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Democracy and the threat of populism

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DEMOCRACIA E AMEAÇA DO POPULISMO

A democracia é considerada, em geral, um bem essencial à sociedade política. O que significa democracia, contudo, é controverso. Como o vinho, a 'garrafa democrática' pode conter compostos variados e saber muito diferentemente. Nos anos 2010 a democracia parece presente em todos os discursos - um bem a ser estimado e preservado - e sofrer sob o duro ataque do ceticismo e de avaliação negativa. Voltamos aos anos 1920? Precisaria o mundo - ou ao menos vários países importantes - de uma forma reinstaurada de tutela despótica? É inevitável voltar ao egoísmo político nacionalista em um cenário global avançado? O horizonte turvo das esperanças políticas, econômicas e sociais favorece o reaparecimento de projetos populistas - de esquerda como de direita - que projetam miragens sobre o sentimento de frustração nos espaços sociais. É esse populismo uma ameaça à democracia como valor e como prática? A resposta é 'sim', malgrado todas as imperfeições do regime democrático. Após apresentar um breve panorama do status atual da democracia, discute-se o entendimento de democracia e o sentido do populismo atual.

Palavras chaves: *Democracia, Populismo, Ameaça populista, Populismo de esquerda e de direita.*

DEMOCRACY AND THE THREAT OF POPULISM

Democracy is generally considered an essential good for the political society. What democracy actually means is controversial. Like wine, the 'democracy bottle' can contain various compositions and can taste very differently. In the 2010s democracy seems to be everywhere in discourse - a good to be cherished and preserved - and to suffer under a harsh attack of scepticism and negative evaluation. Have we fallen back to the 1920s? Does the world - or at least a number of important countries - need a reinstated form of guardianship from new despots? Is it inevitable to run back into a nationalistic political selfishness in a quite advanced globalized scenario? The troubled horizon of political, economic and social hopes favours the reappearance of populist projects - from the left or the right spectrum of politics - , which project mirages on the feeling of frustration in social circles. Is such populism a threat to democracy as a value and a practice? The answer is 'yes', despite any imperfections of the democratic regime. After presenting a short overview of the status of democracy in the present days, we will discuss the understanding of democracy and the sense of populism nowadays.

Keywords: *Democracy, Populism, Populist threat, Left and right populism.*

DEMOCRATIE ET MENACE DU POPULISME

La démocratie est considérée, de façon générale, comme un bien essentiel à la société politique. Ce que démocratie signifie est, toutefois, controversé. Comme le vin, la 'bouteille démocratique' peut contenir divers composés et avoir un goût très différent. Dans les années 2010, la démocratie semble présente dans tous les discours – un bien qui doit être estimé et préservé – et souffrir sous la dure attaque du scepticisme et de l'évaluation négative. Retournons-nous aux années 1920? Le monde aurait-il besoin – ou pour le moins plusieurs pays importants – d'une forme réinstaurée de tutelle despotique? Est-il inévitable de retourner à l'égoïsme politique nationaliste dans un scénario global avancé? L'horizon opaque des espérances politiques, économiques et sociales favorise la réapparition de projets populistes – de gauche comme de droite – qui projettent des mirages sur le sentiment de frustration dans les espaces sociaux. Ce populisme est-il une menace à la démocratie en tant que valeur et en tant que pratique? La réponse est 'oui', en dépit de toutes les imperfections du régime démocratique. Après la présentation d'un bref aperçu du status actuel de la démocratie, on discute l'entendement de la démocratie et le sens du populisme actuel.

Mots-clés: *Démocratie, Populisme, Menace populiste, Populisme de gauche et de droite.*

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1.

After World War II democracies had taken root in the most difficult circumstances possible—in Germany, which had been traumatized by Nazism and Communism (East Germany 1949-1990), in India, which had one of the world's largest population of poor people, and, in the 1990s, in South Africa, which had been stigmatized by apartheid. De-colonization created a host of new apparent democracies in Africa and Asia, and autocratic regimes were followed by democracy in Greece (1974), Spain (1975), Argentina (1983), Brazil (1985) and Chile (1989). The collapse of the Soviet Union created many incipient democracies in central Europe in the 1990s.

In 2014 - almost a quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall - delegations of numerous countries gathered at the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg (France) - an initiative of the Council of Europe - to search a way to go further than a 'mere' representative democratic system, in which "the will of the people" was "the basis of the authority of government", aiming for a more influential participation by the youth. The forum's final report states in its opening words:

> *While the number of democracies in the world has been growing steadily, it has to be said that these democracies, whether established or in transition, now face major challenges. Among these challenges, in particular, is the disenchantment with political representation and skepticism regarding policy decisions among young people who are at risk of being increasingly alienated from public political life.*[2]

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[1] Speech to the House of Commons, 11 November 1947; see LANGWORTH, Richard (ed.) – *Churchill by Himsel.* New York: PublicAffairs, 2011 (reprint). p. 574: "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time". ISBN 9781586489571.

[2] Final report. Retrieved from https://rm.coe.int/16806b1656. Access 11.5.2017

As a matter of fact, the feeling as the judgement on the political issues simultaneously criticizes strongly the traditional democratic practices (both the representation's principle and the electoral system in which form ever) and looks forward to reforming but keeping democracy as the best possible way.

Protests like in Hong Kong, the 'Occupy' movement, still active in many states around the world, or the Arab Spring, do not only demand the strengthening of democracy, but also an open-ended political debate which considers alternatives to neo-liberal economy and social justice. In this respect, the consolidation of democracy cannot be considered separately from economic dilemmas and the relationship between political and economic elites. Even mature democracies are at a risk of reaching a state often referred to as post-democracy. Post-democratic societies make the appearance of having operating democratic institutions, whereas most decisions are in fact strongly influenced by transnational market forces and financial institutions. Decisions are taken by an elite, justified by claiming that political issues are too complicated for citizens and should rather be taken by experts. The awareness of this reduces in turn incentives for citizens to take part in elections and other formal democratic processes. Most young people feel that they have a vote, but not a voice (WFD 2014).

