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POPULIST POLITICAL PARTIES IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

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MASARYK UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL STUDIES
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1. INTRODUCTION

Populism is a term which has become established in the public consciousness. It has become a part of the rhetoric (as a form of attack) of political players and has also found a firm place in academic debates. This is despite the fact, or perhaps because, that a generally accepted and heuristically seamless concept of populism does not exist. The term populism somehow carries an automatic negative connotation. Party leaders are accused of populism, proposed solutions to political problems are attacked by their opponents as populist and, as such, summarily rejected. Populism in the public as well as journalistic discourse has in many cases become synonymous – as we describe in the theoretical chapter of this book – with demagoguery or rhetorical statements full of empty promises.

Yet there is consensus among professionals dealing with party politics that populism is alive and well in many party systems and does not necessarily have negative connotations. In the academic environment, populism is (mostly) a neutral category, or a defining feature of an attempt to capture certain specifics of some political parties or party politics. The problem is that even in an academic setting politicians and political parties with different historical backgrounds, voter bases or – and this is probably the most troubling area in the contemporary debate about populism – different electoral appeal and political programmes are labelled as populist. The populist epithet has been applied to the French Poujadists, the National Front, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Scandinavian Progress Parties, Hungary's Fidesz, and the Slovak National Party and to South American politicians in the Juan Peron mould. Likewise, new conjugate forms can be found such as agrarian populism, national populism (also populistic nationalism), extreme right-wing populism or social populism.

The theoretical chapter of this book will attempt to systemise the current academic debate about populism and, by following recent articles from scholars such as Ben Stanley, Cas Mudde, Kevin

Deegan-Krause and Peter Učeň, we hope to offer a clearly defined theoretical basis of the perception of populism. Regarding populism and especially populist rhetoric perceived primarily as emphasising antagonism between a corrupt political establishment (not only governmental political parties) and the "betrayed" people, we distinguish between parties which can be identified as exclusively populist and non-exclusively populist political parties. We unequivocally reject the understanding of populism as demagoguery or policies of empty promises (from discussion with one of the authors of the case studies emerges a certain irony over such an understanding of the term populism as "doubled-wage populism").

In the section of the book consisting of case studies, we focus exclusively on the region of post-communist East-Central Europe, and only on current (mid 2012) European Union member states. First, we believe that the countries in the region, despite their mutual differences such as the level of economic development and different cultures have in common something that could be called a "legacy of communism" – experience with a communist regime and resurgent political pluralism, including newly configured party systems lacking long-lasting links between civil society and its party representation. At the same time the membership of the European Union these countries (with respect to admission) points to a degree of democratic consolidation and political processes. A tricky issue in preparing the concept of this book was whether to include the Baltic countries. On the one hand, of course, all three states meet the requirement of post-communist members of the European Union. On the other hand, their inclusion in the East-Central Europe region is problematic for geographical and historical reasons. The Baltic countries were therefore finally – also with regard to the fact that they are small states – dealt with in one joint chapter.

The main aim of the book is, therefore, through case studies to present an in-depth description of the appearance and activities of political parties and also to compare their differences and similarities. In other words, is there something that unites the populist political parties which would emerge from a study of the specifics of the studied region? The analyses yielded some interesting results, and also incentives for further research. The aim of the book is not only to

find answers to the question formulated but also to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of parties in the region corresponding to our concept of populism.

Populism is often seen as an effective tool for attracting protest votes, which leads to its frequent use by new political parties and formations, or non-parliamentary actors trying to gain relevance in the party system. This book focuses only – except in rare cases justified in the individual chapters – on parties that during their tenure managed to gain parliamentary representation and can therefore assume at least some degree of relevance. The timeframe of the study is set on one side by the foundation of democratic party systems and on the other the year 2011. This limit is not strictly complied with – in justified cases, authors briefly reflect the developments during 2012. The authors of the case studies focus on a wide range of aspects of the political parties, including their electoral performance, program identity, internal functioning and involvement in the political system. All authors of case studies in this book followed the same theoretical framework set out in the theoretical chapter. Each of them used their expertise and knowledge of the particular country to select the parties analysed in their chapter. Should no populist parties be indentified in the political system, the authors were given the option to analyse the possible reasons of the low significance of populism in the party system.

