

Authoritarian Populism in Transitional Countries of Western Balkans

INTRODUCTION

Populism today is a topic in Europe in different societies and at different levels, as in the recent past. Of course, the concept is split again among various opinions about populism, like those claiming it is a political tactic, rhetorical instrument, theory, or ideology. Most authors define populism as a dimension of political action rather than being an ideology or theory. Given this, different political practices are signified by this notion in a rather unselective manner; this is explained by the shallowness of populism and the lack of “theory in it.”² This has shown to be a mistake. This is also demonstrated by experience of contemporary challenges of parliamentary democracies in different parts of the world, especially in Europe. Populism remains a totalitarian spirit that stalks democracy and points out the compromise between the democratic and undemocratic spirit, and between restricting the will of the people or the people’s sovereignty and liberal principles of democracy.

New moments, evidence, and elaborations in this discussion were brought to the foreground by present experience of authoritarian populism in transition countries; this populism appears to be the greatest danger for these countries to be ruined on their road to democracy, as well as the relative successes of the rightwing and leftwing populism in contemporary European democracies in context of globalization, democratic deficit, unwanted openness, and immigration.

Such experiences indeed do confirm that thesis’ about populism being a rhetorical instrument and tactics without theory are hasty and not well based. It is increasingly clear that it is a question – if not about theory or discourse – certainly then about a political ideology with its own concept.

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² In context of describing populism in his work, Peter Wiles gives even 24 features of populists in: *A Syndrome, Not a Doctrine...* ed G. Ionesco and E. Gellner; *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, London 1969; or, P. A. Taqieieff, *Political Science Confronts Populism*, Telos 103, 1995, pp. 9-43; etc.

1. POPULISM AS IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS

In relation to populism, one can set aside and consider several starting analytical positions! For example, one can analyze it as a phenomenon of some historical period, context, or social formation: populism in Europe, in the 1930s, fascism, the populism in Latin America, or populism of national liberation of decolonization, etc. Likewise, one can analyze populism in a symptomatic or phenomenological manner – by analyzing some of the political techniques, tools, and relations that populism establishes on politics, how populism formulates the notion of “the people”, attitude towards the elites, towards the status quo of the institutions of the parliamentary democracy, attitude towards the political mythology and history, the manner in which populism formulates leadership in politics, attitude towards elections and pluralism.

By means of both approaches – and so it happens in most analysis – one can arrive at conclusion that, in this case, it is not a question of some special ideological formation or theory; rather it is a question of a political technique/rhetoric that is used historically and currently by formations in the entire political spectrum: from the extreme leftwing to the extreme rightwing, via the central mainstream.³ Well known are definitions that populism is a rhetoric style without substance (Taggard); that it is an anti-political episode that celebrates the fatherland just before a crisis (again Taggard, Kirchheimer, Krouwel); that it is a political tactics or a style of communication (Jagers and Walgrave, etc.).⁴

Let me suggest – in line with Margaret Canovan, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Francisco Panizza – that it is a question of consistent ideology of populism, which can be politically conceptualized and which has several key elements of self-creation and several key rhetoric of criticism towards the institutions of parliamentary democracy; these elements and rhetoric are constant and can be singled out in all characteristic cases of populism in all political spectrums.

For the basis of such approach, let me borrow the definition of “ideology” from Heywood: it is like more or less a coherent collection of ideas that offer basis for political action, which are aimed at either

³ In contemporary context mention is often made of 7 to 8 rightwing parties having clear populist politics and policies: Schweizerische Volkspartei (Switzerland), Front National (France), Lijst Pim Fortuyn (the Netherlands), Vlaams Blok (Belgium), Die Republikaner (Germany), Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Austria); and there are also leftwing populist parties like the movement of G. Pepe in Italy. Populist elements have been accepted and pursued also by many other center-right parties; however, further mention of this would lead us away from the main topic. Further on this in: *Varieties of Populism*, J. D. Raadt, D. Hollanders, A. Krouwel, Working Papers, Political Science No 2004/04, Universiteit Amsterdam.