The multiple 'failed experiments' in political life and the frustrations concerning the leading forces in society have a double effect. On the one hand they put democracy at risk with the 'totalitarian temptation' of the extremes - presently covered up by the populist proposals. On the other hand, the frustration with traditional politics and with the alienation from decision-making processes seems to range from acid critique to a refusal of maintaining old leadership and finally to a renewal of the democratic tools through traditional electoral instruments. Democracy is also no post-truth failure, but a real and concrete issue for societies in the 2020s, so that the forum in Strasbourg in 2017 will have populism as its main theme. Its call for participation says:

Representative democracy became the dominant democracy model during the industrial age. After WW2 party pluralism was enshrined in democratic constitutions as the vehicle for political pluralism and a barrier against authoritarian regimes in Europe. Political parties represented mostly class interests, built political capital within their membership base, and communicated via like-minded media. Public service broadcasters were entrusted with ensuring multiple perspectives in political information and debate and the overall independence and diversity of media were seen as a guarantee of a free and pluralist debate. However, something is happening with political parties and with the media. A growing disconnect between citizens and political elites and dramatic changes in the media ecosystem are a challenge for democracy as we know it. At the same time, new political and media actors and practices are emerging, offering new opportunities for members of the public to participate in political life. Legacy media and political parties are both threatened by these new developments but can also learn from them in order to adapt their own models and functioning to new realities. The objective of the World Forum for Democracy 2017 is to review novel initiatives and approaches which can enhance democratic practices and help parties and media, but also other political actors, to re-connect to citizens, make informed choices and function optimally in 21st century democracy.

One can nevertheless corroborate that societies having seen off 'failed experiments' along the century with authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government, seem, at long last, to be willing to keep democracy, even in very particular political interpretations in many countries.

Such self-confidence is surely understandable after the successes during the second half of the 20th century. But looking farther back the triumph of democracy looks rather less inevitable. After the fall of Athens, where it was first developed - and not so 'theoretically equal' as presently conceived -, the political model had lain dormant until the Enlightenment and was then widely idealized. Ultimately, the only sustained democracy produced by the 18th century was the American revolution. The Congress of Vienna and the Restoration after the Napoleonic Wars led the 19th century European monarchists to fight a continuous action against democratic forces in order to contain them as much as possible. The so cherished Constitutionalism of the 1800's was by far a kind of damage control. In the first half of the 20th century nascent democracies collapsed in Germany, Spain, Portugal and Italy. Worried by the on-going war in Europe and the successes of Nazi-Germany, the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed on March 15th 1941 the Annual Dinner of the American White House Correspondents and shared with strong words his concern that "The light of democracy must be kept burning", and that Britain alone might not be able to shield "the great flame of democracy from the blackout of barbarism". For him, America must take action to "keep that flame alight".[3]

Democracy won and its progress in the late 20th century seems to have difficulties in the 21st. Even though in 2015 around 50% of the world's population, more people than ever before, live in countries that hold free and fair elections regularly, democracy's global advance has come to a halt.[4] And democracy's problems run deeper than mere numbers suggest. Many nominal democracies have slid towards autocracy, maintaining the outward appearance of democracy through elections, but without the rights and institutions (like an independent Justice system or a free press) that are equally important aspects of a functioning democratic system, among many others.

Enthusiasm for democracy flares up in moments of triumph, such as the overthrow of unpopular regimes in Tunis, Cairo or Kiev, only to crack once again. The stalemate in Libya or Syria shows how difficult it is to combine euro-american democracy with other cultures and with powerful hegemonic ambitions. Including in the West, perceived as the 'paradise of democracy', the regime could advance only to collapse, like in Venezuela. And within the West, democracy has too often become associated with debt and dysfunction at home and overreach abroad. Democracy has always had its critics, but now old doubts are being treated with renewed respect as the weaknesses of democracy in its Western strongholds, and the fragility of its influence elsewhere, have become increasingly apparent. Why has democracy been exposed to such threats? One point is that democracy is no unequivocal concept. We will come back to this question further below.

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[3] Retrieved from http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16089. Access 11.5.2017

[4] ROSER, Max (2016) – 'Democracy'. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: https://ourworldindata.org/democracy/ [Online Resource; access 11.5.2017]

Democracy suffers nowadays from repetitive crises since 2007. It started with the sub-prime financial crisis of 2007/08 in the United States and the sharp and destabilising rise of China. The damage caused by the crisis was psychological as well as financial. It revealed fundamental weaknesses in the West's political systems, undermining the self-confidence that had been one of their great assets. Governments had steadily extended entitlements over decades, allowing dangerous levels of debt to develop, and politicians came to believe that they had abolished boom-bust cycles and tamed risk. In the Euro-Zone, the reckless management of public accounts (Ireland, France, Italy) and accelerated indebtedness have caused political destabilization in several countries (Greece, Spain, Portugal) and jeopardized the expected solidarity of the zone. Many people became disillusioned with the workings of their political systems—particularly when governments bailed out bankers with taxpayers' money and then stood by impotently as financiers continued to pay themselves huge bonuses. The crisis turned the Washington consensus into an object of harsh critique across the emerging world.

Meanwhile some recent recruits to the democratic camp have lost their lustre. The Arab Spring seems to have slid rapidly into a sort of instable Arab Autumn (Egypt, Tunisia) or even Winter: Civil war (Syria) and absence of Rule of Law (Lybia). The goals of establishing democratic practices are catapulted to an unpredictable horizon. Since the introduction of democracy in 1994 South Africa has been ruled by the same party, the African National Congress, which has become progressively self-serving. Turkey, which once seemed to combine moderate Islam with prosperity and democracy, is descending into corruption and autocracy. In Bangladesh, Thailand and Cambodia, opposition parties have boycotted recent elections or refused to accept their results. In the Philippines the outcome of formal presidential elections has invested a leader with hard individualist ways of ruling and tending to autocracy.

All of this suggests that creating the institutions necessary to sustain democracy is a very slow work, and has dispelled the once popular notion that democracy will flourish quickly and spontaneously once the seed is planted. Although democracy may be a "universal aspiration", as again and again stressed by important political players like former UN-Secretary General Kofi Annan[5], it is certainly a culturally rooted practice. Almost all Western countries extended the representation model (the right to vote) long after the establishment of sophisticated political systems, with powerful civil services and entrenched constitutional rights, in societies that cherished the notions of individual rights and independent judiciaries.

Yet in recent years the very institutions that are meant to provide models for new democracies have come to seem outdated and dysfunctional in established democracies. The United States experiences since many years a distortion of the traditional principle of checks and balances with the blockade between the majority that elects the president and the one that forms the two houses of Congress. It is not unusual for the USA to waste too much time to undo the gridlocks, so obsessed with partisan point scoring

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[5] Democracy is a universal aspiration, not bound by region, ethnicity, culture or religion. Tweet on Sept 15, 2014 (see also Annan's speech at the Oslo's Centre for Peace - retrieved from http://www. kofiannanfoundation.org/speeches/democracy-turbulent-times/ - access 11.5.2017).

that it has come close to defaulting on its debts twice in the recent past. Its democracy is also compromised by the practice of drawing constituency boundaries to entrench the power of incumbents, similarly to the projected reform of UK constituencies drafted in 2016. This encourages extremism, because politicians have to appeal only to the party faithful or to its radicals, and in effect disenfranchises large numbers of voters. If one remembers that money talks louder than ever in politics, this creates the impression that democracy is eventually for sale and that the rich have more power than the poor, even as lobbyists and donors insist that political expenditure is an exercise in free speech.

