic sentiment, in this campaign they tried to draw strength mostly from the popularity of their leaders and from social issues (Slavujević 2007: 145). The SRS lauded their leader (Vojislav Šešelj) for voluntarily going to The International Criminal Court in The Hague and focused on solutions for economic and social issues. The Radical Party continued to espouse egalitarianism along with nationalism as its main narrative. As such, one can understand their slogan: “Radically better.” The election programme of the SRS consisted of 20 points in which they promised to recover the economy and society by creating a frugal government that would start up industry, decrease unemployment through investments in public works (such as the building of infrastructure) and offer a better social programme: free healthcare, education for everyone, cheap housing for young couples, an increase of living standards for pensioners (Srpska radikalna stranka 2003: 5). They were explicitly against the liberalisation of the economy and promised to reassess privatisations that already took place. Though it could be argued that egalitarianism overshadowed nationalism, the latter was still apparent, as the SRS was advocating for the creation of a “comprehensive and unitary Serbian ethnic state, economic and cultural space” (Srpska radikalna stranka 2003: 4).

Though the main themes in the DSS campaign were social issues (Slavujević 2007: 146), they used nationalism in a specific manner. Since their nationalism was less belligerent than the SRS’s and it could be argued that they were perceived as less nationalistic than the SRS, it is interesting to notice that,

unlike the SRS, they mentioned the people in their slogan: “As the people say – Koštunica.” Unlike the SRS they didn’t advocate for uniting all Serbs in one country and it seems that the main goal for using nation-related motives was simply to differentiate themselves from the rest of the parties that were members of the DOS. Though they were part of the DOS until August 2001, they based their campaign on criticising the DOS and presented themselves as true protectors of Serbian democratic tradition and a party that would truly respect the will of the people (Slavujević 2007: 146).

Elections that were held in January 2007 were notably affected by the atmosphere of the constitutional referendum that was held earlier in 2006 (Slavujević 2007: 149). Once again, the Serbian Radical Party won the most votes (29%) while the Democratic Party (DS) came second (23%) (Zavod za statistiku 2007). Just like four years earlier, the SRS couldn’t form a government and Vojislav Koštunica (DSS) remained Prime Minister – while the DS had a majority of ministers in the government. In their campaign, the SRS promoted their role in ensuring that Serbia was defined as a country of ‘ethnic Serbs’ (in Serbian it is literally “Serbian people and others”) in the new Constitution and that, in the preamble, Kosovo and Metohija was explicitly defined as part of the Republic of Serbia. When it comes to their nationalistic narrative, they also advocated for support to “our people in Republika Srpska and occupied Republic of Serbian Krajina” (Srpska radikalna stranka 2007: 2). On the other hand, the Democratic Party didn’t have any strong nationalistic elements in their campaign and, despite nationalistic elements in the SRS campaign, it could be argued that both the SRS and DS mainly focused on economic and social issues, which paved the road for some egalitarian rhetoric. In that vein, the SRS, whose slogan was “To get better today,” promised in their election programme that they would fight corruption and, in that way provide funds for improving the living standard of all people by: “creating new workplaces, building kindergartens, creating developmental pension funds” and by ensuring that key economic sectors were state-owned (Srpska radikalna stranka 2007: 2). Under the slogan “Because life can’t wait,” the DS more clearly advocated a liberal economy, promising further privatisation, but they also focused on social justice. Therefore, in their election programme, they promised to simultaneously develop a market economy and the state’s social responsibility (Demokratska stranka 2006: 15). In the similar manner, they used many

popular terms, such as ‘sustainable economy, monetary stability, tax justice, education and healthcare for all, support for families, children and seniors’, etc. (Demokratska stranka 2006: 15). The Democrats used egalitarianism as one of their main narratives and tried to combine it with a pro-European narrative in order to portray themselves as both the ‘people’s party’ and a modern European party at the same time.

The next elections were held just over a year later (May 2008) and this time the most votes were won by the Democratic Party. More precisely, the coalition “For a European Serbia” (Za evropsku Srbiju – ZES) that was led by the Democratic Party and their leader Boris Tadić won over 38% of votes, while the Radicals took second place with 30% (Zavod za statistiku 2008). Once again topics related to social issues dominated this campaign. On the one hand, the Democratic Party used the fact that Serbia signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union just two weeks before the elections to focus on the benefits of joining the EU. As such, they managed to channel pro-European rhetoric into egalitarian narratives, promising that joining the EU would solve the problems of all people and lead to a “better life for our children, more opportunities for all, new workplaces” (Boris Tadić in a ZES commercial). They tried to present the aforementioned agreement as a huge success and future EU membership as unquestionable and as a magic wand that would help everyone to “wake up as a proud man” (Boris Tadić at the final convention of ZES). On the other hand, the Radicals practised egalitarian rhetoric by focusing on fighting corruption and criminality (one of their slogans was “full steam ahead against corruption and criminal”). They tried to present the corruption of elites as a key enemy and that, if Serbia would fight against corruption, it could achieve the goals that they stressed in their programme, such as: recovering the economy, focusing on agriculture and halving poverty (Srpska radikalna stranka 2008). Though nationalism wasn’t the dominant topic during these elections, it could be argued that it was actually more present than in previous elections. Namely, while nationalistic topics weren’t the focus of this election, some national symbols were used more than before. For the first time during the analysed period, both parties mentioned the name of the country/people in their slogans. “For European Serbia” was both the name of the coalition and their main slogan, while the Radicals used “Go, Serbia” as their slogan. Though the Radicals

advocated in their programme for a “return to national values,” it could be argued that manifestations of nationalism in this election programme decreased compared to previous ones (Srpska radikalna stranka 2008: 50). Unlike the Radicals, the DS slightly increased the number of nationalistic elements in their campaign (which were almost non-existent in previous elections). In addition to mentioning Serbia in their slogan, their visual identity changed: blue and yellow (party colours from the 1990s) were more and more accompanied by red, blue and white (the colours of Serbia’s flag). Additionally, even their main topic (joining the EU) was occasionally presented in a slightly nationalistic way. For example, during the final convention of ZES, Tadić stated that “the day Serbia joins the EU will be the day that Serbia is able to fight stronger for Kosovo.” It could be argued that the Radicals (that were known as nationalists) didn’t have to focus on nationalistic elements – at least not more than usual – while the DS, for the first time, tried to form a real catch-all coalition, thus offering a wide range of populist narratives (both egalitarian and nationalistic).

Parliamentary elections held in 2012, together with the presidential election that was held at the same time, were among the most important since the fall of Milošević. After these elections, power relations changed and many of the politicians that were in government during the Milošević period came back to power. The majority of votes at these elections was won by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) (24%) which was formed just three years earlier by former prominent members of the Serbian Radical Party, while a coalition led by DS won 22% (Zavod za statistiku 2012). It can be argued that the two parties had similar programmes and that both could be labelled as catch-all parties. Once again topics related to social issues were dominant. The Progressive Party focused on the economy under the slogan “Honest and successful Serbia – it is possible.” Though they promised to “respect the principles of a market economy,” to fully cooperate with international economic and financial institutions and to attract foreign investments (Srpska napredna stranka 2011: 2) and said in their commercial that “only a healthy economy can save workplaces,” it’s fair to say that the narratives they used were quite often more egalitarian than liberal. Their campaign focused on social justice, fighting corruption, and they advocated for special strategies for improving the status of the youth and seniors. When it comes to nationalistic elements in SNS’s campaign, they were drastically

reduced compared to the period when the same politicians were members of the SRS. For instance, in their programme, they promised that they would never recognise Kosovo as an independent state but the language they used was much more reconcilable than the Radicals, saying that they wouldn't accept any 'proposal' that didn't "take into account the minimum national interests of Serbia" and that Kosovo is "Serbian, at least as much as Albanian" (Srpska napredna stranka 2011: 37). Foreign investments, which were an element of the SNS campaign, were key elements of the DS campaign, too. They tried to present some foreign investments as their doing and suggested that everyone could benefit from them. In that vein, their slogan was: "Jobs, investments, security – that is our only choice for a better life." Foreign investments were not presented just as something that would increase living standard for all people (in a way, an egalitarian manner), but as something that would help protect the national interest (in a nationalistic manner). For example, the president of the DS and Serbia said that, only if Serbia attracted investment and became economically strong, could it defend its national interests and not "cross the red line" (recognise Kosovo) (Boris Tadić at the DS convention at Novi Sad which was streamed on TV as a political ad). When it comes to the nationalistic ethos in their campaign, they continued to substitute party colours with the colours of the Serbian flag and began their conventions with an intonation of the anthem. Nonetheless, they didn't have a nationalistic programme and were perceived as a civic party that was trying to obtain some votes based on nationalistic sentiment. The Serbian Progressive Party proved to be more successful as they appealed to former voters of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) by successfully combining nationalism and egalitarianism with a declarative pro-European stance that made them the most successful catch-all party in Serbia.

The last elections to be analysed in this chapter were held in April 2016 and they were marked by a comfortable victory for the SNS (over 48% of the votes) and their allies in the previous period, the SPS (11% of votes) (Zavod za statistiku 2016). Once again, both winning parties focused on the economy which paved the road for an egalitarian rhetoric. So, the SNS promised in their campaign that they would fight for "a decent life for everyone," that "everyone must have the chance of a good job," and that they would provide "better healthcare for everyone" and "better education for our children" (SNS commercial 2016). At the same time, they portrayed

tycoons as evil elites that are opposed to the people who should have equal chances, and promised that these elites “will never again rule Serbia” (SNS commercial 2016). Similar egalitarian elements were apparent in the SPS campaign, since they promised free education and healthcare and cheap housing, and argued that they “never gave up on social justice” (Ivica Dačić at SPS convention – used in SPS commercial, 2016). Slogans of both parties mentioned the people or name of the nation. The slogan of the SNS was “Serbia wins” and in their commercials, they said that “we are a people of winners.” On the other hand, the SPS’s slogan was “We serve the people,” which had a military overtone. Additionally, during speeches at conventions, politicians stated that they (ergo, the party) “bled for the country” (probably referring to the 1990s wars and the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999). Though it seems that nationalistic elements during these elections were more apparent than in previous ones, it should be stressed that social issues and egalitarian rhetoric were key segments of the campaign, while nationalism was a secondary topic and it seemed as though politicians used these themes rather as folklore than as strong political messages.

VALUE ORIENTATIONS: NATIONALISM AND EGALITARIANISM

Data from the European and World Values Survey show that nationalism has been in decline since the beginning of the 2000s. More precisely, when it comes to willingness to fight for one’s country as an indicator of nationalism, almost three-quarters of people were willing to fight at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century (Period 1), about three-fifths during the second half of the first decade of the 21st century (Period 2) and just a little bit more than a half of respondents in the most recent study (Period 3 – Table 2). Based on this data, it can be claimed that willingness to fight for one’s country was significantly lower in Period 2 compared to Period 1 ($\chi^2(1) = 25.21, p < 0.01$), and significantly lower in Period 3 compared to Period 2 ($\chi^2(1) = 14.65, p < 0.01$).

TABLE 2. Nationalism in Serbia

Time period	Would you be willing to fight for your country?		How proud are you to be a member of your national group?	
Period 1 – 2001	Yes	72.1	Not at all proud	6.6
			Not very proud	18.6
	No	27.9	Quite proud	32.9
			Very proud	42
Period 2 – 2006–2008	Yes	61.2	Not at all proud	2.5
			Not very proud	11.8
	No	38.8	Quite proud	40.6
			Very proud	45.1
Period 3 – 2017–2018	Yes	53.8	Not at all proud	2.5
			Not very proud	13.5
	No	46.2	Quite proud	47.4
			Very proud	36.6

Source: own elaboration based on World Values Survey and European Values Study.