In the first case study Ilze Balcere analyses the situation in the Baltic countries, which usually remain on the margins of research interest into populism in post-communist countries. The author identifies four potential populist parties, Lithuanian Order and Justice (TT) and the Labour Party (DP), Latvian New Era (JL), and Estonian Res Publica (RP). With the exception of RP, all the named parties have their leader in a characteristic key role, which not only affects the organisational operation of the party, but often its successes (or not) in elections. The electoral success of the party, other than the popularity of the leader, is affected by the intensity of the protest vote in elections. As in the majority of other countries, in the Baltic States, populist parties have repeatedly entered into government coalitions, often as the strongest party of government. Government engagement has led to

the abandonment of original populist rhetoric (JL) or to a significant fall in electoral polling (RP, DP).

Blagovesta Cholova deals with populist parties in Bulgaria. As in most of the other countries, there is no agreement between Bulgarian authors about which parties can be described as populist. This chapter analyses in detail three parties, the National Movement for Stability and Progress (NDSV), Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) and Political Party Attack (Ataka). The first two are understood as exclusively populist parties and the last of them as a nationalist party with a strong populist element. Cholova's analysis confirms the generally accepted assumption that while populist parties can be very effective in mobilizing floating voters, their success is often followed by voter disappointment when the parties come to power, and is then followed by their marginalization.

Vlastimil Havlík in a case study about the Czech Republic deals with the Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ). Czech Republicans tend to be labelled as a radical right-wing political party mainly because of its nationalism bordering on xenophobia and racism. Nevertheless, a significant part of their identity was formed by the populist appeal of accusing the "governmental garniture" (including in their understanding also President Václav Havel) of "stealing the revolution" or "stealing national property". The republican appeal found its voice in the 1990s, at a time of ongoing economic transformation which quite clearly divided society into "winners" and "losers". A completely different case is that of Public Affairs (VV), a political party which – as it turned out later – was infiltrated by rich businessmen who wanted to connect their businesses to public contracts and managed in the 2010 election to benefit from a growing dissatisfaction with the political situation, and not only enter the parliament, but subsequently to become part of the centre-right government. After a series of corruption scandals and deepening internal disputes VV broke up and left the government.

Vratislav Havlík, in the chapter on Hungary, identifies three populist parties, the ecologically oriented Politics Can Be Different (LMP), the nationalistic Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) and the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik). The oldest of these parties, MIÉP, managed to enter Parliament in one parliamentary term, but

by 2002 had lost its relevance. The radical Jobbik was ideologically quite close to MIÉP and both parties even ran together for office in 2006. As in many other countries, expressions of populism in Hungary are often closely connected with nationalism. An exception is the left-wing, environmentally-oriented LMP, which has only been on the Hungarian political scene since 2009 and is still establishing its position in the party system.

A long tradition of populism in Poland is reflected in the modern Polish party system. Populist elements can be found in many contemporary Polish parties. Kinga Wojtas, author of the Polish case study identifies only one party, Self-Defence, which can be classified as an exclusively populist party and focuses on it in her analysis. A specific feature of Self-Defence, in the context of other parties analysed in this book, is a combination of defending the interests of relatively narrowly defined socio-economic groups (de facto Polish rural areas) with a strong anti-establishment appeal and ideological profile.

Also in the case of Romania, only one party really met the criteria for deeper analysis, the Greater Romania Party (PRM). Markéta Smrčková in this chapter describes the organisational and ideological evolution of the party, which managed to remain on the Romanian political scene from 1991 almost to the present day. The party, in spite of its short tenure in government in the early nineties, was able to maintain its protest character and populist rhetoric, and in 2000 achieved its greatest success so far, which brought it to a strengthened position on the party scene and gave it a relatively large blackmail potential. PRM was not able to utilise this credit from the opposition parties and the 2004 elections brought failure, which led to a loss of relevance and, in 2008, parliamentary representation.

Peter Spáč in the chapter on populist parties in the Slovak Republic analysed a total of six subjects – The People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS), Party of Civic Understanding (SOP), Direction-Social Democracy (SMER), Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO) and Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO). Populist parties have long been a part of the Slovak political spectrum. The author of this chapter speaks of two waves of populist parties. The first was epitomized

by HZDS and ZRS in the early nineties, while the second, later wave, benefiting from high polarisation of Slovak politics at the turn of the millennium, brought the rise of SOP, SMER and ANO. The analysed entities constitute a rather heterogeneous group, both in terms of internal organisation, ideology and partly even electorate. In terms of the success of the party and its position in the party system, we find common features especially for ZRS, SOP and ANO, which after a successful entry into the parliamentary scene became part of the national government. However, in subsequent elections they were unable to defend their parliamentary party statuses. They differ from HZDS and SMER, which over time were able to maintain a position of relevance, and even became the strongest of Slovak political parties.