Unfortunately the EU itself is not the best example of practical democracy, despite its official speech of defence of democratic values. The very complex institutional frame of the EU lacks transparency and participation. Within this frame, the ordinary citizen suffers from estrangement. For example, technocrats were largely responsible for taking the decision to introduce the euro in 1999, but with political support by the chiefs of State and Government. Without a coercive obligation to follow the decision - many countries have not yet adopted the common currency. After the failure of approving the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, the replacement treaty (Lisbon Treaty, 2007), which consolidated power in Brussels, was submitted to formal parliamentary vote, without popular referendums (with the exception of Ireland, where a referendum is constitutionally required). During the darkest days of the euro crisis, the euro-elite forced Italy and Greece to replace democratically elected leaders with technocrats. The European Parliament, an unsuccessful attempt to fix Europe's democratic deficit, is both ignored and despised. The EU has become a breeding ground for populist parties, such as Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen's National Front in France, and Fauke Petry's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, which claim to defend ordinary people against the arrogant and incompetent elite. Greece's Golden Dawn is testing how far democracies can tolerate Nazi-style parties. The struggle against populism in Europe has tamed its rise but has not yet repealed it. The issue of the recent regional polling in the German Province North-Rhine-Westphalia (on May 14th 2017) shows how resilient the populist discourse can be: the AfD was able to join the assembly for the first time with 7.4% of the votes.[6]

Even in its original region, democracy is clearly suffering from serious structural problems, rather than a few isolated afflictions. Since the dawn of the modern democratic era in the late 19th century, democracy has expressed itself through nation-states and national parliaments. People elect representatives to exert national power over defined mandates. But this arrangement is now under assault both in its structures and in its social composition.

Structurally, globalisation has changed national politics profoundly. National politicians have seen even more power, for example over trade and financial flows, shifting away toward global markets and supranational bodies. Promises made to the voters on the national scenes are mostly unrealistic or unable to be kept. International organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation

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[6] Although AfD succeeded the entry in NRW-Assembly, its score lies significantly below the results in other provincial elections in 2016. The resilience is there, but getting somehow weaker.

and the European Union have increased their influence. There is in this respect an inescapable logic of the contemporary world: how could a single country deal with problems like climate change, terrorism or tax evasion? National politicians have also responded to globalisation by limiting their discretion and devolving power to unelected technocrats in some areas. The number of countries with independent central banks, for example, has increased from about 20 in 1980 to more than 160 today.[7]

Socially powerful challenges are also expected: from would-be breakaway nations, such as the Catalans and the Scots, from Indian states, from American city mayors. All are trying to reclaim power from national governments. This new kind of microphysics of power - as practiced for instance by NGOs and lobbyists - modifies traditional politics and makes life harder for democratic and autocratic leaders alike.

We are now far away from Michel Foucault's structuralist analysis of the classic problematic of government, exploring the historical constitution and periodization of the state and the important strategic and tactical dimensions of power relations and their associated discourses. For, in rejecting various essentialist, trans-historical, universal, and deductive analyses of the state and state power, Foucault created a space for exploring its 'polymorphous crystallization'[8] in and through interrelated changes in technologies of power, objects of governance, governmental projects, and modes of political calculation. Indeed, he argued that 'the state is nothing more than the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities'.[9] For Foucault, this does not mean that one needs a trans-historical, universal notion of the state before deconstructing it in and through an interrogation of historically specific, concrete practices. He avoids this paradox by asking how one might explore history if the state did not always-already exist.[10] For example, *Il faut défendre la société*[11] shows how the modern idea of the universal state emerged from a complex series of discursive shifts and the eventual combination of disciplinary and bio-political power within a redefined framework of sovereignty.[12]

In the present days the shifts are multiple and turn around in astonishing rapidity. The internet makes it easier to deconstruct, organise and agitate; in a world where people can participate in reality-TV votes every week, or support a petition with the click of a mouse, the machinery and institutions of parliamentary democracy, where elections happen only every few years, look increasingly anachronistic. Politics seems to be now considered as a 'plug in toy', disposable if defective.

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[7] GARRIGA, Ana Carolina – «La independencia de los bancos centrales. La 'sabiduría convencional' a la luz de nuevos datos». *Studia Politicae*. 40: 105-130, (2017). ISSN 1669-7405.

[8] MANN, Michael – *The Sources of Social Power*. Vol. 1. 2a. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. ISBN 9781107635975

[9] MANN, Michael – *The Sources of Social Power*. Vol. 1. 2ª. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. ISBN 9781107635975.

[10] Id., p. 4-5.

[11] *Il faut défendre la soc*iété. Cours au Collège de France, 1976. Paris: Gallimard, 1997. ISBN 9782020231695.

[12] JESSOP, Bob – "From micro-powers to governmentality: Foucault on statehood, state formation, statecraft and state power". *Political Geography*. 26 (1), 34-40 (2007).

The biggest challenge to democracy, however, comes from within—from the voters themselves (and most prominently from the non voters, who proclaim that preserving, reforming and adapting the system is useless). Plato's great worry about democracy, that citizens would "live from day to day, indulging the pleasure of the moment", has proved prescient. Democratic governments got into the habit of running big structural deficits as a matter of course, borrowing to give voters what they wanted in the short term, while neglecting long-term investment. France and Italy have not balanced their budgets for more than 30 years. The financial crisis starkly exposed the unsustainability of such debt-financed democracy.

With the post-crisis stimulus winding down, politicians must now confront the difficult trade-offs they avoided during years of steady growth and easy credit. But persuading voters to adapt to a new age of austerity will not prove popular at the ballot box. Slow growth and tight budgets will provoke conflict as interest groups compete for limited resources. To make matters worse, this competition is taking place as Western populations are ageing. Older people have always been better at getting their voices heard than younger ones, voting in greater numbers and organising pressure groups. Yet this is also changing. Movements like *En Marche!* in France modified substantially the expectations on the political stage and led to Emmanuel Macron's (39 years old) election to the presidency in 2017 (May 14th). Matteo Renzi (42) has just been elected leader of the Italian Democratic Party with a large majority, guided by his movement *In Cammino* (April 30th).Such movements will increasingly have absolute numbers on their side. Many democracies now face a fight between past and future, between inherited entitlements and future investment.