⁴ Taggard P., *Populism*, Buckingham, Open Society Press, 2000; Kirchheimer O., *Transformation of Western Party System*, ed New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969; Krouwel A., *The Catch-All Party in Western Europe*, Universiteit Amsterdam, 1999; Jagers J. and S. Walgrave, *Political Rhetoric of Vlaam Party, Somenleving en Politiek*, 10/8 2003; etc.

maintaining or changing the dominant balance of forces in politics. Such set of ideas always includes those ideas that relate to assessment of the existing order, projection of a new ideal order (imagined and desired) and a road how to reach such order by changing the present situation.⁵

In these frameworks, populism is determined as ideology according to the manner in which it constructs the notion of “the people”; afterwards, populism leans entirely on “the people” and, according to its own beliefs, it finally “generates people who are reborn.” Then it is determined according to the manner in which populism constructs the direct and uncorrupt relationship between such people and their new leaders. Namely, through them, it is supposed that the will of the people is directly transmitted, without go-betweens, into politics, thus avoiding the always corrupt classical political elites (the political class) and their institutions. Thirdly, according to the populist mantra, it is possible and it is needed to have direct injection of the will of the sovereign people into the democratic decision-making process; and this is possible to do only through a special type of leadership that is not infected with other known elitist forms. Leadership that constantly refuses to be defined as “political” (at least in the thus far known forms); leadership that places itself in the myth of “the common man,” being one of us but with special features and mission.

In this sense, some of the populist practices do not deny democracy in principle or as an idea; still, such populist practices refute the present organizational form of democracy – representative, liberal parliamentary democracy. In the mind of a populist, representative democracy needs a revival, restoration, rebirth (remorse – redemption), and not a mere replacement. According to populists, democracy is in essential crisis, because of the corruption of the representational process and its participants – the elites, who do not represent anybody now, but themselves and the close oligarchy around them. These elites and their oligarchy – so say populists – are very irresponsible and disobedient to their own people: they have thrown the sovereign people into oblivion!

Upon this critical point, populists then appeal to the sovereign people to take democracy back through them (populist leaders), to own again democracy, thus clashing with the elites and their structure of power. Hence, a discrepant feature of populism is that it is basically political – in sense of depending on and stimulating antagonism and dynamics of clashing with the status quo. This is valid at least until the moment of coming to power; afterwards, a new dynamics is put in place – shifting the place of confrontation (this will be considered later in the text). Populism is *POLITICS* par excellence in context of the manner in which it antagonizes its own program towards the status quo; at the same time, populism thinks ideologically that it is “denial of politics” and some kind of end of history of liberal pluralism. And this is perhaps not far away from the truth if populism wins, because democracy – as we know it – will be covered by the giant and deep shadow of the populist spirit, especially in context of the compromise that is maintained between the democratic and undemocratic tendencies, and between

⁵ A. Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, 3rd edition, Houndmills Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

restricting the will of the majority (of the people) and the rule of law and individual human rights.⁶

From all of the aforementioned, a conceptualization of populism would include: constructing “its own people” and appealing to them; anti-institutional rhetoric and antagonism (political, not post-political); and rhetoric of direct democracy, intermediated by the special leadership.

Certainly, it is prosaic to state that some politicians in democracy are “for the people”; namely, no discourse is implied that has analytical value. What is important is to notice how populists CONSTRUCT the notion of “people,” as opposed to the known definitions thus far and grasping of this notion.

The populist position “for the people” and appealing “to the people” for action, and the forms of direct action represent a typically ideological thing; namely, this is a message in a room of echoes – an illusion simulacrum. Such position appeals for originality, a zero point of establishing sovereignty (of the people), in context of something, upon which this position builds itself, and fills it with a very desire. The relationship between a populist leader and his people is a complex and ambivalent issue. The aforementioned desire of the people – later to be imposed on the democratic institutions of the state – is actually a construction of the populist leader inserted “into the people.” In this sense, it is a zombified people. In other words, such people who desire intentionally what they have been told to desire.

This ideological moment (as pointed out by Slavoj Žižek) in context of ideological construction of the wishes of the people, with the people’s sovereignty being manipulated and processed – is the weakest point in the analyses thus far dealing with populism as such. These analyses finish with the conclusion (based on the tradition since the times of A. Gramsci), claiming that the appearance of populism is historically and socially related to the appearance of “organic crisis”; i.e., a crisis that is manifested by proliferation, a huge increase in demands towards the system, which is not able to articulate them through the institutions...⁷ This per se still represents an originary discontent and originary creation of will in the people, a will that is used and directed (but not created) by the populist leaders. This type of analysis is defective because it lacks a more serious understanding of the reverse movement in forming the WILL and role of the leaders in such process. I would like to propose a different viewpoint that is based on the ideas of three authors in the field of collective ideological formulation of the will: Michel Foucault, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek.

⁶ See how Charles Lamore explains this when he says that (...) he thought democratic home rule was the best protection for the liberal principles and that (...) it was understood human rights were crucial and constitutive for every form of modern democracy, (...) but... In: *Political Liberalism, Political Theory*, Vol. 18, No 3, 1990 pp. 359.