Alenka Krašovec, in her chapter, analysed the situation in Slovenia, a country which is not normally focussed on in research on populism. Unlike most post-communist parties, populism does not present a significant force in the political arena. We do not find any exclusively populist parties and only one party according to the author meets the definition of being a non-exclusively populist party. This is the Slovenian National Party (SNS), a right-wing nationalist party with strong populist elements.

We would like to acknowledge the role of at least some of the people, who made the publication of this edited volume possible. First of all, the editors would like to thank all the case studies' authors for their input and participation in the project. Special thanks go to Kevin Deegan-Krause for the comments and insights included in the pre-publication review of this book. We would also like to thank everybody who participated in the discussions during the conference Populist Political Parties in East-Central Europe (Brno, 4th Dec 2012), which helped us clarify some of the issues discussed here. This edited volume was prepared and the research conducted as part of the project Contemporary Challenges of Democracy in East-Central Europe (GAP408/11/0709). The publication of this volume was funded by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. We would also like to thank Mark Alexander, Martina Alexanderová, Todd Hammond, Štěpán Kaňa and

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2. SEEKING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HOW TO DEFINE AND IDENTIFY POPULIST PARTIES?

Vlastimil Havlík, Aneta Pinková

Recent decades have seen a pronounced rise in political parties which may be identified as populist. Scholars have reacted with an increased number of studies devoted to the phenomena of party populism and other expressions of populism. Special attention has been paid to political parties identified as radical right-wing populist parties and nationalist populist parties. (Former) Communist political parties have also often been included under the populist umbrella (see, e.g., Deegan-Krause 2007, March 2008). A relatively novel phenomenon, and one whose "breakthrough" has come particularly in post-communist countries, consists of political parties without a clear platform, who have built their electoral success almost entirely as advocates of ordinary citizens and critics of existing elites. Examples of these parties, which we refer to in what follows as exclusively populist parties, include SMER in Slovakia (in the first years of its existence), Self-Defence in Poland, the Bulgarian National Movement for Stability and Progress, as well as Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria and, in the Czech Republic, Public Affairs.

Despite the frequency with which one encounters "populism" as a term in academic literature, the media and non-academic discussions, its meaning remains somewhat unclear. Outside of scholarly discussion, populism often seems to be viewed as interchangeable with demagoguery or opportunism (unfairly from the point of view of how political scientists conceive the term). Although populism may be and often is connected with demagoguery, the two phenomena are quite different. Populism may, but need not be, accompanied by demagoguery, just as demagoguery may, but need not be, accompanied by populist argumentation. Unfortunately, the way the two terms are equated in ordinary discussion also often makes its way

into academic debates, to the extent that some researchers (see e.g., Sikk 2009) doubt whether there is any sense in continuing to use the term at all. Although this position may be too radical, it is true that within the academic environment, the concept of populism preserves, to cite Paul Taggart (2000: 1), "an awkward conceptual slipperiness". Although it is far from unusual for an agreed definition to be lacking in the social sciences (think, for example of the debate over how to define euroscepticism or interest groups), when it comes to populism, the situation is more complicated than usual (see below). The confusion between populism and demagoguery has contributed to the fact that negative connotations are often ascribed to populism, or populism may be viewed quite directly as a negative phenomenon. This normative aspect then negatively impacts the otherwise legitimate discussion of the relationship between populism and democracy (see, e.g., Panizza 2005) and is reflected in the interpretation and use of the term "populist political party". The negative connotations associated with the term therefore present a challenge which must be faced in any attempt at a precise conceptualization of populism (see Deegan-Krause 2007). The utility of the term populism for analytical purposes is also mitigated by the variety of party entities which have been labelled populist and the frequency with which populist parties are equated with nationalist and extreme right-wing parties (see, e.g., Norris 2005). This last problem increases the relevance of populism as a topic of research into radicalism and extremism, where the specific conceptualization of populism as a "basic concept associated with nationalism" (Laryš 2012: 141) blurs even further the already indistinct terms "populism" and "populist political party". To quote Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008: 4), to equate or automatically associate the term populism with radical right-wing populism "…is detrimental to our understanding of specific mislabelled parties (for example, the Northern League or the Swiss Lega dei Ticinesi) and populism itself". Under this view, the situation is not aided by the creation of various types of populism (exclusive/close to populism, nationalist populism, new populism, xenophobic populism and populist nationalism – see de Lange 2008), which are often remotely related to or even inconsistent with prevailing notions of populism in the literature (see below).