Adjusting to hard times will be made even more difficult by a growing cynicism towards politics. Classical party membership is declining across the developed world - only newly founded movements attract new militants, whether or not they are populist (like the French *En Marche!*, which so far shows no populistic characteristics, or the typical populist Italian *MoVimento 5 Stelle*). Voter turnout is falling, too: a study of 49 democracies found that it had declined by 10 percentage points between 1980-84 and 2007-13.[13] A survey of seven European countries in 2012 found that more than half of voters "had no trust in government" whatsoever.[14]

Meanwhile, the boundary between poking fun and launching protest campaigns is fast eroding. In 2013 one quarter of Italians voted for a party founded by Beppe Grillo, a comedian. Since 2006 the German Party of Pirates (Piratenpartei) defends the thesis of a 'liquid democracy', with strong populist traits of left-wing inspiration, not exceeding 2% of the average vote. All this popular mistrust about politics might be healthy if people demanded little from their governments, but they continue to want a great deal. The result can be a toxic and unstable mixture: dependency on government on the one hand, and disdain for it on the other. The dependency forces

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[13] See comparative database in http://www.idea.int/themes/voter-turnout. The voter turnout changes from country to country if the vote is compulsory or not.

[14] Retrieved from http://www.cevipof.com/fr/le-barometre-de-la-confiance-politique-du-cevipof/resultats-1/vague8/; http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/ Access 11.5.2017

government to over expand and overburden itself, while disdain robs it of its legitimacy. Democratic dysfunction goes hand in hand with democratic distemper.

Democracy did well in the 20th century in part because of American hegemony and of the European recovery: other countries naturally wanted to emulate the world's leading countries. But as China's influence has grown lately, America and Europe have lost their appeal as role models and their appetite for spreading democracy. At the same time, democracies in the emerging world have encountered the same problems as those in the rich world. They too have overindulged in short-term spending rather than long-term investment. Brazil allows public-sector workers to retire at 53 but has done little to create a modern airport system. India pays off vast numbers of client groups but invests too little in infrastructure. Political systems have been captured by interest groups and undermined by anti-democratic habits.

Democracy has been on the back foot before. In the 1920s and 1930s communism and fascism looked like the coming things: when Spain temporarily restored its parliamentary government in 1931, Benito Mussolini likened it to returning to oil lamps in the age of electricity. In 1969 Willy Brandt, who was at the time just sworn in as German chancellor, declared in his first official speech: "Wir wollen mehr Demokratie wagen" - "We want to dare more democracy". Things have indeed improved, but the risks of frustration and lack of interest increase as well. Although far away from traditional democratic countries, the way China conducts its politics and economic management poses a far more credible threat than communism ever did to the idea that democracy is inherently superior and will eventually prevail. The answer to that depends in a large measure upon how economic elites from Western countries benefit from the Chinese centralized and monocratic decision-making process.

The most successful new democracies have all worked in large part because they avoided the temptation of "majoritarianism"— the notion that winning an election entitles the majority to do whatever it pleases. India has survived as a democracy since 1947 (apart from a couple of years of emergency rule) and Brazil since the mid-1980s for much the same reason: both put limits on the power of the government and provided guarantees for individual rights.

Robust constitutions not only promote long-term stability, reducing the likelihood that disgruntled minorities will take against the regime. They also bolster the struggle against corruption, the bane of developing countries. Conversely, the first sign that a fledgling democracy is heading for the rocks often comes when elected rulers try to erode constraints on their power—often in the name of majority rule. Mohamed Morsi tried to pack Egypt's upper house with supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Viktor Yanukovych reduced the power of Ukraine's parliament. Vladimir Putin has strongly overridden Russia's independent institutions in the name of the people. Several African and Asian leaders are engaging in crude majoritarianism—removing term limits on the presidency or expanding penalties on the ground of religion, with the adoption of the Sharia law (for instance: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Mali).

Foreign leaders should be more willing to speak out when rulers engage in such illiberal behaviour, even if a majority supports it. But the people who most need to learn this lesson are the architects of new democracies: they must recognise that robust checks and balances are just as vital to the establishment of a healthy democracy as the

right to vote. Paradoxically even potential dictators have a lot to learn from events in Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Ukraine: political abuse within the regimes can enrage their citizens by accumulating too much power or failing to respond to their expectations on the long run.

Even those lucky enough to live in mature democracies need to pay close attention to the architecture of their political systems. The combination of globalisation and the digital revolution has made some of democracy's most cherished institutions look outdated. Established democracies need to update their own political systems both to address the problems they face at home, and to revitalise democracy's image abroad. Some countries have already embarked upon this process. Reform of party financing, so that the names of all donors are made public, might reduce the influence of special interests. The broad and in-depth[investigations of the Brazilian Judiciary on corruption and harmful complicity between politicians and businessmen in Brazil since 2005 contributes both to clean the political scene and - as an unintended side effect - to reinforce contempt for the political class. The European Parliament requires its members to present receipts with their expenses.[15] Italy's parliament has far too many members who are paid too much, and two equally powerful chambers, which makes it difficult to get anything done.

But reformers need to be much more ambitious. The best way to constrain the power of special interests is to limit the number of advantages that the state can hand out. And the best way to address popular disillusion towards politicians is to reduce the number of promises they can make. The key to a healthier democracy, in short, is a narrower state—an idea that dates back to the American revolution. The notion of limited government was also integral to the relaunch of democracy after the Second World War. The United Nations Charter (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) established rights and norms that countries could not breach, even if majorities wanted to do so.

These checks and balances were motivated by fear of tyranny. But today, particularly in the West, the big dangers to democracy are harder to spot. One is the growing size of the state. The relentless expansion of government is reducing liberty and conceding ever more power to special interests. The other danger comes from government's habit of making promises that it cannot fulfil, either by creating entitlements it cannot pay for or by waging wars that it cannot win, such as the war on drugs. Both voters and governments must be persuaded of the merits of accepting restraints on the state's natural tendency to overreach. Giving control of monetary policy to independent central banks tamed the rampant inflation of the 1980s, for example. It is time to apply the same principle of limited government to a broader range of policies. Mature democracies, just like nascent ones, require appropriate checks and balances on the power of elected government.