⁷ Ernesto Laclau maintains such basis, op. cit., pp. 9; also see: Oscar Reyes, *Skinhead Conservatism: A Failed Populist Project*, ed.; Francisco Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Verso, London, 2005, p. 103.

So, if we have as point of departure the working thesis that populism is a dimension of politics, which it constructs and gives sense to the notion of “people”, such sense that has never existed before and does not coincide with similar concept – such thesis then builds further on the view of Michel Foucault that the collective memory in the people is subject to fight for control..., memory control in the people and groups is social control..., controlling the memory and deciding what such memory contains determine the dynamism of a nation..., facts per se are never true or evident; facts are mediated and interpreted and thus represent basis for collectivistic memory narratives...⁸

This thesis appears to be important because the construct of the memory by populism, i.e., its struggle to implement its own memory as dominant in the new identity of its own people, telling how sovereignty was lost in favor of corrupted elites, how such sovereignty was stolen and how the people were cheated – represents exactly such competitive memory that becomes a basic political tool. In case of populism, this memory is not at all a memory; on the contrary, it is a construct and a forged remembering, which is a mythologically arbitrary interpretation of history and specification of social antagonisms of a rather black-and-white world. In the very center of this, a PHANTASM is located (often present in the imagined communities of the nations, according to W. Anderson). This phantasm fabricates the existence of a ZERO POINT in history, where the contemporary sovereignty and state (the covenant on democracy) of a given nation were founded, and where the sovereignty was initially transferred to the representative elites, thereby founding democracy there.

Such imagined outcome point or the phantasm of the basic covenant (Ernesto Laclau calls it an empty signifier⁹) is presented by the populist rhetoric as lost through the fraud made by the elites and hence appeals that this point be returned to the people through political action.

Actually, this can also be a more complex Lacanian construction: namely, when something, which had never existed, has been lost – such loss then assumes the form of phantasm. This is the Lacanian LOST OBJECT of the people. The people and/or the community then feel sorry for such loss; in other words, they are in sorrow for the lost originary being together. This sentiment then spins the political knitting of the identity of the people – how they see themselves, what they want, whom they support, how they fight. Namely, the identity of the people is more of a relationship towards their phantasms rather than being a relationship towards the rational understanding and mastering the world around them. Populism, as ideology, feeds upon this and then upgrades itself; all of the aforementioned is politically organized by populism as very ideology.

Liberals claim that the price of our today's freedom and liberation is that very loss of (the phantasm of) the initial unity of the nation. However, communitarians and populists indeed do claim that such price of modernity is too high and so they want to make return to such unity of the people.

⁸ Michael Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits, 1954-1988*, Vol. I-II, Gallimard, Paris, 2001.

⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Populism: What's in a Name*, ed, Panizza, *ibidem*, pp. 38-46

This is a powerful message and mobilizing creed regardless of the fact that the final unity of the people is illusion just like a classless society is. Nevertheless, appealing to the people is rather efficient especially in situation of social crisis and expanded collective existential fear (Z. Bauman).¹⁰ Actually, the situation of organic crisis (A. Gramsci) and expanded existential fear of the population can develop taking two directions or two-and-a-half directions. The first direction involves denial of the legitimacy of the institutions and elites through forms of participative deliberation and radicalization of the forms of inclusiveness within the representative democracy, including also various forms of civil disobedience. The second direction involves manipulative populism (most often a conservative, xenophobic, repressive populism; still it could also be a leftwing populism); such populism organizes the dissatisfaction of the people through a response to the representation by other means (a quasi-direct democracy), other elites and other rhetoric. Certainly, the third option, or the halfway option, is to dilute the protest and make it then gradually disappear into the current institutional arrangements; this indirectly gives legitimacy and power to these arrangements.

In populist ideology, “their people” is perceived as organic unity. Issues dividing the people, entire pluralism, and especially the representative elites from the government and the opposition are put aside; these elites are entirely portrayed as corrupted political class. The epicenter of antagonism and clash with the status quo is thus shifted from the democratic pluralism to a new level –the new people and their leaders versus all the rest.

Certainly, denial of legitimacy of every individual elite of the political class is further expanded by populists also to include economic oligarchies, university intellectual circles; this especially takes the form of such populist feature called anti-intellectualism, which is very often cited in history.¹¹ Hence, it can be concluded that populism, as ideology, creates new identities and new collective desires.