When it comes to pride in the nation as a second indicator of nationalism, the results are a bit more ambiguous. Almost three-quarters of respondents were proud of their country (quite proud or very proud) at the beginning of the 2000s. The share of people proud of their country rose to 85% in Period 2 and only slightly declined (to 84%) during Period 3. Additionally, when comparing the 2nd and 3rd periods, it is apparent that more people were very proud of their nation during the second half of the first decade of the 21st century (45% compared to 36% in the 3rd period). Based on this data it is noticeable that pride in the country was significantly higher in the 2nd period than in the 1st period ($\chi^2(3) = 71.79, p < 0.01$), and significantly lower in Period 3 than in Period 2 ($\chi^2(3) = 37.1, p < 0.01$).

When it comes to egalitarianism, the data shows that this value orientation is relatively stable in all three periods. As presented in Figure 2, there are no big oscillations regarding the acceptance of competition. More precisely, there are no significant differences between the three periods

($F(2,6474) = 0,9, p > .05$) and in all periods respondents were slightly more pro-competition (i.e., more liberal than egalitarian). On the other hand, there are significant differences between the three periods ($F(2,6266) = 12,97, p < .01$) regarding attitudes towards income equality. Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test showed that acceptance of inequalities was lower in Period 2 (-0.53 (95% CI, -0.78 to -0.27), $p < .001$) and Period 3 (-0.44 (95% CI, -0.69 to -0.18), $p < .01$) compared to Period 1, while there are no significant differences between Periods 2 and 3 (-0.09 (95% CI, -0.29 to 0.11), $p > .05$). This means that, when it comes to accepting economic equality, people have been more egalitarian in the past 15 years than they were at the beginning of the 2000s.

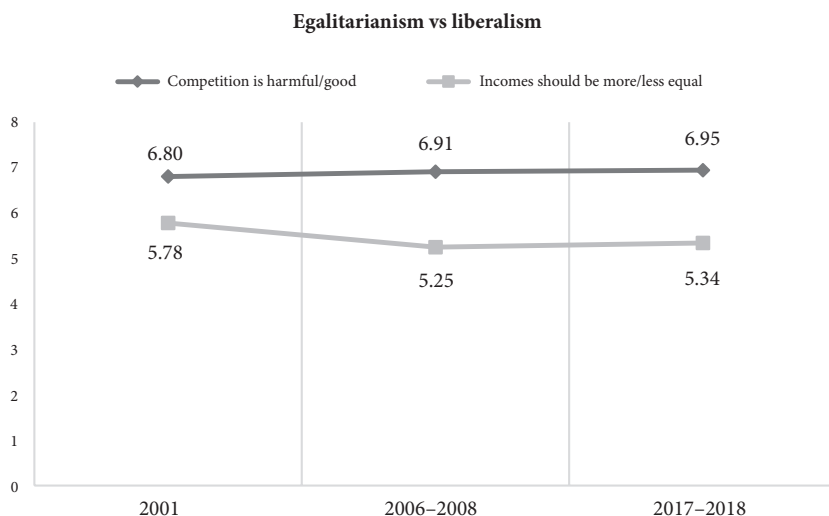


FIGURE 2. Egalitarianism in Serbia

Source: own elaboration based on World Values Survey and European Values Study.

CONCLUSION

If we accept that egalitarianism and nationalism in Serbia have been perfect ideological and discursive voter bait, we can complete the nexus of the political and social context for the development of main populist narratives in Serbia (Dajč et al. 2022: 6). Taking into consideration the historical context and strong People's Radical Party and Communist Party legacy in Serbian society since the second half of the 19th century, it is easy to understand why nationalism and egalitarianism have remained dominant narratives in Serbia into the 21st century. Even Socialist Yugoslavia did not manage to restrain the nationalisms of the different Yugoslav nations but accepted it and cherished it until the country's collapse. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia post-1945 found fertile ground for its economic and social egalitarianism that was the result of the strong Radical Party influence in Serbia. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s cemented the need in Serbia's social context for a dominant leader who would combine populist strategies with nationalist narratives and conflict with all those who are not 'us,' along with ideas of egalitarianism which imply that populists come 'from the true people' so that they can defend Serbian society from 'rich, corrupt elites' that are often seen as agents of the West (Dajč et al. 2022: 6).

Dominant political parties in Serbia since 2000 haven't abandoned the main narratives that helped them mobilise their electorate in each of the elections that were analysed in this chapter. Only in the first election after the fall of Milošević was the nationalistic narrative not prevailing, while clear pro-market economy attitudes were advocated (at least in the narratives of the winning party – the DOS). In all other elections, nationalism was present and egalitarianism became more and more dominant. During the same period, the willingness to fight for the country as an indicator of nationalism among people decreased. Even though a feeling of pride in the country was more ambiguous, it didn't decrease during this period. Therefore, it could be argued that nationalism didn't fade but that it just took on a more peaceful form. When it comes to egalitarianism, the data shows that this value orientation is relatively stable and there is even a slight increase towards this orientation when it comes to non-acceptance of unequal

incomes, which is probably a consequence of people's disappointment in the privatisation process and liberal reforms (or unrealistic expectations in the first place).

Though our research design doesn't allow us to determine whether narratives affect value orientations or value orientations affect narratives, it seems that both are, in a way, two sides of the same coin. And in order to fully understand the political dynamics, both need to be taken into consideration. Nonetheless, after 2000 with the development of political marketing in Serbia, politicians started to pay more attention to the value orientations of people in formulating their narratives – which is in line with the viewpoint of political scientists who suggest that political parties in Serbia use “total marketing” more and more and are prone to the “idolatry of marketing” (Slavujević 2011: 285). It can be understood that disappointment in liberal reforms and a slight increase in egalitarian values among people affected the abandonment of clear pro-market economy attitudes and the growth of egalitarian narratives among politicians. Additionally, the two most successful parties/coalitions transformed into catch-all populist parties even more significantly since the 2012 elections and kept nationalism and egalitarianism as their main narratives. Serbian society has remained prone to nationalist and egalitarianism narratives even after democratic changes in the 21st century and the main political parties have continued to use them successfully. This leads us to the hypothesis that most voters still happily accept narratives that haven't changed much in the last few decades.

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NATIONALISM AND POPULISM IN 21ST CENTURY CROATIA: CONSEQUENCES OF ENCOUNTER¹

ABSTRACT

This chapter is focused on the encounter of nationalism and populism or precisely right-wing populism in the political life of Croatia in the 21st century. In this analysis, we first rely on the results of our content analysis and critical discourse analysis of Croatian parties'/movements' discourses from the fall of the Berlin wall to the 21st century, which we compare with the later period (2000–2020). Based on a critical assessment of neglecting right-wing populism in the recent research of Croatian social scientists who use the method of content analysis and focus only on election periods, we will re-examine and fulfil their analysis with a historical insight

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of the political narrative that deals with nationalism. In this chapter, special attention will be put on the Homeland Movement/HM (*Domovinski pokret*) and the initiative ‘On the Behalf of the Family’/OBF (*U ime obitelji*).

KEY WORDS: nationalism, populism, right-wing, nativism, Croatia, CDU, SDP, Homeland Movement, On the Behalf of the Family

INTRODUCTION

After two decades of a two-party frame ruling in Croatia, with right-wing conservatives and social democrats in power, we can’t see a long-run continuity of democratic changes. Or, to be clearer, there’s been a decline of consolidated democracy in Croatia since the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century or even earlier. In line with that, Croatia was categorised as a “semi-consolidated democracy” and received a Democracy Percentage of 54 out of 100 in the Nations in Transit 2022 report (Freedom House 2022: 22). We need to agree with this report according to the state of social freedom in Croatia, specifically in relation to minorities and LGBT rights, migration, health, delayed school reform and, finally, violence against pluralism or the supremacy of clericalism in Croatian social life. Furthermore, if we look at neutral international analysts’ opinions, we can single out, for example, the Oxford Analytica briefing report, which, already in 2015, diagnosed the political state of Croatia with the title: “Populism will win, whoever triumphs in Croatia” (Oxford Analytica 2015). After the 2015 election, they observed that Croatia was on a journey towards Hungarian-style economic nationalism and a more sceptical approach towards the EU. In line with that, we need to search interdisciplinarily to understand the consequences and trends that took Croatia on this path of lacking democracy and the triumph of populism and nationalism in that process.

Although trends of mixing nativism with populism show continuity from the establishment of the Republic of Croatia in 1990 and its first president Franjo Tuđman, the democratic transition started after his death – or, more

precisely, in 2000 with the social democrats winning the elections. The first decade of the 21st century was pretty much coloured by dark processes of the resurrection of the issue of the Yugoslav succession wars of the 1990s, now from the perspective of the *pro et contra* extradition of war criminals to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. This process fueled a new wave of nationalism and a revival of war histories (Pavlaković 2010). From 2001, a high level of pressure in public and on the new Prime minister Iвица Račan (1944–2007) related to the case of general Ante Gotovina prompted the Croatian ‘patriotic’ fraction to call him “a traitor to the national interest” or liberals to criticise him for doing nothing to fight right extremism. His lasted a few years with Gotovina being on the run until 2005.² The shadow over the social democratic government in these years resulted in new elections which led to the new government having 13 ministers from the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ) and only one from the Democratic Front. The next ten years saw Croatia facing the process of EU accession with several nationalistic events and, after this happened, there was a further rise of nationalism under the new CDU leader Tomislav Karamarko who brought the party back to the radical right and Tuđman’s legacy from 2015. In line with that, according to state statistics,³ we notice an advanced crisis in Croatian society after the new wave of sharpening right-wing ideology in the CDU in 2015–2019. Although the economy gained priority in political discourse, politicians seemed to avoid questions of social justice, civil rights, health, etc. and all hard topics during their campaigns from 2015. An example of this is the complete avoidance of the migrant issue which was a social highlight in 2015 when up to 700,000 people crossed the territory of the former Yugoslav republics. Observes confirmed that “Croatian authorities have consistently assaulted refugees and migrants and denied them access to asylum, in contravention of European and International law” (Amnesty International 2021) as an obvious example of the influence of far-right exclusionist policy. In line with that, we focus on an analysis

² This case was followed by others, such as the protest in Split against the extradition of Mirko Norac, which ended with Carla del Ponte helping to solve the case by trial in Croatia. Račan refused the extradition of Janko Bobetko in September 2002, who died the next year. For a thorough analysis of this issue, see Pavlaković 2010.

³ Compare in general statistics and publication Croatian in numbers *Hrvatska u brojkama* 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019.

of nativism, authoritarianism and populism as an influence on exclusionist policy and, thus, immigration policy in Croatia too.⁴ Following Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde in this sense, it's useful to remind ourselves of his far-sighted conclusion in 2016 about relations between immigration policy and right-wing populist parties' practices: "Right-wing populist parties should have the strongest impact on issues and values that are directly connected to their ideological core; in the case of nativism this would be immigration and European integration, for authoritarianism it would be crime, and for populism the issue of corruption and dissatisfaction with democracy/the political system." (Mudde 2016: 301).