Governments can exercise self-restraint in several different ways. They can put on a golden corset by adopting tight fiscal rules—as the Swedes have done by pledging

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[15] Décision du Bureau du Parlement Européen des 19 mai et 9 juillet 2008 portant mesures d›application du statut des députés au Parlement européen. 2009/C 159/01 (retrieved from http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009D0713%2801%29). Access 11.5.2017

to balance their budget over the economic cycle. They can introduce "sunset clauses" that force politicians to renew laws every ten years.. They can ask non-partisan commissions to propose long-term reforms. In the 1990s, Sweden reformed the pension system, and payments from the new system started in 2003. Norway followed closely behind with a pension reform that came into effect in 2010. The Swedes rescued their pension system from collapse when an independent commission suggested pragmatic reforms including greater use of private pensions, and linking the retirement age to life-expectancy. Chile has been particularly successful at managing the combination of the volatility of the copper market and populist pressure to spend the surplus in good times. It has introduced strict rules to ensure that it runs a surplus over the economic cycle, and appointed a commission of experts to determine how to cope with economic volatility. After a promising rebirth of democracy in the late 1980s, Brazil is struggling to overcome two major political crises, as well as the impeachments of two presidents in 25 years (1992: F. Collor de Mello; 2016: Dilma Rousseff), fighting continuous financial and debt problems since 2007, coping with a deficitary loss-making system of pensions, now in the third reform attempt since 1998 (2003, 2017).

Is this not a recipe for weakening democracy by conceding more power to the greater good? Not necessarily. Self-effacing rules can strengthen democracy by preventing people from voting for spending policies that produce bankruptcy and social breakdown and by protecting minorities from persecution. But technocracy can certainly be taken too far. Power must be delegated sparingly, in a few big areas such as monetary policy and entitlement reform, and the process must be open and transparent.

And delegation upwards towards grandees and technocrats must be balanced by delegation downwards, handing some decisions to ordinary people. The trick is to combine the twin forces of globalism and localism[16], rather than trying to ignore or resist them. With the right balance of these two approaches, the same forces that threaten established democracies from outside, through globalisation, and inside, through the rise of micro-powers, can reinforce rather than undermine democracy.

Tocqueville argued that local democracy frequently represented democracy at its best: "Town-meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it." City mayors regularly get twice the approval ratings of national politicians. Modern technology can implement a modern version of Tocqueville's town-hall meetings to promote civic involvement and innovation. An online hyperdemocracy where everything is put to an endless series of public votes would play to the hand of special-interest groups. But technocracy and direct democracy can keep each other in check: independent budget commissions can assess the cost and feasibility of local ballot initiatives, for example.[17]

Democracy is no theoretical debate on philosophy, but a concrete form of organizing the common life and the common form of taking and enforcing decisions. There are also concrete people living and acting. Once again should Tocqueville have the

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[16] O'RIORDAN, Timothy (ed.) – *Globalism, localism, and identity: fresh perspectives on the transition to sustainability*. London: Earthscan Publications, 2001. ISBN 9781853837319.

[17] Retrieved from http://www.economist.com/news/essays/21596796-democracy-was-most-successful--political-idea-20th-century-why-has-it-run-trouble-and-what-can-be-do. Access in 11.5.2017.

voice to put the reference frame of a possible understanding of effective democracy: "It is above all in the present democratic age that the true friends of liberty and human grandeur must remain constantly vigilant and ready to prevent the social power from lightly sacrificing the particular rights of a few individuals to the general execution of its designs. In such times there is no citizen so obscure that it is not very dangerous to allow him to be oppressed, and there are no individual rights so unimportant that they can be sacrificed to arbitrariness with impunity."

Given the scenario outlined above, how to understand and circumscribe democracy?

2.

Democracy is understood as the political regime in which everyone and all of the people are equal, so that no essential differences could be established to distinguish rights and duties. As it seems, democracy is an ultimate good for organizing a *modus vivendi* in society, although complex and not a perfect system of self-government, because it is human.[18] As a human invention, it is contingent, limited, historically determined by the accumulated heritage of men's actions in time. Throughout history. The concreteness of the human history defines the effectiveness of democratic values as put in practice in everyday life. In the present days, albeit democracy is a usual notion and a current discourse (and since a long time) that is successful without a doubt, we do not have a clear definition, or a widely shared concept that one could present as free of ambiguity. When a definition comes to be established, it is not free of controversy, polysemy. Even when a definition is put forward to avoid controversy and obtain a maximum consensus, it is reduced to a minimal set of characteristics and yet problematic.

The choice of a 'minimal set of defining characteristics' to circumscribe democracy appears to has become the most followed path in the 20th century, admittedly the century of the triumph of democracy - as relative as it is - throughout the world. Norberto Bobbio's minimalistic definition is probably the most followed one: A 'democratic regime' is "first and foremost a set of procedural rules for arriving at collective decisions in a way which accommodates and facilitates the fullest possible participation of interested parties".[19]

Bobbio conceived democracy as a threshold of conditions beyond which no one should step. As the Berlin Wall falls and the failure of the 'real socialism' - as the main proposed alternative to democracy - became evident, Bobbio refined and introduced two complementary definitions of democracy, referring to Hans Kelsen and to Joseph Schumpeter. The mitigated realism of Kelsen suited Bobbio much more than Schumpeter's skeptical reductivism to a sort of economic mechanism of electing voter's delegates (representatives).[20] In both cases the backbone of the theoretical

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[18] MASTROPAOLO, Alfio – *La democrazia è una causa persa? Paradossi di un'invenzione imperfetta.* Milano: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011. ISBN 9788833970752.

[19] BOBBIO, Norberto – *The future of democracy: a defence of the rules of the game*. U of Minnesota Press, 1987. p. 19. ISBN 9780745603094.

[20] KELSEN, Hans – "On the Essence and Value of Democracy". In JACOKSON, Arthur; SCHLINK, Bernhard (eds.) – *Weimar. A Jurisprudence of Crisis*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, [Original:

democratic political equality is the idea of representation and power delegation. Kelsen and Schumpeter lived in a very difficult time for democracies and societies: the first half of the 20th century. Eric J. Hobsbawm called this century 'interesting times'[21], which coincided with his own life (1917-2012) - but the 'short 20th century' was actually hard, extreme, difficult.[22] Including the frequent political crises concerning the democratic form of government all around the world. So it is easy to understand the dilemma Schumpeter sees his time facing, as he states: "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will."[23]

The difficulty of this approach is that people tend to disagree over fundamental and still more over secondary issues and their multiple divergences cannot be bridged by mere rationality thus discovering the common good. Schumpeter proposes another theory of democracy. Actually he puts the classical doctrine on its head. For Schumpeter, voters should first elect their representatives and the representatives themselves would choose what they think the best policy is. The representatives would compete for the votes of the voters like firms compete for customers. Thus Schumpeter likens democracy to a free market mechanism where parties (firms) have to offer to electorate (the customers) the best policy in order to win their votes. The voters are free to decide their representatives and they can be demanding. If parties failed to deliver they would lose votes on the next elections. So we arrive at Schumpeter's definition of democracy: "And we define: the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote".[24]

At the same time, as Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out in the 19th century, democracies always look weaker than they really are: they are all confusion on the surface but have lots of hidden strengths. Being able to install alternative leaders offering alternative policies makes democracies better than autocracies at finding creative solutions to problems and rising to existential challenges, though they often take a while to zigzag to the right policies. But to succeed, both fledgling and established democracies must ensure they are built on firm foundations.