At this point of the debate, it would be interesting to refer to a group of authors who are focused on the creation of collective desires of the people in the process of confronting with the status quo and whose work also deals with populist practice.¹² Namely, populists usually define politics as “a dirty game,” trying to bring redemption into it or at least to make it purified. Populists reject politics as it is presently known and MORALIZE it intensively, thus replacing its discourse with moralizing. I deliberately say moralizing and not ethics; moral in politics – because it is exactly that: simplified, sometimes rather pathetic

¹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Life In Fragments*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995.

¹¹ See especially in: Margaret Canovan, *Trust the People, Populism and Two Faces of Democracy*, Political Studies, Vol. 27, 1999, pp. 2-16; and: Barney and Laycock, *ibidem*, 1999, pp. 321.

¹² Certainly, some authors point out that one should differentiate from one experience to another experience, claiming that there are more pragmatic versions of populism, more collectivistic populisms, all the way up to abstractly romantic populisms. See in: Jasper de Raadt, David Hollanders, André Krouwel, *Varieties of Populism*, op. cit., 2004, pp. 20.

messages against corruption; loss of public moral; deforming the essence of the nation; betrayal made by the intellectuals, etc. – all of this involving “the struggle” between “us, the good guys” and “them, the evil ones”, thus denying any room for a compromise substantial for democratic politics. Use of tabloid language and general (over)simplification in presenting relations and very politics is just a tool that should create a picture about being direct and straightforward, being close with “the language of the people” and express indirect contempt for the language of intellectuals. What is very important in order to understand the success of such language is that populist politics does not address problems (does not solve them); rather SUCH POPULIST POLITICS RADICALLY REDEFINES THEIR STATUS and symbolically mediates them. The moral signifiers, which we mentioned as leverage of political qualifications, work differently, in a more warlike and destructive manner if they are framed in a political rhetoric, which is basically antagonistic and producing conflicts. They create internal boundaries, new divides, or the so-called internal periphery!¹³

Thus, according to F. Panizza, populism destroys the borderline between private and public, exposing the public sphere/domain, the domain of *res publica* to the private desires, phantasms, and fears.¹⁴

I find this conclusion especially important! This is the place where the real drama of populism and its entire fall under the rules and dynamics of the collective subconsciousness of the people happen. This “awakens the tiger” in the subconscious of the people and becomes the leader of the spirits of the elements that are sidelined and subconscious in the human mind, and, at the same time, also their slave.

Such transformation of the political discourse and rhetoric aimed at the collective phantasms is experienced by the people as “cultural revolution” and collective catharsis, unpunished outburst of xenophobia, hatred, demonization, while multiculturalism, for example, is signified as a fraud made by the intellectuals and imposed by them.¹⁵

Even if such new identity-based unity is shared on grounds of what Oscar Reyes calls “our small dirty secrets” or what Slavoj Žižek calls “the forbidden and shared collective enjoyment that is only ours” – it must be ours (versus theirs) and must represent a cathartic discharging instead of a deliberative politics. An unavoidable consequence is moralization of politics and in politics, between “us, the good guys” and “them, the evil ones” and agonistic perspective of politics (Chantal Mouffe). This hurts democracy because it is treated as “a zero sum game” and so the opportunity for a democratic compromise and deliberation is reduced.¹⁶

What is, however, important in both processes and determines the force of populist initiative (something that concerns us in the text) is the element that Alain Badiou calls syndrome of the MASTER in

¹³ See in: Benjamin Ardit, *Populism as an Internal Periphery of Democracy*, in Panizza eds, p. 98.

¹⁴ F. Panizza, eds, op. cit., 2005, pp. 24.

¹⁵ Very often, such discourse contains a clear anti-EU position, as a project imposed by the elites.

¹⁶ Oscar Reyes, *Skinhead Populism, Failed Populist Project*, Panizza eds, 2005, pp. 99-117.

organizing political action and collective motivational creeds that push it forward! Namely, Badiou claims that the masses of people are politically activated and organized by appeal to the MASTER (the leader) who should know what they want! The populist leader, like Baron Munchausen using flying ducks, should take out the masses from the quagmire. The MASTER is the one helping the individual and the masses become a subject, an actor. The masses need MEDIATION in form of AUTHORITY in order to move forward on the road of political action and defining what they actually want from politics and who they are (collective subjectivity). Badiou claims (and S. Žižek agrees with it) that it is not possible to carry out such political mobilization without the role of the authority, either in emancipative or in populist and manipulative direction.¹⁷ Žižek pushes further this argument by stating that we think the people know what they want! They do not know and what is even more tragic, “they do not want to know”... There is need for elite through which the people discover what they actually want (sic?).¹⁸

The power of the populist ideology lies in this point. It is not found in the content of its political program that is eclectic, rather in the manner of approaching the relationship leader-people-direct action, in shaping the political identity of the newly constructed people and their desires.¹⁹ The vehemence of the crisis forwarded to the institutions and the inability of such institutions to absorb it, transform it into legislative actions – can disappear in medium term, can be diluted, unless it is taken over by the interpretative political rhetoric of the leaderships who further build upon this vehemence, increase it, then explain it in historical and value perspectives, and, finally, use it to overthrow the government.