After the migration crisis and several other economic affairs that included high-ranking officials, Croatia was also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and several earthquakes from 2020 onwards. The aforementioned political climate and social issues of the crises, together with a recent value survey that showed an increase in the popularity of authoritarianism, and populism in general among the younger population in Croatia (Derado, Dergić and Međugorac 2016; Gjaja 2018; Abramović and Paša 2021), prompted us to search for the answers on several questions. We first look to answer how nationalism coped with the crisis that started after Croatia's EU accession in 2013, taking into account that the rise of nationalism is historically connected with crises in Croatian society and is used as a weapon by politicians to unite. Second, are the changes in with nationalism connected to populism? And with it, has nationalism been an ideological supply of populism in recent years and in what movement/party? We found that populism as a "thin-centered ideology" defined by Mudde (2004; 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) was interconnected and permanent in Croatia and, in many cases, fuelled by nativism as an establishing force of independent Croatia stemming from the first CDU leader and first president, Franjo Tuđman.⁵ This trend of populism-nativism continued

⁴ Croatia is a country almost without immigrants and Croatian emigration rates increased during 2017, which is connected with high unemployment rates in 2016.

⁵ Mudde defined nativism that: "entails a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. It is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native (or 'alien') elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation state. [...] In the late 1980s nativism was primarily framed in ethno-national terms with economic concerns, but particularly since the terrorist attacks of 9/11

through the entire 21st century, from Stjepan Mesić as the first democratic leader from 2000 to 2010 with his ‘folksy’ and populist campaign and lengthy presidency, through all other examples of populist leaders, such as Milan Bandić (elected mayor of Zagreb in four elections, in office from 2005 to 2021) (see Zakošek 2010; Matić 2014a; 2014b). This circles up to the most permanent person in Croatian life for more than two decades who has changed his appearance to populism – now-president Zoran Milanović (see *N1 Croatia* 2021, and for earlier developments Duhaček 2020; Lalić 2013). Our goal is to follow the rise of right-wing populism and its trends in Croatia in respect of this continuity and political heritage.

For this chapter, we follow the interdependence of populism and nationalism in the most important cases that we found scientifically rewarding and useful for the future developments of analyses of democracy and overall social crisis in Croatia. In line with that, we consider that populism as a political strategy and ideology fuelled by nationalism/nativism and a conservative ideology in the activities of the HM and OBF initiative. As the authors of this chapter are a sociologist and historian, our main goal is to merge critical approaches to political discourses ‘of’ and ‘on’ nationalism and populism in 21st century Croatia. Finally, our main goal is to leave behind a narrow approach to nationalism and populism only through election circles and parliamentary practices and to try to follow their ramifications and final influence on the value orientations of Croatian citizens. Therefore, we will first review the state of play in this field and then proceed to a critical analysis of political discourse of the political representatives and chosen case studies as examples of encounters of populism and nationalism in Croatia.

STATE-OF-THE-ART: A NATIONALIST AND POPULIST ENCOUNTER?

When we approach studies of Croatian politics and society in the 21st century, we need to emphasise that recent Croatian sociologists and political theory scholars have significantly focused their analysis on populism,⁶ and left the issue of nationalism and ideology to historians and political scientists. Therefore, there's been no merger of these two topics, nor a possibility for an easy comparison of the results. That's our goal in this chapter.

In the studies of populism and nationalism in Croatia, we found four types of research results useful for our analysis – two as supply – and two as the demand side of the topic. Supply of political messages and their influence is represented with qualitative research results: (1) a content analysis of populist features and representatives' discourse before and after elections, (2) case studies of several politicians or parties/movements/initiatives. The demand side was made available only through: (1) large-scale research of 'nationalism' measurements in the European Value Survey across three periods (1999/2008/2017) (Baloban, Črpić and Ježovita 2019), and (2) several small-scale research about values regarding youth (Derađo, Dergić and Međugorac 2016; Altaras Penda and Zekaj 2019; Abramović and Paša 2021).

Pioneers – or, to be precise, the most influential researchers of populism in Croatia – include sociologists Marijana Grbeša and Berto Šalaj with their book *Good, Bad or Evil? Populism in Croatia (Dobar, loš i zao? Populizam u Hrvatskoj)* (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018). They approached populism in Croatia from 2009 to 2015 with a qualitative methodology of content analysis of political messages of politicians in the media assessing three factors: mentioning “the people,” empty signifiers, and “dangerous Others.” Their results are

⁶ Croatian sociologists and political scientists spent huge research efforts in analyse of politics and especially party politics and populism in 21st century Croatia, with several PhD and MA theses too (Čačija 2016; Gjaja 2018; Knežević 2018; Matić 2014a), and scientific papers devoted to recent populist upheaval (Altaras Penda and Zekaj 2019; Grbeša and Šalaj 2017; Matić 2014b; Mustapić and Hrستیć 2016; Mustapić, Balabanić and Plenković 2019; Rogulj and Kišiček 2018).

focused on the measurement of the quantity of populism in Croatia, identifying populists, then dividing populists into “strong” and “weak” categories, and the confirming existence of “true” populism in Croatia in contrast to populism as a political style (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 227–231). Besides this, these authors divided populists into four categories: moralist, nationalist, leftist and centrist populism, and confirmed that there is no right-wing populism in Croatia (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 233), at least according to their analysis until 2015.⁷ With respect to their role as pioneers, these authors analysed only a small group of politicians and their behaviour between 2009 and 2013, and then the performance in the media of populist features before and after the electoral processes in 2014 and 2015. Stuck in the chosen tri-partite methodology, on the one hand, they never mention or relate identified populists with their party membership during whole study – and most of them were from the biggest Croatian party CDU, then the Social democratic party (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*, SDP) and others who were connected to them during their political career. On the other hand, they influenced populism studies in Croatia to be election-focused, neglecting other values that populism presented, and their activities beyond the transparent race for votes.⁸

After studies of populism were launched with a methodology completely neglecting analyses of ideology that fuelled or surrounded populists’ political performance or institutions and topics they promote and any wider context that surrounded political discourses of politicians, any further development of political analysis in Croatia faced huge ramifications of populism in the media, or precisely the popularity of populism as a topic in the media,

⁷ They just cautiously consider as a comment of their analysis that “eventually, right-wing populism could be detected in the case of the initiative of OBF” (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 235).

⁸ For example, a representative of “nationalist populism” in their typology is physician Milan Kujundžić for “strongly using signifying of the Croatian people, but without mentioning dangerous others” (Grbeša and Šalaj 2018: 230), which we found as a shaky reason to pronounce somebody as a nationalist populist. The scholars Altaras Penda and Zekaj in their study about populism in the 2016 elections, analysed 70 newspaper articles of the most read daily newspapers. The authors concluded that the data acquired seem to suggest that there is a left-oriented and centralist populism in the Republic of Croatia with all three populist references: reference to “the people,” “anti-elitism,” and “dangerous others.” Right-oriented populism was not found by their research. Regarding the reference to “dangerous others” was only once registered in the biggest opposing party, the SDP’s media statement (Altaras Penda and Zekaj, 2019: 48, 56–57).

on TV, internet portals, and newspapers such as *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list*, *Index.hr*. Therefore, citizens became familiar with the topic, often without a definition of populism, becoming daily acquainted with populism through a political analysis of electoral processes from that view – populist elements in campaigns or party/movement/organisation programmes or style of communication of certain politicians, etc. Main reason for that is trend that populism started being widely used as political style of communication and become main weapon in their mutual classification and conflict between the main officials as *pro et contra* populism with one-sided negative view of populism or just as “empty signifier.”

We finally consider that a measurement of few politicians’ appearances in the media before and after elections oversimplified what is a complex process of the circulation of nativistic/populistic/nationalistic values in Croatia. A good example is Croatian President Zoran Milanović who, from 2020, made a significant shift not only from the use of populism as a political style of communication directed against journalists and other representatives of the coalition government, but also by representing – certain populist values and strategies, which sociologist Marijana Grbeša called “furious populism” (N1 Croatia 2021). To be more precise, he became opposed to COVID-19, the EU, and was even sceptical of NATO. By doing so, he deviated significantly from the overall frame of the SDP. His discourse dispersed long after the elections and transgressed the values and topics he promoted in his campaigns.

With the qualitative research results, it becomes obvious how content analysis is insufficient in the case of the intersection of populism and nationalism if it is not merged with other methods or by using sources other than media discourse. In line with that, a critical analysis of discourse by certain politicians (statutes, programmes, slogans, books, articles, etc.), and also a wider context of politicians’ performance: history of engagement in politics, social activities, status, membership in party(ies), funding, etc. have also been considered in this analysis. Also, in their approach, only Grbeša and Lalić contextualise their research with a review of economic and other social issues in Croatia around elections (Lalić and Grbeša 2015). Further, a critical analysis of Croatian media that, without evaluation, gave access even to hate speech and several non-democratic features, still didn’t catch the attention of scholars.

Therefore, for researchers interested in the rise and development of populist (radical) right-wing ideology in Croatia, on the one hand, and the conservative re-traditionalisation of society on the other, the corpus of analysis by social and political scientists focused on the most popular topic according to them – populism – and left several neglected questions, starting with reasons why they exclude even mentioning right-wing populism or nationalism as fuel for the widely accepted understanding of populism as a “thin-centered ideology” (Mudde 2004; 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). Also, as we know that ideologically – empty political strategies such as populism are expected to a higher degree during election periods, why do social scientists neglect other spaces and places for the performance of their political values and strategy? So, the exact use of nationalism as a topic in campaigns was rarely approached in recent studies and, as an exception, there are few sociologists who have conducted an in-depth analysis of certain political events and phenomena concerned with nationalism and populism in search for a more thorough interpretation (Mustapić and Balabanić 2018).

In general, until now, we found only few studies and scholars interested in nationalist performance practices that step out beyond electoral processes and their success in them. In that regard, we found precious studies on the Second World War and the War of the 1990s from memorial sites which launched and fueled nationalism. These included remembrance events for Ustasha victims at Bleiburg field in Austria, the Fall of Vukovar, celebrations of Operation ‘Storm’ (*Oluja*), the erection of certain monuments of anti-fascism or Franjo Tuđman, Jasenovac concentration camp memorial, etc. (Pavlaković, Pauković and Židek 2022), which all fuel the Croatian public and become a field of political battles and representations of the values they propagate. To add to that, sport manifestations such as football matches were also neglected as sites for nationalistic/nativistic and populist propaganda in Croatia, along with several regional national manifestations such as the Knight’s tournament in Sinj (*Sinjska alka*) with traditional political conflicts and issues aroused.

For this chapter, we focus on right-wing populism in Croatian political life in the 21st century without neglecting the wider picture of its manifestations. Before we approach the state of democracy in the context of the encounter of nationalism and populism, we need to make some introductory notes about important features in Croatian political life and then introduce

readers to focal trends in Croatian politics in the 21st century, resulted after several episodes of changes from conservative to social democratic governments. Then, we will focus on the exact encounter of nationalism and populism in discourses and practices of the HM and OBF – or, to be precise, their leaders Miroslav Škoro and Željka Markić. We will analyse how these two entities were direct products of the deficiencies of the two-party Croatian parliamentary frame that plays its role for the international and local public, while the real encounter of nationalism and populism takes place beyond electoral and parliamentary systems. With this chapter, we will assume that scientific conclusions in this topic need an interdisciplinary approach, specifically between history and sociology.

ANALYSES: NATIONALISM AND POPULISM'S INTERSECTION

Our research focus is the encounter of nationalism and populism in political life of Croatia in the 21st century with seven parliamentary election circles (2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2020) and five presidential election circles (2000, 2005, 2009/10, 2014/15 and 2019/20). Having in mind the negative consequences of the radical right-wing populist trend, we first analyse the more general rise of right-wing populist ideology promoted by certain representatives, and then focus on the specific cases of right-wing populism in Croatia – HM and OBF.