They regarded democracy as a powerful but imperfect mechanism: something that needed to be designed carefully, in order to harness human creativity but also to check human perversity, and then kept in good working order, constantly oiled, adjusted and worked upon.

The need for perseverance and persistence is particularly pressing when establishing a nascent democracy. One reason why so many democratic experiments have failed

Vom Wesen und Wert der Demokratie (Tübingen: Mohr, 1929; reprint, Aalen: Scientia, 1963)], 2000. p. 84-109. ISBN 9780520236813.

[21] HOBSBAWM Eric J. – *Interesting Times*. Londres: Allan Lane, 2002. ISBN 9780307426413.

[22] HOBSBAWM Eric J. – *The Age of Extremes. A short History of the Twentieth Century 1914-1991*. Londres: Penguin Books, 1994. ISBN 9780679730057.

[23] SCHUMPETER, Joseph A. – *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* [1942]. Londres: Routledge, 2003. p. 250. ISBN 0061330086.

[24] Id., p. 269.

recently is that they put too much emphasis on elections and too little on the other essential features of democracy. The interval between elections (general, regional or local) is often perceived as a legitimacy gap, during which the holder of sovereign power is simply ignored by the elected, entrenched in their mandated delegations. The power of the state needs to be checked, for instance, and individual rights such as freedom of speech and freedom to organise must be guaranteed. During such 'empty intervals' many 'populist mermaids' seek to bewitch people with miraculous promises of all kinds, raising apparent reliability and nurturing the idea that they alone respect the 'people at their core'. This is a risk and a threat. It is a risk, because populists seize legitimacy and a threat because in the end they seek the establishment of a tyranny, of which they would be the sole owners.

Democracy, as a system of equality among all, in which the social contract expressed institutionally in the mechanisms of representation and participation must be transmitted from generation to generation. It can be perfected, adapted, adjusted, revised, improved, developed, and extended *ad infinitum*, provided that the fundamental equality of the human person and their rights are preserved. So it is theoretically, even if historically the actual conditions of its realization depend on men and their deeds.[25]

Although a human - therefore imperfect - system, democracy is probably the best system possible to take in account the general interest - if only people maintained the consciousness of all in their own individual, as Kant formulated in his categorical imperative: (a) "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"; (b) "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end"; (c) "Thus the third practical principle follows [from the first two] as the ultimate condition of their harmony with practical reason: the idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislating will."[26] It is certainly a moral requirement, but morals is perhaps the best expression of humankind in search of humanity.[27]

3.

How can the phenomenon of populism be determined? In its complex forms, it is increasingly difficult to find a common denominator. There is certainly no consistent ideology - which would be a syndrome rather than a doctrine. At the same time, we can observe an ideology of antagonism from a 'pure people' and a 'corrupt elite'.

The result of the British referendum on the withdrawal from the EU (Brexit) and the victory of the US Presidential Candidate Donald Trump have once again raised the

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[25] BEYME, Klaus von – "Representative Democracy and the Temptation of Populism". In BEYME, Klaus von. *Pioneer in the Study of Political Theory and Comparative Politics*. Berlin: Springer, 2013. c. 9. ISBN 9783319015347.

[26] *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) [Akademie-Textausgabe, vol. 4]. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969. ISBN 9783110079678.

[27] RÜSEN, Jörn – *Teoria da História. Uma teoria da História como ciência*. Curitiba: Editora da UFPR, 2015 [orig. ed. Köln: Böhlau, 2013]. cap. IV. ISBN 9788584800049.

issue of "populism". The term "right" or "left" anti-establishment parties, which are directed against the ruling "empowered elite" (C. Wright Mills[28]) in business, politics and culture.[29] Populists regarded "populism" as a stigmatizing spelling. The populist governor of Alabama, George C. Wallace, declared in the 1960s that the term was only the high-struck wastes of pseudo-intellectuals who wanted to hurt him.[30] It is only in recent times that the leftist populists such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon (chairman of the French Socialist Party de Gauche and presidential candidate in 2017 under the motto *La France insoumise*) or Pablo Iglesias (general secretary of the Podemos leftpopulist party founded in Spain in 2014), Beppe Grillo of the Italian Five-Star Movement (M5S) or the right radical Front National of Marine le Pen in France (who also ran for presidency in 2017 and reached a menacing 2nd place on May 7th) have connoted positively the originally negative stigma in a reviewed self-description: 'Yes, we are populists and proud of it.' Such evolution in the last 20 years puts the neat threat to the classical democratic game. Perhaps because too small elite rules a too large society and that this arouses frustration and irritation, if not indifference and rejection.

At the end, what is populism? There is no consistent ideology with unmistakable elements that form a coherent whole, but only a narrative consisting of a few nuclei. Populism, according to Peter Wiles, is a syndrome, not a doctrine.[31] However, since minimum definitions are required in public debate, the polarization and moralization of politics are established as the smallest common denominator of the phenomenon. The Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde defines populism as "an ideology that assumes that society is divided into two homogeneous, antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite', which argues that politics is an expression of the "volonté générale" or the general popular will".[32] Similarly, Jan-Werner Müller: "Populism [...] is a very definite political concept, according to which a morally pure, homogeneous people are always opposed to immoral, corrupt and parasitic elites". Populists do not refer to the 'moral purity' of the people, but to the common sense of the "good, decent, patriotic, hard-working, law-abiding people" (Nigel Farage, UKIP leader in 2016, appealing on people to vote to leave the EU).

Mény and Surel emphasize three core elements of the populist narrative: (a) the people are the foundation of the political community, (b) their sovereignty is disregarded by some actors or processes, (c) this must be denounced and the place

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[28] *The Power Elite* [1956]. Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN 9780195133547.

[29] PRIESTER, Karin – "Populismus in den Medien: Realität und Stigmawort". HILLEBRAND, Ernst (ed.) – *Rechtspopulismus in Europa. Gefahr für die Demokratie?*. Bonn: Dietz, 2015. p. 138-145. ISBN 9783801204679; PRIESTER, K. – „Wesensmerkmale des Populismus". *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. 62 (2012) 56, p. 39. ISSN 2194-3621.

[30] Apud MÜLLER, Jan-Werner – *What is Populism?*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016; s. p. 305. ISBN 9780812248982.

[31] WILES, Peter – "A Syndrome, not a Doctrine. Some Elementary Theses on Populism". In IONESCU, Ghita; GELLNER, Ernest (ed.) – *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969. p. 166-179. ISBN 9780297000563.