Populist leaders claim that they are in unmediated connection with their people and so they directly transmit the will of the people in context of politics! Gramsci, Laclau, and Mouffe call this an established HEGEMONY. Populist leaders present themselves as internally coherent and transcendental representatives of the only truth of the people – as being one! Hence, populism depends very much on the sense of internal

¹⁷ Both authors further build upon the thesis of Lacan that it is not possible to have a direct access to reality; namely, that such access is brokered by the phantasms of the individual or the collective. By means of such phantasms and a metaphysical speech, the collective understands the identification with it and is so motivated towards a political action. The collective understands itself in relation to such action. The political leadership draws its dominant power certainly from this context and especially by organizing and interpreting such function. Slavoj Žižek further adds to this thesis by claiming that “the fatigue” of the masses, their disorientation after waves of protest and fierce actions represent not only a psychological but also ontological fact. Without leadership, usually a protest is disorganized; it fades away and finally disappears.

¹⁸ Alain Badiou, *The Courage of the Present*, La Monde, and *An Essential Philosophical Thesis: It Is Right to Rebel Against Reactionaries*, MUSE, Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 669; Slavoj Žižek, *Hrabrost odluke*, BUKA Magazin, 4/23/13, <http://www.6yka.com/>.

¹⁹ Likewise in: Margaret Conovan, *Populism as the Ideology of Democracy in Many Y. And Y. Surel*, eds, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Houndmills: Palgrave, pp. 25-40.

homogeneity – demonizing heterogeneity and pluralism, against which such homogeneity is formed. In this sense, antagonism against heterogeneity and pluralism is the key political tool of populism.²⁰

2. POPULISM ON THE EDGE OF DEMOCRACY – AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM

In contrast to our previous discussion, **the authoritarian populism** in the countries in transition, especially in the Western Balkans, represents a fast-moving phenomenon and danger of completely deforming the young democratic institutions in the very beginning of their establishment.

This populism as such appears as a lethal threat to them and democracy, especially the rule of law and human rights.

Several common themes among these cases of populism in Europe from different settings: immigration, minorities (in a word, resistance towards "the others"), nationalism, anti-Europeanism, etc., are not sufficient reason for ignoring the big picture, the substantial difference and power of each of them to individually endanger the institutions of democracy in their own countries.

Clear and well-known are the basis on which populism in transitional democracies appears.

It is the existence of **illiberal societies**, with the burdening legacy of communism and single-party culture of statism, often associated with nationalism and bad history towards ethnic minorities and the religious diversity.

Very often, such countries have **irresponsible political elites**, which take the easier road of political mobilization on the line of the ethnic homogeneity (the syndrome of riding the tiger, instead of the civil society context). Manipulation with fear and conspiracies, and historic mythologies directed toward finding an imaginary-specific enemy in form of the cultural diversity of the "other."

Continuous economic crisis, corruption, and collective culture of letting the state solve everything.

Economic **markets distorted by the ruling party and state penetration**, corruption, and absence of any predictable legal certainty. Absence of entrepreneurship culture and initiatives.

Cynicism of the ruling elites towards democratic values, and especially towards values of human rights. A rather bizarre practice that such cynicism grows (and not decreases) in the process of EU

²⁰ See especially in: Ernesto Laclau, *Towards a Theory of Populism and Populist Rupture in Democracy*, Screen Education, 1981.

accession?!? A practice of double reality and cheating the people in adopting the EU legislation, as well as its cunning utilization are developed in such countries. In practice, however, a finalized system of authoritarian populism is maintained (some kind of perverted anti-European Europeanism).

Breaking up of the local civil society sector by organized state intrusion into it and transferring there the ideological authoritarian debate on the need to identify the domestic “traitors.”

Obsession with the MEDIA and imagined policies of populism. In such context, the media become A CONSTITUTIVE PART OF THE ORGANIZATION OF POWER OF THE AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM (Giorgio Agamben), and not just its instrument as until now.