In this analysis, we first rely on the results of our content analysis and critical discourse analysis of Croatian parties'/movements' discourses (programmes, statutes, bulletins, statements of representatives in official events, election slogans, biographies of members, etc.) from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the 21st century, which we compared with the later period (2000–2020) (Dajč et al. 2022). Accordingly, our analysis pays attention to the supply and demand side of the populist narrative, i.e., value existence/construction. In line with that, the corpus of results of discursive and content analyses of political narratives, and an analysis of value orientations through European Value Survey (Baloban, Črpić and Ježovita 2019) were conducted, and,

in the case of existing analyses, critically assessed. Our first important theoretical assumption is that we understand populism as “thin-centered” ideology which is fuelled in the case of Croatia with nationalism. Secondly, we follow American-German political scholar Jan-Werner Müller in understanding that every real populist with an insistence on being the only representative of the ‘will of the people’ is anti-pluralistic and with it authoritarian (Müller 2016). To be more precise, we will be following on from his opinion that populism is a threat to contemporary liberal democracy by this general anti-pluralistic standpoint. In line with that, we first found out that pluralism could not be found in the Croatian parliament. Since 2000, the Croatian parliament (*Sabor*) has been composed by a two-party ruling frame which is consisted of the two largest and oldest parties in Independent Croatia – CDU and SDP (Table 1). Besides a long tradition of an interchangeable dynamic between these two parties – dividing the roles of Presidents and PM (see Table 1 and 2) and dividing parliament between the (sober) left and right in general for the majority of the 21st century – their conflicts/discussions/competitiveness have shaped modern Croatia both in the parliamentary and in the media space.

In the second decade of the 21st century, or more precisely after Croatia became member of the EU and, therefore, the EU parliament too in 2013, the country was faced with new impulses and challenges from populist and left-wing parties during the election circles between 2014–2020. During this period, on the one hand, we witnessed surprisingly strong results for several political actors that planned ‘reform from inside’ and who were ‘not interested to cooperate with the two biggest parties’ (instead, standing for the *Bridge*); or they were campaigning to correct the undemocratic circumstances that contributed to the financial suffering of the Croatian people facing debts in Swiss francs (a policy of the Human Shield; see Table 3, but also 1 and 2). And finally, in 2020 the third-ranked presidential candidate, Miroslav Škoro, a folk singer and activist from the far right of the spectrum, was the president of the HM, widely-known for his hatred of Serbs, his strong nativist position and sharp exclusionary nationalistic attitudes and campaigns (we can compare the close results from the presidential elections in 2019/2020 in Table 2). On the other hand, during this period, certain left-wing participants finally received a voice in the Croatian parliament, such as the Green-left Coalition with three left-wing parties: Workers’ Front (*Radnička fronta*, RF), the New Left (*Nova ljevica*, NL) and We Can (*Možemo*) (Table 1 and 3).

TABLE 1. Parliamentary elections in Croatia 2000–2020: winners and other coalition/parties results⁹

Year of election circle	Winning party/coalition, with number of seats	2nd place party/coalition	3rd–4th place parties/coalition
2000	SDP led coalition with HSL (Croatian Social Liberal Party), PGS (Alliance of Primorje Gorski Kotar), and SBHS (Slavonia-Baranja Croatian Party) ¹⁰ Leaders Ivica Račan and Dražen Budiša – 71 seats	CDU led by Zlatko Mateša – 46 seats	CPP–IDA–CPP/HNS–LP–SDAC (Croatian Peasant Party–Istrian Democratic Assembly – Croatian People’s Party/Liberal Democrats – Liberal Party – Social Democratic Action for Croatia) ¹¹ led by Zlatko Tomčić – 24 seats; HSU (Croatian Party of Pensioners) led by Anto Dapčić – 5 seats
2003	CDU led by Ivo Sanader – 66 seats	SDP led by Ivica Račan with Istrian Democratic Assembly (<i>Istarski demokratski sabor</i> – IDS), Party of Liberal Democrats (<i>Libra</i>) (in Croatian: <i>LIBRA</i> – <i>Stranka liberalnih demokrata</i>) and the Liberal Party (LS) – 43 seats	HNS–PGS–SBHS Croatian Peasant Party (HPSS) – 11 seats; HSS (Croatian Peasant Party) – 9 seats
2007	CDU led by Ivo Sanader – 66 seats	SDP led by Zoran Milanović – 56 seats	CPP–CSLPcoalition – 8 seats; CPP/HNS–LD (Liberal Democrats) (in Croatian: Liberalni demokrti) – 7 seats

⁹ Table made according to data on the Croatian national election platform: Državno izborno povjerenstvo Republike Hrvatske, <https://www.izbori.hr/site/> [accessed: May 2, 2022].
¹⁰ Original names of parties that were in coalition with SDP: *Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka* – HSL, *Primorsko goranski savez* – PGS, and *Slavonsko-baranjska hrvatska stranka* – SBHS.

¹¹ Original Croatian names: *Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, *Hrvatska narodna stranka*, *Liberalna stranka*, and *Akcija socijaldemokrata Hrvatske*. To avoid confusion, and to make a difference between the Croatian People’s Party and Croatia Peasant Party, we will use both languages in abbreviation – CPP/HNS.

Year of election circle	Winning party/coalition, with number of seats	2nd place party/coalition	3rd–4th place parties/coalition
2011	SDP led “Kukuriku coalition” ¹² led by Zoran Milanović – 80 seats	CDU coalition led by Jadranka Kosor – 47 seats	Labour led by Dragutin Lesar – 6 seats; HDSSB Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja – 6 seats
2015	CDU “Patriotic coalition” led by Tomislav Karamarko – 59 seats	SDP “Croatia is Growing” led by Zoran Milanović – 56 seats	Bridge of Independent Lists led by Božo Petrov – 19 seats
2016	CDU “Patriotic coalition” led by Andrej Plenković ¹³ – 61 seats	SDP “People’s coalition” led by Zoran Milanović – 54 seats	Bridge of Independent Lists led by Božo Petrov – 13 seats
2020	CDU-led coalition; Centre-right – 66 seats	SDP “Restart coalition” led by Zoran Milanović; Centre-left ¹⁴ – 41 seats	HM by Miroslav Škoro – 16 seats; Most Božo Petrov – 8 seats; Green-left Coalition – 7 seats

Source: own elaboration.

¹² The coalition was consisted of: SDP (60), CPP/HNS–LD (13), IDS (3), CPP/HSU (Croatian Party of Pensioners/Hrvatska stranka umirovjenika) (2), Vladimir Bilek (Czech and Slovak minority; CPP/HNS–LD), SDP-led coalition changed their name to “Croatia is Growing” for the 2015 election: SDP (42), CPP/HNS–LD (9), HL–SR (3), CPP/HSU (2), Sándor Juhász (Hungarian minority; SDP), Ermina Lekaj Prljaskaj (Albanian, Bosniak, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Slovene minority; HNS–LD), Veljko Kajtazi (Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Jewish, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Rusyn, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vlach minority; HNS–LD). Furthermore, they become the “People’s Coalition” (*Narodna koalicija*) (SDP, CPP/HNS–LD and CPP/HSU) in 2016, and “Restart coalition” for 2020 (SDP, CPP, CPP/HSU, Civic-Liberal Alliance (*Građansko-liberalni savez*, abbr. GLAS) and Power – Party of People’s and Civic Engagement (SNAGA – Stranka narodnog i građanskog aktivizma), and, finally for the 2020 circle of parliamentary elections the “Restart coalition” gathered SDP (33), IDS (3), CPP (2), CPP/HSU (1), Glas (1) and DBIL (Damir Bajsi Independent List) (1).

¹³ Besides the CDU led by Andrej Plenković, the coalition consisted of: Croatian Party of Rights dr Ante Starčević, CPP, CSLP, Croatian Growth (*Hrvatski rast*), Bloc Pensioners Together, Croatian Demochristian Party (*Hrvatska demokršćanska stranka*), and Democratic Party by Zagorje (*Zagorska demokratska stranka-ZDS*).

¹⁴ SDP was led by Zoran Milanović and, during 2020, by Davor Bernardić.

TABLE 2. Presidential elections in Croatia 2020: winners and other candidates results

Year of election	Winner	2nd place candidate	3rd–4th place candidate
2000	Stjepan Mesić ¹⁵ joint candidate of the CPP/HNS, CPP, LP and IDS. 56%	Dražen Budiša CSLP 27.8% Conservative-liberal	Mate Granić 22.6 % from CDU Centre-right
2005	Stepan Mesić a joint candidate of 8 parties 41.3%	Jadranka Kosor 20.3% from CDU Centre-right	Boris Mikšić independent candidate, businessman
2009/2010	Ivo Josipović SDP candidate 60.2%	Milan Bandić ¹⁶ 14.5% Left-centre populist expelled from SDP	Andrija Hebrang CDU 12.04% and Nadan Vidošević (independent candidate, former member of CDU) 11.33%
2014/2015	Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović from CDU 50.7%	Ivo Josipović SDP 49.26%	Ivan Vilibor Sinčić the Human Shield 16.4%
2019/2020	Zoran Milanović SDP 29.55%	Kolinda Grabar Kitarović CDU 26.55%	Miroslav Škoro HM 24.45 % Conservative-right, far-right populist

Source: own elaboration.

¹⁵ Mesić has a strong CDU-connected past. He was elected as a first president of the independent Croatia in 1990, as a Prime minister.

¹⁶ Mayor of the capital city, Zagreb from 2000 to 2017, winning six elections. See about his first mandate in Goldstein and Hutinec (2007: 316).

TABLE 3. The main Croatian political parties, movements, and civic organisations 2000–2020

Party/ movement/civic organisation	Date established and activity period	Political ideology	Political spectre
CDU	17/06/1989	Conservatism, Christian democracy, and Pro-Europeanism (2020–)	Centre-right, and far right-wing (2015–2020)
SDP	03/11/1990	Social democracy, Anti-fascism, Progressivism, Pro-Europeanism	Centre-left
The Bridge of Independent Lists	2012 active from 2020	Fiscal conservatism, Economic liberalism, Soft Euroscepticism, Green conservatism, Social conservatism, Populism	–
	2011 active from 2014	Populism, Euroscepticism, Anti-establishment, Sovereignism Protectionism	–
OBF	15/05/2013–	Conservatism, Populism, New morality, Anti-LGBT, Clerical fascism	Right-wing
HM		Nationalism, Conservatism, Populism, Soft Euroscepticism,	Right-wing
Green-left Coalition	2014	RF – Socialism, Anti-fascism, Anti-clericalism, Anti-militarism, Democratic Socialism, Social Progressivism, Left-wing populism	Left-wing
	2016	NL– Democratic socialism, Social democracy, Anti-fascism, anti-clericalism, Anti- nationalism	
	2019	<i>Možemo</i> – Eco-socialism, Green politics, Progressivism	

Source: own elaboration.

¹⁷ Formerly founded under name The Key of Croatia (*Ključ Hrvatske*) in 2011, but changed their name in May 21, 2022 according to event when they played human wall protesting against foreclosures.