[32] MUDDE, Cas – "The Populist Zeitgeist". *Government and Opposition*, 39 (2004) 3, 541-563, p. 543. ISSN 1477-7053.

of the people in society restored.[33] The disregard of the sovereign people can be the result of different actors identified by the populists: financial capital, technocratic control elites, mainstream parties, or social-moral interpretations. By means of this criterion, populism can be understood as a reaction to the withdrawal of sovereignty.

Populistic leaders are often outsiders and *homines novi* - 'new immaculate players' in a political scene that must be rescued and corrected.[34] They often come from the economic world such as the Italian Silvio Berlusconi, the Swiss Christoph Blocher and and Americans Henry Ross Perot and Donald Trump. The Dutchman Pim Fortuyn, as a homosexual, catholic socialized intellectual, was an outsider. Individual wealth is not an obstacle to its success, since it shows that they are neither part of the political establishment nor corrupted by financial sponsors. Trump argued against his competitor Hillary Clinton that he was not "bought" by Wall Street, but independent and therefore credible. The rather pseudo-populist American President Jimmy Carter, a Baptist Southern statesman was also an outsider. When questioned whether he was a liberal or a conservative, he declared himself to be a populist: "I have derived the political support, the encouragement for myself and my concern directly from the people themselves, not from powerful middlemen or representatives of special interests".[35]

Modern democracies are mixed systems and are based on two pillars: constitutionalism (a legal state) and popular sovereignty. The 'legal state' has older roots, stands for the rule of law and guarantees constitutional rights for the protection of the individual or minorities against state omnipotence. On the other hand, popular sovereignty is an achievement of the French Revolution, and it is said that all power comes from the people. The people are the sovereign, i. e. the supreme legislator and controller of democracy, expressing their will through elections. A mere acclamation-democracy, that is, a kind of consent or rejection-democracy of a *de facto* publicly assembled people, as propagated from the right (Carl Schmitt[36]), withdraws the control of the electorate.

Fear of loss of status, future insecurity, the growing gap between rich and poor, or disputes over the housing or labor market between autochthonous and immigrants can no longer be seen as a contrast between the right and the left, but appear as a conflict between the people and elites. The question of access to power is, therefore, central to the understanding of populism: in principle, populists reject intermediary bodies (especially parties and media education elites) between the people and the power, since they would falsify the true people's interests and have only their special

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[33] MENY, Yves; SUREL, Yves – *Par le peuple, pour le peuple. Le populisme et les démocraties.* Paris, 2000. p. 181. ISBN 9782213600772.

[34] "The term *novus homo* (plural: *homines novi*), 'new man', is bandied about quite often in historical textbooks on ancient Rome. It is generally applied to men who were the first in their families to become senators. By the mid-republic, membership of the Senate was afforded to all those who were elected as consuls. For advocates of the republic, the 'new men'... define the glowing meritocracy of republican politics." Retrieved from: http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9781138776685/Ch2/The%20Novus%20Homo.pdf (access 11.5.2017)

[35] Jimmy Carter in an Interview (13.09.1976), in: RICHARDSON, Don (ed.) – *Conversations with Carter.* London: Lynne Rienner, 1998. p. 19. ISBN 9781555878016.

[36] S. *Die Diktatur. Von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf* [1921]. Berlin: Duncker-Humblot, 1994. 7th. ed., passim. ISBN 978-3428079407.

interests in mind. In practice, however, they organize themselves into parties and participate in elections.

. The mistrust of liberal elites towards the people or the masses has always been great. The liberal conservative Alexis de Tocqueville warned against the "tyranny of the majority". Edmund Burke or the French liberal François Guizot declared that the people were not the sovereign, but the reason for which only the educated and the proprietor citizens are able to access (nowadays rather experts, specialists or professional politicians). The people, on the other hand, identified as the "lower" people or the uneducated masses were mood-dependent, emotional, and seducible. After the introduction of the general and secret electoral vote, filters have been installed in order to prevent the popular will being expressed directly. One of these filters is political parties. In the Weimar constitution of 1919, they were not mentioned and were regarded only as civil society associations. It was only the German Federal Basic Law of 1949 that brought them into the rank of constitutional bodies and assigned them the task of forming and aggregating the political will. Presently almost every country confers constitutional status to political parties as mediators of popular will through the electoral process, as in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, among many others. Populists consider this educational task of the parties to be condescending to citizens. They demand an unfiltered, non-mediated will-articulation by direct democracy, either according to the Swiss model or as a network democracy, under which the Italian M5S is mobilized.

It is hard to deny that the two pillars of liberal democracy are increasingly becoming an imbalance. There is hardly a mention of popular sovereignty. In the course of the multi-level governance in the EU, it had lost its relevance, especially as there were no European people at all according to the right-wing populists. The Populism researcher Guy Hermet comments: "It is especially striking that the sovereignty of the people, so far regarded as the heart of democracy, is becoming less and less important. ... There is a philosophical doubt about the relevance of popular sovereignty "[37] But if the bond between rule of law and popular sovereignty breaks, the liberal and the democratic components are once again opposed. As argued by Fareed Zakaria[38], it is possible to consider populism a kind of democratic illiberalism: "Populism is an illiberal, but democratic response to undemocratic liberalism." Well noted: a response. As a syndrome, populism is essentially reactive. It becomes active only when the prevailing policy does not adequately react to maladministration and dismisses the appeal to emotions as "mood-making".

Is right-wing populism 'only' a light right-wing radicalism? In Europe, right-wing extremist parties such as the British National Party (BNP), the German NPD, or ethnocentric regional parties such as Vlaams Belang (Belgium) and the Northern League (Italy) are declining. Exceptions are the Hungarian party Jobbik and the French Front National (FN). The FN sees itself as a national-populist, but is open to right-wing

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[37] "Permanences et mutations du populisme". *Critique* 2012/1 (776-777) 62-74. ISSN 1968-3901.

[38] *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2017 (revised edition). ISBN 978-0393331523; "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy". *Foreign Affairs* (November-December 1997). ISSN 0015-7120.

extremist currents and Holocaust-deniers. With a social policy stigmatized by the former leader of the German AfD Frauke Petry as "socialist" and at the same time opening up to sexual minorities, Marine Le Pen, the chairman of the FN, succeeded in what the left less and less succeeds: the combination of material and post-material values and an electoral alliance between lower and middle social segments.