Finally, there is unclear strategy and tactics of the EU diplomacy in context of monitoring and defending its own values by means of the policy of “conditionality.” One notices hesitation in the use of diplomacy of pressure and coercion (“offer more stick than carrots”) when there is clear stagnation or retrograde tendencies in the accession process. The presence of the clientelist instinct of some of the EU countries towards the Western Balkans comes to the surface. Finally, there is also the easy exploitation of the entire project of enlargement and placing it below other priorities of the EU.

In the region of the Western Balkans, there are different degrees of established local authoritarian populism. From Macedonia, where the system has been completed, to Serbia where elements of the system can be detected in the judiciary, the national science and arts academies, etc., to Montenegro as well, then Albania under the Berisha government, Kosovo, and to Bosnia similarly (in the wider region, it also includes Hungary and Turkey). The global picture of such system is hard to see at a first glance because all of these countries show strong pro-European and democratic rhetoric; however, it has penetrated everywhere and therefore a common EU strategy on this phenomenon is necessary, possible, and sustainable. Such strategy is the only guarantee of the success of real EU-backed reforms in these countries.

Key challenges to democracy

What are the characteristics of the local authoritarian populism in the Balkans (due to the danger it represents to democracy, let me give it a working name: the cannibalistic populism)?

Like the populism in broader sense, the authoritarian populism is not a concept of coherent policies; namely, it is eclectic. It is more like a bag that collects IMAGINED policies. In that sense, it is an assemblage, a patchwork where one can find cohabitating leftwing and rightwing, and even extreme leftist and rightist policies. Nevertheless, it is also characterized by a specifically connecting political dogma that was discussed very much in the first part. Namely, it exploits the thesis

THAT IT IS VERY CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE. That is the key and the connecting tissue of so diverse policies or imagined policies, so that they can be presented in a single party program and seem coherent.

The second part of such political dogma is also well known: anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism. In other words, allegations that the elites are buried in their own trenches and are corrupt, and so they do not hear the voice of the people.

However, let us be very careful about this. The present authoritarian populism found in paracolonial transitional countries in the Balkans is cleverer and more cunning than similar historical examples were. Namely, this type of authoritarian populism does not show direct resistance to “the gamekeeper,” EU (Milošević was the last one openly to do it). The contemporary authoritarian populism is very polite and attentive to the EU demands; it is entirely PROCEDURAL (by this and in this, such populism prevents the opposition parties to launch easy attacks, especially the Social-democratic parties, which are procedural in the history of their creation). This type of populism develops AN UNDEMOCRATIC PROCEDURALISM, authoritarian or empty proceduralism.

In these transitional country dictatorships, everything is in accordance with the law – and the law is in accordance with THEM (the local authoritarian populists). Legalism, which is given illiberal forms, is confronted against legitimacy of adopted laws and especially of the Constitution as such.

This type of populism achieves the objective in such manner that it creates and uses procedures and laws by means of two combined techniques. The first one is production of a huge number of laws, muddled legislation, and legal fog. This legislation is often internally controversial – but this has been done so, intentionally, by the lawmakers. In such situation of general in clarity and uncertainty, the instrument of application and interpretation of the laws is entirely in the hands of the administration and the government. Thus, the presumption of innocence and honesty of the citizen disappear. Everybody is potentially guilty, because the law is probably violated by somebody somewhere (a Kafkaesque situation), but his guilt has still not been processed and is so at the mercy of the administration when it will be done so.

The second technique is THE VAGUENESS of the key legal norms. What is legal and what is punishable is not clear, and this is changed all the time. Again, the main demiurge of the implementation of such vague legislation is the government and the administration. Their power is constantly on the rise and this power is not restricted by anything.

The ability of leaders of such populism to draw European money from funds for local legislative projects, and at the same time to remain unchanged, or to strengthen their local authoritarian power – makes them cynical towards European values, and they even openly call for the legitimacy of such political program/fraud.

The result that we have in context of these authoritarian operations is creating DOUBLE REALITY; in other words, there is existence of normative fog of pro-European legislation that serves as a show room to foreigners, and, at the same time, there is also a whole universe of subrules. These subrules actually are important and serve to solve the living problems of the citizens (the factual reality). These subrules say who is the boss, where in the ruling party one should apply to solve some personal problem, and how to interpret the rules to the foreigners (mostly, not to take them seriously).

I could drive this argument further by stating that the EU agenda of noticing only small “problems” (at legislative level) in these countries and failing to see the greater picture of created double reality of dictatorship – is actually the greatest success of the new authoritarian rulers.