Unfortunately, together with the impossibility of the aforementioned newcomer to preserve and institutionalise, and the minority of left-wing voices in the *Sabor*, Croatian political life changed only on the surface and stayed stuck focusing on old issues with unresolved or new crisis “fatigue” from the huge number of changes during the 1990s.¹⁸

Although scholars insist on the decline of radical right-wing ideology and the non-existence of right-wing populism, political discourses, and practices we analysed show the entrance of these features in the media sphere and mass events, and with it influence on Croatian citizens. Therefore, after election results, we follow, in the next part of the chapter, right-wing populism. We found it important because of the ramifications and possibilities which transcend the parliamentary system and have more consequences than just the populist Human Shield and the Bridge with their episodic nature and obvious impossibility to cope with the two-frame party system frame. Above all, in this respect, we agree with Cas Mudde who considered in 2016 that populist radical right-parties “are relevant political actors in about one-third of all European countries, even if many seem to be beyond their electoral peak. This notwithstanding, the populist radical right is by far the most successful new party family in postwar Europe” (Mudde 2016: 298).

Another important insight of scholars is concerned with the ‘demand’ side of populism/nationalism. Therefore, as we wait for the next value survey cycle, it is important to apprehend data from the European Values Survey that shows that has been in decline since the beginning of the 21st century (Baloban, Črpić and Ježovita 2019).¹⁹ Over 86% of respondents were proud of their country (quite proud or very proud) during Period 1, the share of people proud of their country rose to 90% in Period 2, and slightly declined (81%) during Period 3. Additionally, when comparing the 2nd and 3rd periods, it is apparent that more people were “very proud” of their nation in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century (42% compared to 38% in 3rd period), while more people were “not at all proud” at the end of the second decade

¹⁸ That process is understood through another EU Commission – sponsored project “Fatigue: Populism in Central and Eastern Europe” as “delayed transformational fatigue,” where scholars confirmed that populism gained strength after the most stressful phase of post-communist transformations was over. Compare in Fatigue 2022.

¹⁹ For further value orientations analysis with a comparison of Croatia and Serbia, see: Pešić 2017.

of the 21st century (5% compared to 1% in 3rd period). Besides this survey, value analysis concerned with the consequences of the rise of populism were conducted, and they confirmed an affirmation of authoritarianism, populism, and nationalism in younger generations of Croatian society. The research of Mustapić and Karajić, which deals with students as an elite intellectual cohort of young people, confirmed their strong distrust in parties and the connection between such attitudes and the presence of social problems in Croatia (Mustapić and Karajić 2013). Then Derado, Dergić and Međugorac indicate the obvious inclination and receptivity of young people to populism in Croatia, an almost dominance of populist sentiment among young people and distrust in existing political parties (Derado, Dergić and Međugorac 2016). What is also confirmed by several small-scale research conducted in the period after the last EVS cycle in 2018 is that populism become popular (Rogulj and Kišiček 2018) and widespread amongst younger generations (Gjaja 2018). Lately, researchers have been dealing with the reception of populism among Croatian citizens, with a small group of respondents as well as messages that certain right-wing politicians convey through the media (Abramović and Paša 2021).

NATIVISM, AUTHORITARIANISM, AND POPULISM'S LEGACY HAS PREVAILED IN CROATIA

A nationalistic and authoritarian political heritage from the past, both from WWII and the Wars of Yugoslav Succession in the 1990s were still the strongest fuel for contemporary Croatian politics.²⁰ On this occasion

²⁰ For a more general approach to Croatian politics as being stuck with old issues and how badly it dealt with its past, see Goldstein and Hutinec 2007; Markovina 2019; Goldstein 2021. In line with that, as is common for post-socialist countries, Croatia started its independent history with reformed communists in power (see further in Pešić 2017: 165). Torn with the wars of the 1990s, Croatian political elites still slowly accept the "sins from the past" such as WWII when it was a Nazi satellite state, but also resurrected even the medieval knighthood legacy of the Kingdom of Croatia. More unfortunately, Croatia's post-socialist transition period was slowed down by the Homeland

we need to remember that the primary features we identified as unifying right-wing populism in Croatia from the 1990s until third decade of the 21st century are nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, which are three main features that Mudde singled out in his analysis (Mudde 2016: 296).

A rich mix of nativism and populism, with an extremely sharp victimology narrative of the Croatian people, were transferred from the ubiquitous legacy of the former Croatian president Franjo Tuđman. The influential combination of nationalism with populism that he propagated made independent Croatia and has not been challenged by any Croatian government so far.²¹ Let us recall and compare election slogans of his party, the CDU before the first elections in Croatia in 1991 that established the independent state of Croatia when he held a speech on Grobničko polje in Istria with an appraisal of the number of people from that place who gave their life for Croatia; and the first elections after his death in 2000 with his picture on election posters with a child in his arms and the slogan: “All for Croatia, Croatia for nothing” (Markovina 2018: 158). The final stage of overemphasised victimology during Tuđman’s rule was the establishment of the Ministry of Croatian Veterans in 1997, which increased to 200 employees in 2015 – and which fought even for a law for the preservation of privileges of the children of veterans attending university.

Tuđman, a historian by profession, used the populist matrix under which the CDU was portrayed as an example of ‘true Croatian people’ in contrast to the dominant Serbian elite, which was seen as the main threat to the survival of the Croatian nation. Next to Tuđman’s nativism of winning the “hundred year dream of the Croatian people to become independent,”²² the main establishing feature in the political strategy of CDU, with obvious right-wing omens from the 1990s, was to break free from the Serbian ‘corrupted elites’ and bring back the Croatian ‘people’ to their “historical right” and

War (*Domovinski rat*) and started to accelerate only after Tuđman’s death (see further: Pešić 2017: 165–169). In that period, the country faced a new wave of political changes and was freshly fed by a new injection of nationalistic hatred against Serbs.

²¹ On the authoritarian and nationalistic rule of Franjo Tuđman see: Helmerich 2005. Also see: *Review of Croatian History*, Thematic Block: Franjo Tuđman: 20 Years Later, 2021.

²² Compare Tuđman’s speech on the first anniversary of “Storm” on August 5, 1996. https://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/Govor_Franje_Tu%C4%91mana_prigodom_prve_obljetnice_Oluje_5._kolo-voza_1996 [accessed: May 2, 2022].

“historical territories.”²³ Furthermore, the CDU as Tuđman’s main legacy, and overall Croatian political life in general can be understood as periods of de-Tuđmanisation and re-Tuđmanisation.²⁴ In the further development of the cult of Tuđman and his vision of Croatia, political representatives from both right and left of the spectrum have been complicit,²⁵ such as the left-of-centre SDP, but also certain conservative and far-right parties and movements. In line with that, completely different candidates – from social democrat Zoran Milanović to far-right Tomislav Karamarko who radicalised the CDU in 2015, and Andrej Plenković who brought the CDU back to Christian democracy and a more sober right-wing position – emphasised that their path was to fulfil and maintain Tuđman’s legacy in their winning speeches after elections.²⁶ “If I had been in Tuđman’s place in 1990 and in the years immediately following, I would probably have acted like him. But if Franjo Tuđman were in my place today, he would probably act – or act – just like me,” Karamarko said in an interview after winning the parliamentary elections (Hudelst 2015). Prior to the parliamentary elections, intra-party elections were held in the CDU in March 2020 in which Plenković won. Highlights of his speech included the following key points: Tuđman, patriotism, family, and demography. With the original slogan “Brave for Croatia!,” again in his winning speech, Plenković emphasised that Croatia needed a government that would pursue a policy of Croatian sovereignty that inherits the policy of Tuđman (Lechpammer 2020).

The achievement of those ramifications of Tuđman’s legacy resulted in losing a proper understanding of Tuđman and his role in the Yugoslav antifascist legacy through the political discourse of Milanović who, in the role of president, at the same time refused to visit Tuđman’s grave but claimed in

²³ For thorough programmes of the 34 parties for the parliamentary elections in 1990, see: Veselinović 2018.

²⁴ A further in-depth analysis of Croatian political life as de-Tuđmanisation and re-Tuđmanisation is presented in: Čulić 2014.

²⁵ On December 10, 2019, several Croatian institutions (which including historians, sociologists, political scientists, etc.) organised the round-table discussion “Franjo Tuđman: 20 Years Later.” Their presentations showed that Tuđman’s heritage still draws attention and prompts various reactions among the Croatian public, ranging from disapproval to unconditional approval. See: *Review of Croatian History* 2021. Thematic Block: Franjo Tuđman: 20 Years Later.

²⁶ Compare their similar mentioning of Tuđman in post-election speeches: Hudelist (2015); Lechpammer (2020).

numerous speeches that “Tito and Tuđman are the best things to happen in Croatian history” (*Slobodna Evropa* 2015), and has used Tuđman for empathy concerning the poor position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and acclaimed him as a role model and protector of Croatian interests: “Tuđman would be ashamed because he knew how to defend Croatian interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Beker 2022).

The phenomenon which we can call “construction/reconstruction/existence of different Tuđmans,” as a Croatian nativist or anti-fascist, is a process of dividing between Croatian national elites and splitting the vision of Croatian identity we witnessed in every parliamentary and presidential campaign during the 21st century. Also, by using his name vaguely or not clearly mentioning the feature they compare with or appraise him, the main Croatian politicians from the second decade of 21st century – Milanović, Karamarko, and Plenković – reduced or dispersed Tuđman to an ‘empty signifier,’ which is a usual populist weapon to get voters – or ‘confirms’ their position after elections. On that issue, nationalism/nativism and populism still intertwine decades after Tuđman’s death.

Beside the CDU as a populist radical right-wing party in parliament 1990–2000 according to Mudde’s analysis (2016: 301), there was also more radical right-wing populism in 1990s through the Croatian Party of Rights (*Hrvatska stranka prava*). They won only 5 seats in parliament, but their radical approach and populist strategy caught our attention due to their continued activities. In general, the CPR acted in Croatian political life as a radical right-wing party with elements such as: (1) authoritarianism (even militant with forming a paramilitary squad who participated in war battles), (2) extremely radical nativism (with the slogan “*Hrvatska Hrvatima/Hrvatima/Croatia to the Croats*”), (3) anti-communism, (4) neo-fascism, etc.²⁷ In the context of contemporary Croatian political life, they fell from 7.1% in the 1990s war period when their radical ideology appealed to voters, to 3% in 2003 when the right-wing CDU government prevailed again. They then coalitioned with the CDU in 2016 (Table 1, footnote 11), and finally fell to 0.44% in 2020. In line with that, they merely played the role of a proxy for

²⁷ More detailed analysis about the CPR’s mix of nationalism and populism in the 1990s, can be seen in Veselinović 2018: 250–267.

the CDU and finally atomised and perished when the Plenković-led CDU didn't need any more radical voices as they changed to European sober right politics. Without exact data to confirm but with an insight into the activities of several conservative and far-right features in Croatia, Dario Čepo made a farsighted conclusion that "right populists were especially prevalent when the CDU was in opposition, and these movements then acted as de facto proxies and surrogates of the CDU" (Čepo 2017: 17).