New parties have emerged between conservative people or rally parties and the right-wing extremism, which are considered to be right-wing populists despite the great political differences in economic, social and family policy: the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Great Britain, the New Flemish Alliance (Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie, NVA), in Italy the M5S. They represent a "third way from the right" (René Cuperus), but declare that they are not on the right or left but on the side of the citizens.[39] As these new parties are much more successful than right-wing extremism, it is possible to have a bandwagon effect, as in the case of the young AfD: many of those parties, which circle within the New Right or right-wing extremist groups jump in and try to mark the trend with their own 'brand'. Similarly, new left parties, such as the Spanish Podemos, the Greek Syriza, or the French Parti de gauche, are taking a "third way from the left" beyond the old Communist Left and the established Social Democracy.

We are indeed facing a crisis of representation, a crisis of participation, and a crisis of sovereignty. If social-democratic parties no longer perceive their function as a tribune of advocates of the "small people", conservative people's parties proclaim themselves as "social democrat" and act as modernizers, this leads to a weakening of their integration function, to confidence crises and to loss of voter's choice. On their way to the political center such traditional parties leave a vacuum at the edges, in which right-wing populist parties, and in Southern Europe also left-wing populist parties, penetrate the field and occupy it with their themes.

The crisis of representation is expressed when many people are no longer represented by the established parties and perceive them as a cartel without alternative. Long before the fight of the Spanish *Podemos* against the "oligarquía", classics of political thought such as Robert Michels, Josef Schumpeter or Gerhard Leibholz pointed out the tendency to oligarchize parties. Parties no longer perceive their function as representative organizations between the state and society, but mutate into a secluded caste with declining intra-party democracy. Closely connected with the crisis of representation is the crisis of participation. It is the case when a considerable number of voters, especially in the lower social segment, no longer participate in politics, but have a grudge against "those up there".

The third aspect, the crisis of sovereignty, means a loss of national sovereignty in favor of transnational organizations such as the EU, but also the loss of individual competency. "Like all symptoms," says Jürgen Habermas, "this feeling of the loss of control has a real core – the hollowing out of national democracies that, until now, had given citizens the right to co-determine important conditions of their social existence. The UK referendum provides vivid evidence about the keyword "post-democracy".

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[39] KANDEL, Johannes; DUFFEK, K.A.; CUPERUS, René – *Multiple Third Ways*. Amsterdam: WBS, 2001. ISBN 9789072575708.

Obviously, the infrastructure without which there can be no sound public sphere and party competition has crumbled. After initial analyses the media and opposing political parties failed to inform the populace about relevant questions and elementary facts, let alone make differentiated arguments for or against opposing political views. The very low turnout of the 18-24-year-olds, supposedly disadvantaged by the elderly, is another revealing piece of data".[40] When people experience no longer being master of their own situation, not being able to determine their own life and feel exposed to unmanageable influences, they perceive this as a loss of control. Trump's victory, the Brexit, the rise of the AfD, as well as the right-wing populist Swedish democrat (Sverigedemokraterna) in the course of the mass immigration of 2015, all seem to follow one imperative: to regain national control, in America against its "weakness" ("Make America great again!"), in Europe also against the "Leviathan" (Umberto Bossi, Formerly Lega Nord) or the "monster" (Geert Wilders, Partij voor de Vrijheid PVV) in the form of the EU.

After Karl Jaspers one could consider that politically the world faces an axial era[41], a new epochal dividing line between nationalism and liberal worldliness. More precisely, four shifting lines appear to oppose each other: a conflict between material and post-material value orientation, a rivalry between representative and direct democracy, a strife of identity between nativism and cosmopolitanism, and a clash between center and periphery. Right-wing populists also argue that the discrimination of ethnic and sexual minorities or women is one-sidedly the focus of attention, while the social disadvantage of large sections of the population is overshadowed.

Social inequality has grown under the hegemony of neoliberalism, and the gap between rich and poor has spread far apart. The misalignment, i. e. the abandonment of the lower social segment (former industrial workers, young unemployed persons who do not have access to the labor market, modest self-employed persons) by the left parties led to a differentiation of right-wing populist parties. They assume the function of an advocate who has long abandoned the left. Populists, however, are not directed to a particular social class , but to the forgotten people, the "plain people", the "silent majority", the "ordinary people", who are not only concerned with threatened loss of status but are confronted with numerous civil society grievances (bloated but inefficient bureaucracy, corruption, inadequate infrastructure). The rapid rise of the Five-Star Movement to Italy's second-strongest party is also due to the failure of the established parties and their disregard for central citizens. In the meantime, the Social Democratic Party under Matteo Renzi has embraced many of the social and ecological demands of this outsider party, even if the voters prefer the original rather than the copy.

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[40] Interview to *Die Zeit* (2016) 16. ISSN 0044-2070

[41] JASPERS, Karl – *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*. Munich: Piper, 1963 (original: Zürich, 1949). ISBN 9783492102988.

4.

How to avoid the major risk of populism and to dispel the threat of populism? The reasons for the success of right-wing populist parties (but also left-wing, like Syriza) are different from country to country; after 1989 also between West and Central Eastern Europe. However, it is always about the recovery of sovereignty and self-determination towards the outside (mainly against the EU) and internally (against the caste or the cartel of the established parties or the 'vested interests', that is, particular interests in the USA). As a reaction, the traditional parties have entrenched themselves in a kind of confused center for enlightened citizens, whose success is more than compromised, in face of tight election results (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany) and sometimes by simple defeat (presidential election in France, 2017).

Is there a way to react to the populist threat? Sure. But where the parties of the mainstream react further in building large coalitions and consequently offering poor alternatives to their classic program, the frustration and failure blow wind under the wings of the populist protests. Ralf Dahrendorf predicted in 1997 that the 21st century could bear the signature of authoritarianism. In the same year, another liberal, Fareed Zakaria, pleaded for a liberal democracy, "which emphasizes both parts of the wording": liberalism and democracy. The stability of the post-war regime was based on the connection between the rule of law and popular sovereignty. In the meantime, however, the tectonics of these two pillars had been cracked. The pendulum strikes towards the liberal rule of law and an "enlightened" elite rule, which is placed as a bulwark against popular sovereignty, seen? as threatened by populists of all sides. According to Ivan Krastev, "liberal democracy is in danger when the structural conflict between "the elites" and "the people" is no longer seen as a liability but a major asset. The current generation of European liberals has been educated in a political tradition that wrongly assumes (historically and theoretically) that anti-liberal parties are also anti-democratic. This is no longer the case. The real challenge that liberal democracy is facing today is the rise of democratic illiberalism. Whoever wishes to save democracy is called on to fight on two fronts: against populists and against those liberals who hold democracy in contempt".[42] This is a call that best fits the challenge of conjuring up the contemporary populist threat.

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[42]   KRASTEV, Ivan – „The Populist Moment". *Eurozine*, 18.09.2007 (Retreived from http://www.eurozine.com/ - access 11.5.2017). ISSN 1684-4637.