Still, the basic and lacmus feature of the authoritarian populism (a feature by which one can clearly identify and differentiate this phenomenon) is its attack on the independent institutions of constitutionalism (the Constitution). Here it is lethally consistent and efficient. Authoritarian populism creates room of mirrors, or room of echoes, thus entirely destroying the independent institutions and making them movable mirrors that reflect the picture of the authoritarian leader. There is complete arbitrariness in their decisions and procedures, a definitely finalized reality of the dictatorship.

A separate devastating attack is made (and has been completed in Macedonia) on the judiciary. The judiciary is completely under the ruling party influence and is very unqualified, not by chance. The Constitutional Court of the country has also been a special target of such devastation.

To summarize – as Alain Badiou would say, it is a matter of dreadful misunderstanding about and of the procedures and their meanings, and consequently a matter of full dying out (not of the state as such) but of the rule of law in the state.

At this point in the discussion, the “positive” reports made by EU on such countries are especially bizarre. Namely, in the effort to assist such countries in their EU accession process, EU ends up in grotesque manner and de facto assist the system of authoritarianism with “European money” from various projects and aid grants?!?

The third clear difference of the present transitional authoritarianism from its historical predecessors is OBSESSION WITH THE MEDIA.

Since we have said that its policies are simulacrums, imagined – finally, these policies depend on their display to the public through the media (not on their accomplishment). That is why the media is key to this populist policy and its getting power. Here the media (according to G. Agamben) is not only an instrument of the government, but also a constitutive pillar for the realization of the power and of such government. Without such media, the power of the authoritarian

populism erodes very quickly. Hence, such populist systems are obsessed and directed towards control and pressure on the freedom of all possible media. These systems do not make any compromise whatsoever in this respect! (The case of the Inquiry Committee of the Macedonian Parliament to investigate the parliament incident of 24 December 2012 and the impossibility to reach any compromise whatsoever even about the journalists being thrown out of the parliament building on that very day represent an indicative example of such obsession and unwillingness to make compromise even only about the freedom of the media, position of the journalists, and media control.)

At the same time and most clearly in context of this point on freedoms and rights, the freedom of expression as constitutional for the set of political freedoms and democratic pluralism – should be the strongest EU counter-game and strategy of reconsidering a new policy of “conditionality” in the EU enlargement process.

Fourthly, the authoritarian populism **does not believe in ELECTIONS**. Even though this populism seems obsessed with elections and turns all political public life into constant election campaign and election issue (the election paradox), still it treats elections as unavoidable relic of democracy and pluralism, a relic that endangers the phantasm of the homogeneity of the newly established nation.

Authoritarian populism believes only in verification of itself and its policies through elections and in no other results whatsoever, and especially not in the plurality of options and alternatives. Hence, authoritarian populism has no problem with abuse of the police at elections, abuse of electoral lists, corruption, and blackmail of the administration employees at the elections (especially by blackmailing part-time administration employees), and with other electoral fraudulent and illegal activities.

In order to attain success in this objective, such populism produces the next dangerous operation. It occupies the sphere/domain of the general public and fully contaminates it with partisan, abrasive speech – creating permanent lines of division among the citizens (and even when it is not necessary) along party lines that become bloodthirsty. The domain of the general public is completely under adrenaline being in permanent situation of conflicts. The regime channels and controls this situation of conflicts. In this context, the basic tool of the populist regime is the classical operation of producing threats, conspiracies, and dividing the people into traitors and patriots. The organic unity of the people is again on the scene (C. Schmitt), under the vigilant leadership of the new authoritarian populism. The system is fully transformed into MAJORITARISM, which is not a democracy, and especially not the rule of law.

At this point in the ideological discourse of dictatorships, there is repetition of the position, as defined by C. Schmitt, concerning the people as non-political masses that strive towards organic unity in search of their lost unity (the Lacanian LOST OBJECT).²¹ Such unity, which is lost, still has its own start, its own ideal zero point somewhere in the

²¹ See in: Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of Political* (1932), Chicago, 1996.

distant past – when this unity existed in all its power and glamor. A point in history when the nation was in harmony and united. Such point and situation had been lost in the meantime (the nation enters the phase of being a victim and of its suffering); and still the nation is in constant search for restoration of such lost ancient unity. Suggestion made by present populist dictatorships is that such unity is again accessible, possible, and feasible – by means of their systems and their leaders. This is the right-wing mythology (in essence, entirely invented historiography and ideology) – a UTOPIA that is shown to be very efficient in time of crises; at the same time, transition, by definition, is always a crisis.