Croatia entered the 21st century as fertile ground for the rise of new waves of nationalism(s) and the construction of 'dangerous Others' because war was no past but reality with a scattered population – expelled or emigrated – destroyed cities and villages, war veterans, and all casualties of wars that were fought on their own territory. All these facts were used by political elites because nationalism was a well-affirmed weapon in the unification of voters/citizens. Right-wing representatives in Croatian politics primarily promoted Serbs as traditional enemies or, to be precise, a fear of Serbian hegemony/aggression. This irrational hatred didn't decrease even with the small (decreased) Serbian minority in Croatia in the 21st century: only 4.36% according to the 2011 census compared to 12.2% in the pre-war census in 1990. Despite steps towards normalising relations with the Serb minority in Croatia, the CDU is still a conservative, clientelist party, prone to corruption, nepotism, nationalist speeches by some party members idealising Tuđman and does not dare to question Tuđman's legacy.²⁸

Beside such a rich burden of nationalisms and a devotion to the authoritarian legacy, one important issue challenged the rise of populism and nationalism in Croatia, and that's Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013, and with it the establishment of a local version of the importance of national pride connected with that. Speaking about national identity, even before EU accession, Croatia was established as European (*europejski*) in contrast to a Yugoslavian identity (Pešić 2017: 147), and, in line with that, the *second important "internal enemies" of the Croatian people were Yugoslavs* as ideological and the cross-cultural category of Yugonostalgia's as dangerous for the Croatian "people" (*narod*)

²⁸ The phrase "Croatian state" is an emotional trigger in the nationalist nativist discourse "sacred" or "unquestionable value." Today's followers of the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman perceive any criticism of state policy concerning nationalism as blasphemy and high treason (Goldstein 2021: 492–514, 532).

in the EU and in their existence in the international environment. With the recent entrance of Croatia to the Eurozone, Croatia was internationally widely presented and called an 'Adriatic' country as *differentia specifica* to other ex-Yugoslav 'Balkan' states, and as a part of Central and Mediterranean countries that left their regional partners in South-Eastern Europe. In line with that, Karamarko said: "Until the SDP renounces Josip Broz Tito and his crimes, there will be no true European social democracy in Croatia. And they, not only do not renounce Tito, but Milanović makes him a hero, comparing him to Tuđman. This is historical revisionism, because during his dictatorship Tito said that the Sava would flow towards Triglav rather than Croatia being independent, and Tuđman is the father of the modern Croatian state. From this attitude towards Tito, the SDP is still dominated by the Yugoslav nostalgic approach" (Hudelst 2015). Further, he declared "I would not even call it Yugoslavism, in the traditional sense of the term, but – a cynical departure from the Croatian state! [...] They simply graft European thought onto their old Bolshevism, and that is the whole 'wisdom' of their attitude and approach. They did not love Croatia then, as they do not love it now" (Hudelst 2015). To conclude, we agree with the observation of historian Dragan Markovina that "nothing captures the collective paranoia of the Croatian right in relation to Yugoslavia than the slogan on the Veterans Tent in Savska Street on the occasion of the 2014/2015 elections: 1991 against Yugoslavia, 2014 against Yugoslavia" (Markovina 2018: 173). Therefore, the final post-EU populist confrontation promoted by the biggest parties in Croatia is "European, modern, Croats" against internal enemies – "Yugoslavians" who could lead Croats on the wrong path – again, with extreme nativism since Yugoslavia was supposed to be brotherhood of different nations, with nationalism forbidden. Although, in political analysis, we could expect that representatives of these narrative of the confrontation between "new European Croats" and "Yugoslavs" could be based on a criticism of communism/socialism/bolshevism, these narratives were devoid of deeper analysis, often even reduced to empty signifiers and with a deep denial that modern Croatia was developed by reformed communists.

In line with that, in the next section of this chapter, we will focus on the conservative and right-wing values promoted by representatives of the HM and OBF which we found scientifically rewarding for understanding the ramifications of right-wing populism on both the 'supply' and 'demand' levels.

RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN CROATIA: PROXIES OF CDU AND THE CROATIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH?

As the CDU dominated the Croatian parliament and politics as a radical right populist party from 1990 to 2000,²⁹ and then interchanged with the SDP from 2000 to 2020, with a high percentage of winning all circles of elections (2000–2020) and being regularly present among the winners, second and third-placed parties in elections for the parliament and president (compare Table 1 and 2), there's no room to talk about any pluralism in political life of Croatia. For several election campaigns, they used the slogan "It's Known – CDU" ("*Zna se – HDZ*"), which even culminated from 2007 in a party song,³⁰ not questioning voting for them. Still, in between the underestimated dimension of the rise and development of right-wing populist features in Croatia within junior coalition leaders/movements/organisations that grew and were supported in their early phase by the two biggest parties in Croatia, most of them also by the omnipresent CDU, as being a catch-all party for several conservative and right-wing movements/parties/initiatives.³¹

On the one hand, it is widely underestimated that numerous right-wing movements and organisations entered the political arena in coalition with the CDU. In line with that, the civic organisation, the OBF movement's history should be emphasised starting with their leader Željka Markić as the first president of the far-right party Croatian Growth or Hrast-Movement for Successful Croatia (*Hrast* as acronym from "*Hrvatska raste*")/Croatia Grows and oak tree too) and later being a part of the 'Patriotic' coalition led by the CDU in 2015.³²

²⁹ Compare the periods of HDZ rule with 16 other European radical right parties from 1980 until 2014, with almost the same period for the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*) 1998–2000 as another representative of post-communist transformation history (Mudde 2016: 301).

³⁰ "Zna se," CDU party song from 2007: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLwN3tXcwsY> [accessed: May 2, 2022].

³¹ See more about the connection of conservative and right-wing parties with the CDU and its behaviour in: Čepo (2017). Also, see the in-depth analysis of the chameleon nature of the biggest parties in Croatia in: Mikucka-Wójtowicz (2019).

³² In 2021 they merged into an entity called Croatian Sovereignists (*Hrvatski suverenisti*) with two more right-wing parties – Croatian Conservative Party (*Hrvatska konzervativna stranka*) and Generation of Renewal (*Generacija obnove*).

OBF is the only populist entity in contemporary Croatia that showed a power of mass mobilisation. Besides having more than 600,000 members, just after Croatia's entrance to the EU in 2013, activists of this Catholic citizens' group handed over 749,000 collected signatures to the Parliament calling for a referendum which would enshrine in the constitution a provision according to which marriage would be reserved exclusively for women and men – to be precise they won the battle against the LGBT community for exclusively heterosexual marriage. By undermining the democratic values that were being established and cherished through the activities of SDP-led government, OBF claimed that they were the saviour of Christian legacy and values³³ and stood against violence of the 'minority' against the 'majority.' The manipulative process of choosing something they 'already have' and to prevent 'hypothetically same-sex marriage' was a huge attack on the SDP who had been fighting for more social equality and freedom from 2003, and all other political participants who were not influenced by the conservative Catholic Church.³⁴ OBF also continued to play the referendum 'game' promoting the preservation of the law on referendums as their main tool for political participation.³⁵ Both the episodic nature of the Human Shield and the populist manipulative game of OBF, failed to run the course which Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser claim is corrective of democracy, but also Kyle and Mounk who hypothetically-observed as populists' "big opportunity to deepen democracy, and to have positive effect of political system" (Kyle and Mounk 2018: 7). On the contrary: OBF showed the subversive or transgression possibilities of democracy and a misuse of the democratic institutions of referendum and the law.

³³ For the path to preservation of Christian legacy as a part of European Civilisation Process, but also protectionism and morality included in that process see: Brubaker (2017).

³⁴ CCC acted from the start of independent Croatia as a partner of the newly formed CDU and, through the 21st century developed their influence in all social fields (compare in Galić 2020: 91–92). The clericalisation of Croatian society was grounded in deep connections between the Croatian nation-building process with their medieval history and the traditional role of the Catholic Church as a partner of the State (Bešlin et al. 2020: 19). The CCC supported Croats both during the war and afterwards, but it never neglected its humanitarian duties. As a result, the CCC has been socially integrated in the newly established Croatian society and it has dominated the political and public spheres in the last decade. Still the moral authority of the CCC suffered because of its alliance with the CDU (Grzymała-Busse 2017: 145), and vice versa.

³⁵ Compare on their official site: Referendum on electoral law, <https://uimeobitelji.net/referendum-2014/> [accessed: May 2, 2022]. Further details on the activities of this organisation were recently thorough analysed in: Kahlina (2020).

Another initiative connected with the leader of this organisation is opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention against violence against women and domestic violence, along with abortion and euthanasia. As Eiermann, Mounk and Gultchin observed: “Many populist parties, especially on the right, advocate policies that may be democratic (in the sense of being popular) but also deeply illiberal: with the backing of the majority of the people, they undermine the rule of law and violate the basic rights of unpopular minorities” (Eiermann, Mounk and Gultchin 2017: 18). OBF is an example of the illiberal use of referendum as pretending to be democratic and supporting ‘majority’ rights. On the other side, HM’s leader, the musician, and entrepreneur Škoro, is an example of a politician with a long political career and an excellent example of the development of radical right-wing populist(s) in the auspices of the CDU supported by state institutions. Finally, his appearance at the state sport and culture manifestations where his general values were promoted to a wide audience demonstrate this. Although his election campaign in 2019 promoted by Croatian media as a new face and ‘independent candidate,’ Škoro had more than a decade of support from the CDU. He was first appointed as consul in Hungary by Tuđman in person from 1995 to 1997. His long career of folk musician-patriot returning from the USA to his homeland Croatia resulted in several albums of soft patriotic songs.³⁶ He succeeded in 2007 in becoming a member of parliament, as member of the CDU, and is now the vice president of the Croatian *Sabor*. Before his candidacy at the presidential elections in 2019/2020, the ideology he propagates were already present: extreme nativism, populism, Euroscepticism, authoritarianism, and conservative-right ideology, such as ‘pro-life’ policies against abortion.

In line with the *authoritarian* values he promoted, Škoro actively supported pro-fascism and Ustasha-led ideology of the ‘state’ during the Independent State of Croatia, which was exact evidence of a call for contemporary Croatia

³⁶ Besides state support of his musicianship, as being head of state records company ‘Croatia Records’ (2001–2006) and hosting one of the most popular singing shows on TV, in the first two decades of the 21st century he acted with a clear political agenda. Just to mention his duets with renowned far-right supporter through music, Marko Perković Thompson, one of them ‘They’re judging me’ (*Sude mi*, album *My dear/Milo moje*) in 2003 when General Gotovina’s case was a primary concern for the rise of nationalism and memory of the Homeland War, along with his singing at several CDU meetings, the last time in 2019.

to follow the path of the mentioned historical authoritarian state-to-be. In line with that, he lined up with supporters of the Ustasha greeting “Ready for the home(land)” (“*Za dom spremni*”) in regular state official events. The resurrection of this greeting and the concentration camp Jasenovac were primary topics in his presidential campaign (*Nedeljnik.rs*, November 17, 2019).

Škoro’s extreme *nativism* with several statements in then concerning the ‘real Croatian people’ and against their enemies, the Serbs, were obvious and permanent values he propagated. He presented himself in the media as a person who “belongs to the generation of Croats who fought Serbian fascism” (*Nedeljnik.rs*, November 17, 2019) and was part of a negative campaign against the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (*Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka*).

Above all, *nativism*, and *authoritarianism* were packed with the third feature of the definition of radical right populist parties according to Mudde (2016) – a *populist* strategy. To start with, the slogan of the HM representative Škoro at the elections “Let’s return Croatia to the people” (“*Vratimo Hrvatsku narodu*”) and the culmination of his message to voters in the second round “I will vote for you – the Croatian people who trusted me,”³⁷ and after elections that “the only coalition partner of HM is Croatian people” all indicate this. His construct of ‘the Croatian people’ is confronted by traditional Croatian elites, led by the CDU and SDP how he characterised them as “corrupted elites,” “ruling oligarchy,” “interest-oriented octopus” (“*interesna hobotnica*”) and a “clique.” He even cried during one election statement, “We unmasked the octopus” (*Hrvatska danas*, December 22, 2019), to fulfil the populist behaviour of familiarity with voters, but also as a common moment during his concerts.

As we pointed out, *nativism*, *authoritarianism* and *populism* were common in Croatian politics, and the *differentia specifica* of OBF and HM are their activities and places/space of their campaign. On the one hand, Škoro’s high percentage wouldn’t be possible without the long development of his public personality as a Croatian patriot, supported with state medals for achievements in culture (Marko Marulić Prix) and soft folk music propaganda

³⁷ In contrast to the candidates from CDU and SDP, he added “the Croatian people” on his election paper as 3rd option. See further to this action and statement in: *Telegraf.rs*, December 31, 2019.

about Croatia's natural beauty and events from Croatian history, along with the pathetic victimhood of the poor, common Croat in every one of his songs. These patriotic songs and values were promoted by him at political and cultural events, and his co-operation with Thompson made connection with far-right supporters at sports and other nationalistic events this he attended. In this example, the encounter of nationalism and populism is insufficient if studied only through electoral campaigns and results. On the other hand, the transgression of the parliamentary system by using a 'parliamentary referendum' is one other subversion of the right-wing populists OBF and belongs to period of growing populism around the world with the Trump presidency and Brexit as examples of its culmination.

Both OBF and HM, but also the CDU, were inconsistent when we approached them with a content analysis of their election campaign statements. Some CDU members also acted against the official policy of their party and promoted right-wing ideology. Beyond all mentioned conservative right populist parties and movements, we confirmed the hand-in-hand support of the CDU and CCC, and with it no possible abandonment of the nativism-authoritarianism-populism matrix in Croatia.

CONCLUSIONS

The results we found by comparing the periods 1989–2000 and 2000–2020 indicate five important conclusions about right-wing populism in Croatia in the 21st century: (1) a mix of nationalism and populism from Tudman's legacy (1990–1999) still prevailed, (2) the HDZ acted as a party who developed conservative and radical right proxies, (3) right-wing populism transcends and inverts in many ways parliamentary systems and electoral processes as democratic institutions, (4) there's a huge influence of the CCC in Croatian politics, and (5) right-wing populism has the support of the youth in Croatia.

Besides the above conclusions being important for further political analysis of Croatian right-wing populism, the peculiarity of the Croatian case and issues that create hard battles with democratic political changes

could relate to the path of their development. On the one side, right-wing populism entities are supported by the logistically and historically confirmed CDU party (and then SDP). On the other side, it is supported by the CCC and its local network, which has demonstrated great possibilities of influence throughout whole history of independent Croatia. Another important issue we found is the underestimating of alternative ways of promotion of narratives and values that had significant influence on the population. In line with that, there's an important gap in the research of processes in which right-wing parties/movements/initiatives use national memorials and other cultural and sporting events for promotion. Therefore, their dynamic processes of splitting and gathering permanently stayed in political life was the circle that has been permanently repeating from the 1990s until now.

Finally, the consequences of the rise of right-wing populism in Croatia, under the umbrella of junior coalition partners showed the weakness of democratic institutions in Croatia. Besides an attack on pluralism with right-wing populism features, state media and institutions showed an affirmative and non-censored approach to discourse on 'dangerous Others,' hate speech between politicians, Euroscepticism, militant statements, etc.

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POSTFACE:

NEW RUSSIA'S IMPERIALISM AND POPULIST DELUGE FROM THE CURRENT PERSPECTIVE OF RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE¹

Thanks to the research and analysis that followed, the second Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 provided more detailed data on relations between European populists and the Kremlin. Connections were established both in EU member states and within the Western Balkans. The rise of populism emerged from internal weaknesses and the inability of the EU and its member states to simultaneously respond to the financial, political and security challenges of the last 20 years, and maintain a general

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social consensus on freedom and democracy. Populists even came to power in several EU member states, and the Western Balkans, the non-integrated periphery, is stuck in the EU's waiting room in a limbo of fractured institutions, corruption and poverty. Eastern Europe has been pierced by economic and social discontent. The Western Balkans have effectively been kicked out of the game, as the EU promised the prospect of integration back in 2003, and the failure that followed has become one of the frameworks of enlargement fatigue and the growth of Russian influence (Bechev 2017: 37–54). Facing its proximate strategic priorities, the Black Sea and Ukraine, and frustrated by the fact that the Baltic states are under NATO's shield, Russia has applied more immediate actions (Conradi 2017: 273–310; Hahn 2018: 19–29; Stent 2019: 315–372). Russia has not forgotten its former satellites in Eastern Europe, who are integrated into EU, as it encourages populist forces, particularly in the states of the Visegrád Group. From a different perspective, the entire area of the economic influence of Germany has been infected, as German industrial and energy interests have contributed to the growth of Vladimir Putin.

Studies of Russian malignant influence have allowed the presumption that there are no relevant populist leaders and populist organisations that have not established corrupt relations with the Russian Federation and enjoyed its political support – public or hidden (Samardžić 2022: 212–219). Russia has been trying to disrupt EU-NATO expansion since the beginning of 1996, as the peace agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina established a pattern of partition based on ethnic divisions that could also have affected relations in the post-Soviet world. A new Iron Curtain was beginning to alienate the West and Russia, but also divide European societies, penetrating to their basic depths confronting emerging populism and retreating liberal democracy (McNabb 2016: 65–66).

After the first wave of EU integration and enlargement in the late nineties, Russia became increasingly dissatisfied with the US's dominant position in international relations, seeking to restore the superpower status it lost following the Soviet disintegration and the first transition period that followed. Russian society was sharply split between extreme winners and extreme losers, while state services of ideological guidance and political coercion, now in coalition with the church and transitional moguls, remained vital and eager for enacting revenge on a global scale (Stent 2014: 102). The

turning point for Russia's new strategic policy was the 1999 NATO intervention in Serbia and Montenegro. In April 1999, NATO also introduced a new strategic policy. Russia again saw the West as a threat and sharpened its anti-Western attitudes. During his first presidential term, 2000–2004, Russian President Vladimir Putin further centralised power and emphasised his personal role in the chain of political decision-making and strategic command, announcing the renewal of the Soviet Union and, simultaneously, the tsarist legacy (Haas 2010: 15–39).

Putin successfully managed a shifting architecture of international relations and the economic and strategic growth of new global powers, China, India, and Brazil. The political distraction of the West was gradually worsened by the corrosion of political leadership and growing corruption. In attempts to regain influence in European relations, Russia repeated that NATO ignored Russia's views and disobeyed UN standards and international law while intervening in Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo. Russia was becoming very concerned about the EU and NATO's enlargement, and established closer relations with North Korea and Cuba, supporting rogue states and movements opposed to liberal democracy across the world. Economic and military ties with China, India and Iran deepened and intensified.

The EU integration of Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007 followed NATO expansion. Moreover, while Putin's regime soon trampled on the last vestiges of democratic practices and institutions, persecuting opposition, civil activists and journalists, the new emerging Russian imperialism was able to cope only by seeking sensitive political and strategic points within an increasingly complex EU structure and manipulating social discontents (Van Herpen 2014: 15). From 2008, the global economic crisis has exposed disunities while raising serious international challenges. The EU was shaken by an indecisive and unfocused foreign and security policy and energy dependency (Tichý 2019: 23–28). Globalisation has rapidly changed the general structure of production, trade and labour, and the EU common market, in particular, affected new social relations. Democratic, free, open societies proved to be vulnerable to populist manipulation as campaigns of lies and deception infected both the mainstream media and social networks on the internet, manipulating fears and irrational feelings, and spreading false news and conspiracy theories (Maass 2016: 64–83).

Russia also used black funding and energy policy in order to reach influential individuals in EU governments and businesses. In particular, Russia exploited EU weaknesses in the peripheries, such as Ukraine, Turkey and the Western Balkans. Russia also used its lines of influence in the former Soviet satellite states within the Visegrád Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Romania and Bulgaria (Barbier and Martí Font 2018: 281–309). Russia's malignant influence also reached the United Kingdom, where Putin's moguls stashed their looted wealth, educated their children and bought football clubs. There are even assumptions that Brexit succeeded because Russia manipulated social media, mobilising a historically traditional left-wing electorate. Brexit was supported in 140 working-class districts that previously voted for the Labour Party and even in a few ethnically diverse areas where settled minorities saw immigrant workers from other EU member states not only as a threat to their jobs but also as potential beneficiaries of preferential social treatment (Samardžić 2022: 220–238). In France, Marine Le Pen attracted one in three French voters, including many in the under-forty category. The populists took over the appealing narrative as the sole defenders of national identity. Integrated in the EU common market and a supposedly impersonal world deprived of borders as lines of social security and national identity, the nation-state was becoming, in populist messaging, the prey of colonisers, a global economy, visiting workers and migrants. Migrants and asylum seekers were prime markers of undesired social change brought about by allegedly unresponsive elites (Barbier and Martí Font 2018: 159–172).

Populism threatened to undermine the important achievements of democratisation and freedom agendas, both in Eastern Europe and within Western European societies (Robinson and Milne 2017: 412–425). Eastern Europe won freedom and established democratic institutions after the fall of communism. Most survivors from the Soviet era considered freedom to travel, exchange or work abroad to be the best things to happen after 1989. However, reforms and integration have not eliminated all the causes of the region's relative backwardness in comparison to Western and Northern Europe. European integration has caused increased competitiveness in the West, and a declining workforce and social depression in the East. Populist policies and leftist intellectual discourse often related globalisation to an allegedly unfair liberal democratic order, an open economy and free trade (although

the essence of globalisation has been the inclusion of non-liberal or anti-liberal BRIC states in an increasingly integrated world economy).

Another trigger was the migrant crisis, provoked by Russian intervention in Syria in 2015 (Conradi 2017: 503–524). As migrants from the Middle East and Africa crossed borders in the southern European, the loudest resistance to their arrival arose in states where migrants even did not intend to stay to settle (Barbier and Martí Font 2018: 77–81). The migrant crisis raised another unknown about the future of the labour market in the EU. Migrants actually followed the previous movements of the Eastern European workforce. The political consequences, almost imminent, were the shift of the working class to the right. Perspectives of political freedom, economic prosperity or social advantages usually attracted the contemporary labouring class. Populist messages, however, invoked a return to national sovereignty and promoted autarchy, a turn to the big state that ostensibly takes care of jobs, standards and the nation's survival.

Populism also grew thanks to the historical disappearance of the coalition of nationalists and liberals who overthrew communism in Eastern Europe. Populism grew on promises of a return to the concept of the welfare state, the core of the post-war political consensus. Populism partly relied on the legacy of nationalism opposed to communism in the pre-1989 era, national-state homogeneity, dissatisfaction of the working class and a demographic decline. However, as populism is not a universal worldview, such as that as formerly offered by Nazis, fascists or communists, populist nationalism arose as more local and parochial – and the only idea or framework that could unite populist movements was the one offered by Russia. Thus, populisms began to tie their future to the fate of Kremlin politics.

Russia has skillfully manipulated feelings of political, economic and social insecurity in the EU. Brexit disputed the economic community. US president Donald Trump began to undermine strategic relations with his European partners. EU disunity was transposed into trans-Atlantic disunity. Europe lost its central position in global politics, and Russian president Putin showed such strength to take over (Snyder 2018: 371–472).

Russia offered certainty and security. Populists based their promises on access to cheap Russian energy sources and the removal of institutional – supposedly alien – obstacles between the leader and the people who used their services. Europeans became more and more worried that their descendants

would have a harder life. New expectations from the new welfare state also arose when facing the process of an aging population. Populism was also fed by disputes of democracy and liberal values based on a postmodern philosophy. China, India and Russia influenced globalisation to create a process of a new legitimization of the concept of the nation-state instead of the opposite, as was expected. In Eastern Europe, the trauma of communism sometimes transformed into a kind of the Stockholm syndrome in relation to the new imperial Russia, and its renewal of the Soviet legacy.

Under populist pressure, the EU revealed its vulnerable spots. Instead of remaining a vague notion opposing the establishment, populism called for a rebellion against meritocratic elites, especially against Brussels, as the EU's bureaucracy was allegedly out of touch with the societies it was supposed to represent and serve. The EU was no longer an acceptable form of community. Tolerance and civility have long been key features of the EU, which were now beginning to be perceived, from the populist perspective, as a form of vulnerability (Barbier and Martí Font 2018: 46–52).

Liberal reforms and transition have created distrust in institutions. Faced with the influx of migrants and economic uncertainty after the global financial crisis, Eastern Europe grew disillusioned with joining the European Union. Eastern Europeans and Trump's white working class in the US reacted similarly to globalisation, considering themselves 'written off.' Populists instilled into transitional losers a sense of humiliation and a fear for their economic and social future. The EU imposes values and norms and cancels national identities. Tolerance and a common community of cultures, nationalities and races were perceived as cultural disorder in a united Europe.

Brexit and Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election had far-reaching consequences. Donald Trump managed to attract even traditional voters of the left who were disillusioned with the Democratic Party and the policies of the previous administration. His messages often resembled the demagoguery of Senator Bernie Sanders from the far left. In Britain, the campaign to leave the EU was led by the populist right and opponents of the establishment from the left wing of the Labour Party. Conservative and libertarian critics saw the EU as bringing excessive regulation, redistribution and socialism, while the left associated the EU with neoliberal reforms that lacked social responsibility and transparency (a particularly

interesting example of this is Greece's Syriza movement and its ties to the Kremlin (Barbier and Martí Font 2018: 100).

A part of European voters, traditionally apathetic towards the EU, was increasingly ready to reject the European project. The causes of the economic crisis were sought in the common European currency and European institutions as a whole. The refugee crisis, followed by terrorist attacks that hit Paris, Brussels and Nice, highlighted existing anxieties about immigration and raised hopes for the effectiveness of the nation-state, in contrast to the concept of EU open borders. Populists condemned the EU for being ineffective, institutions cumbersome, sluggish, with unclear competences, indirectly elected. Russian leader Vladimir Putin established partnerships and influence in Western Europe. The alternative to complex European bureaucracy and weak national governments was autocracy, close to both extreme right and extreme left parties and movements. The success of populists was, among other things, false promises (Barbier and Martí Font 2018: 37–41).

Far-left populist parties supported Putin's concept of a state economy and Russia's policy in Ukraine and the Middle East. It also turned out that the old 'friendship networks' inherited from the Cold War, when the USSR supported left-wing parties and movements, were revived, mainly against the domestic establishment and US foreign policy.

Populism is a seductive alternative to individual political or economic responsibility. In the postmodern reality, a need for protection, belonging, recognition and respect is becoming a priority over individual freedom and responsibilities. Postmodern philosophy opened the path to post-truth, a system of illusions that, within a network of lies or relativising, releases the individual from individual moral duty. With the first aggression in Ukraine in 2014, Russia started a hybrid war against the EU, using propaganda, campaigns of deception, corruption of officials and support for populists. In order to achieve its strategic goals, Russia had to provide a subordinate clientele and thus promote anti-EU alternatives. The EU has revealed clear weaknesses, primarily an inability to mobilise the public and society around its common goals. Leadership failed before the challenges of corruption stemming from legal and illegal inflows of capital from Russia, China and the Middle East. The Western liberal consensus was challenged by the new reality of anti-democratic elitism. Populists offered a shorter and simpler path, becoming more convincing than democratic leaders. Using

a model that re-established authoritarian rule in Russia, populists set out to remove barriers between ‘themselves’ and ‘the people’ (Rohac, Győri and Zgut 2017: 1–24). They revived the spirit of nationalism and economic protectionism. The replacement of politics by culture also became a force of populism. Liberalism rests on a political anthropology that emphasises individualism and unfettered personal choice, denying imperatives of cultural traditionalism. Democracy rejects the divine origin of power and the power of the clergy. Populists began to dispute the right to cultural pluralism and the separation of the public sphere from the private as a rejection and suppression of tradition. The power of populism became the power of Putin’s Russia. Corrupt demagogues, intellectuals, journalists, public activists and charlatans joined the populist agenda (Judis 2016: 122–200).

Campaigns of lies and relativising also led to the EU misjudging that Russia would not oppose the integration of Ukraine into the EU. Along with Putin, EU leaders lost their ability to see the reality in its complex historical dynamics, especially the ability of authoritarianism to produce new crises and human tragedies.

The Western Balkans is Russia’s third point of strategic influence, along with the Baltics and Ukraine. Russia built a network of dependent clientele, encouraging the rise of populists. Using disinformation campaigns and strategic communication, Russia has managed to maintain its dominance over the increasing local distrust of the EU. Russia and China both used political corruption and their economic influence through investment flows. Russia also focused on religious, Christian Orthodox affairs. “Both China and Russia have threatened to use and [have] used Security Council vetoes in support of Serbia’s opposition to Kosovo’s independence” and have heavily invested in the region’s energy sectors. The Chinese Belt and Road initiative went through Chinese state banks and saw non-transparent corrupt deals with government officials. “Both China and Russia have provided military equipment to the region” and “have invested in deepening the links with the political elites” (Rrustemi et al. 2019: 13).

The authoritarian model of governance managed to survive even the era of liberalism and Western dominance between 1989 and 2008. Global democratic backsliding led to the rise of populism as “authoritarian leaders have tightened their grip on public institutions and resources, cultivated clientelistic networks, captured the media, harnessed nationalism, and leveraged

the power of the state to marginalise the opposition and critics in civil society” (Bechev 2021: 52–54). Prime minister Nikola Gruevski in North Macedonia 2006–2016,² Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić since 2012 and Milorad Dodik in Republika Srpska are all examples of this. The similar space was opened to the penetration of Turkey. Both Russia and Turkey have been appealing to religious and ethnic particularism and, in the Russian case, anti-Western nationalism (Bechev 2021: 52–54).

Russia has also built strategic potentials for loyal populists. “The Kremlin is growing its military influence in the Balkans by supplying weapon systems to Serbia and supporting secessionist forces in the Republika Srpska. Russia has increased military pressure on the Baltics and the Scandinavian countries through additional military buildup” (Bugayova 2020: 22). “In 2016, the government of Republika Srpska held an unconstitutional referendum with the blessing of Russia to adopt a separate national holiday. Another vote for secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina was promised for 2018 but it did not happen. These actions paved Dodik’s way on to the U.S. sanctions list and increased reliance on Russia even more. Dodik called for Republika Srpska to recognise the annexation of Crimea and welcomed the Night Wolves, a pro-Kremlin Russian motorcycle movement to Banja Luka in 2018” (Metodieva 2019: 15). Much like previously, as the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation attempted to control regional leaders and keep them away from European influence as much as possible, especially from integration. Russia has successfully hindered almost every step the Western Balkan states have taken to move closer to NATO or the EU. “This helped President Putin to consolidate his popularity and strongman image in Serbia (with a 57% approval rating there, he is the most trusted foreign leader), while also sustaining sympathy in Republika Srpska and the northern municipalities in Kosovo. He also has a strong pro-Russian base in Montenegro and enjoys the support of the nationalist political party VMRO-DPMNE in North Macedonia” (Secrieru 2019: 4–6).

Other populists were brought to power in Montenegro, this time however with clear support from local EU, US and UK missions – Krivokapić in 2020, and Abazović in 2022. A creeping coup, obviously coordinated between Vučić

² Gruevski’s cabinet refused to follow the EU in imposing sanctions against Russia after the annexation of Crimea and President Ivanov attended the 2015 Victory Day parade in Moscow, boycotted by most Western leaders (Metodieva 2019: 7).

and Abazović, is currently underway. “In the middle of a NATO conference in Montenegro, the Montenegrin Prime Minister fired the Head of Montenegro’s National Security Agency. The US Ambassador commented that the Security Director had recently taken strong anti-Russian positions; thus implying that the PM is pro-Russian.”³

If the total political and economic value of the Western Balkans was considered minor, the failure of integration left a feeling of failure of the general EU foreign and security policy, not only the enlargement policy. Russia exploited the EU’s vulnerability using EU populists to support Western Balkan populists. Instead of a symbol of change, the EU has become a symbol of futility, and populism a convincing alternative. Populists have skillfully managed frustrated, angry societies by inciting new ethnic tensions. Meanwhile, the EU remained persistent in citing fear that any change in approach to the Western Balkans and its EU prospectives would mean abandoning EU principles entirely when its standards are not respected. Using the weakness of the EU, Russia managed to reach the pores of every national and religious conflict, so that entire states remain unfinished and societies are in the process of disintegration, regardless of populist homogenisation.

Populism is a political process of democratic erosion that has influenced a general intellectual and moral regression, further underlined by the COVID-19 pandemic. Populism arose from core dissatisfactions in developed European societies and within in the geographical peripheries that were included in the process of EU enlargement, or where enlargement has not been not successful. Populists are political allies of the Kremlin and

³ Jason Jay Smart. 2022. *Montenegro’s Security Chief Sacked for Apparent Attempts to Combat Russia’s Influence*. *Kyiv Post*: <https://www.kyivpost.com/world/montenegros-security-chief-sacked-for-apparent-attempts-to-combat-russias-influence.html> [accessed: December 12, 2022]. Ivana Stradner, Advisor to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and Balkans expert said to the *Kyiv Post* that, “all events in the Balkans are connected, and Moscow hopes to expand its influence in the Balkans, which it sees as another theatre where it can challenge the West. Russia has been destabilizing Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro for a long time. The situation in Montenegro is just the latest event after Putin’s proxy in Bosnia, Milorad Dodik, threatened with secession. Kosovo is also on Putin’s menu. The latest tensions between Serbia in Kosovo undermine regional stability and present an easy target for the Kremlin. The latest protests erupted following a law stating Serbs living in Kosovo must switch their license plates from Serbian to Kosovar.” Many of these policies are viewed as being pro-Serbian and ultimately being exploited to serve pro-Russian interests: <https://www.kyivpost.com/world/montenegros-security-chief-sacked-for-apparent-attempts-to-combat-russias-influence.html> [accessed: December 12, 2022].

views from the perspective of Russia's aggression against Ukraine provided clearer insights into their participation in the emergence of the deepest and most dangerous crisis in European relations since 1945. Putin's current failure in Ukraine has further exposed the network of populists and their role in his imperial agenda. Moreover, Russia's aggression against Ukraine mobilised new European forces of resistance to populism and Russian imperialism, from the Baltics to the Mediterranean – from Estonia and Poland to Montenegro and Kosovo.

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Populism is one of the most frequently used terms in contemporary political debates and the media. This elusive and difficult-to-measure phenomenon became also highly politicised both in Europe and around the world. The dichotomy between 'pure people' and 'the corrupted elite' characterises all populist movements and actors, and so this book focuses on particular features that connect populist actors in the post-communist countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The volume gathers chapters analysing the phenomenon of populism in Central and South-Eastern Europe from multidisciplinary perspectives. The aim is to map and understand the peculiarities of populism in the region seen from the perspective of political science, economy, history, and cultural studies.

The book is a result of cooperation between researchers working on a project entitled Populist Rebellion against Modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: Neo-Traditionalism and Neo-Feudalism (POPREBEL). The project is funded by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 scheme and aims to analyse the rise of populism in Central and Eastern Europe. POPREBEL is run by a consortium of six European universities: University College London, Jagiellonian University, Charles University, University of Tartu, Corvinus University of Budapest, University of Belgrade, and the think tank Edgeryders.

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