In this sense, authoritarian populism is anti-liberal, anti-individualist and anti-democratic, irrational, culturally regressive, supported by inventing history – and, certainly, zombifying.

The ruling party in the authoritarian populist regime aims (if it has been successful) to convert itself into a popular movement of such lost unity of the nation, especially in such sense as pointed out by G. Agamben – a movement that represents crisis of political pluralism and death of the political.

It is a classic example of C. Schmitt's thesis about the people as non-political formation that wishes to have a corporate state and resolute/strong leadership.

It is interesting to note that this feature of populism is also observed by other authors dealing with this topic. For example, in this context Francisco Panizza claims that populism has tendency to depoliticize politics and at the same time to super politicize social relations. In this regard, a populist leader tries to place himself “outside politics”, presenting himself that he is not a politician per se (or at least, that he is not like the rest of the politicians) in some kind of metaphoric loneliness: he alone – together with the people, presenting himself as common man with excellent capabilities.²²

The basic action and only dynamics of such constructed people, under the leadership of such lonely leader, is to search and exterminate domestic and foreign state enemies. All the rest is just a metaphysical tranquility and status quo of the dictatorship. The people are forced to be in constant spasm, constant vigilance, and intimidation about some foreign conspiracy, to “withstand until the very end” as if it was normal that all others are against them, as if there were some kind of historical curse and destiny. The people are forced to wait for some unclear better moment in the future – that will free them and so make then a harmonious and united people. (With Macedonians, this is clearly expressed by the constructed architectural and monumental kitsch and horror called the Skopje 2014 project. It is also expressed by that culturological, literary and teatrologist crap promoted by J. Plevnesh: that a Macedonian is a fantastic creature, who needs just to be sufficiently strongly and longly mistreated, to be sufficiently deeply buried in a hole in the ground – so that such Macedonian would be able to show his ability to withstand everything – in order to express in abstract manner his apology at some time in the future, in some unknown

²² F. Panizza, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

circumstances and for some unknown values?!? It is interesting that his own independent country, democracy, and human individual rights and equities are not sufficient for such realization?!?)

Fifthly, what I consider ultimately the most dangerous element of the authoritarian populism in the Balkans in sociological, psychological and political context is its ability to create ITS OWN PEOPLE (to change the matrix of political pluralism and so not to depend on the free will of the voters, but to create “its own voters” as such, who like “the walking dead” or “zombies” constantly have only one aim or desire).

From using violence and intimidation manipulation (Zygmunt Bauman), and inventing history and myths about victors and victims, and up to internalized values – this is the road of success taken by the populist dictatorship. It is like the alien creature in the movie “The Alien,” in the intestines of the stuffed segment of the mob/population voting in transitional democracies. “This alien” enables the reproduction of populism in the longer term.

Notably, such populism manages to sell its own story connecting it with history and with fear! To promote this story into a metaphoric speech of the political utopia of the rightwing. The fear of unity lost!

Authoritarian regimes in the region use almost the same technique: by searching for the zero point of national harmony in the distant past. With a policy of selective, most often forged memories. The power of that operation should not be underestimated! Let me remind you of the text by Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1966. The intention is to re-interpret history in order to get verification of the role of the authoritarianism presently and in the future. Control over the archives, books, and education gives it power in context of re-reading and re-assessing history. Authoritarian populism produces a particular flashback in history. This populism skips recent history and requires the establishment of zero point at the initial unity of the nation, which had been lost in the distant past (the Lacanian Lost Object). It produces political mythology (the examples of Gruevski, Orban, and Erdogan) into two controversial myths: the heroic myth and the myth of the victim (all Balkan nations have such logic of a victimized nation, are not willing to compromise, think that all others owe them something, are harsh toward the minorities, and subject to manipulation about conspiracies). The heroic myth lies in perceiving the imagined start when the unity of the nation under the leadership Alexander the Great had been established, and then later to have been lost through a long period of suffering (the myth about the victim). Today a designation is suggested; the myth of the victor under the new leadership of the populist leader is again launched (victorious Macedonians, new Macedonians, shift from insignificant and fearful macedonian-with small “m” to a big and fearless huge Macedonian, etc.)

In such operation, history has been cut into pieces in unfounded and frivolous manner and it has been decided which of them will be considered important and glorified as the ultimate fantasy. The present

authoritarian politics imperatively tries to make discontinuity with everything previous and be based at the aforementioned imagined zero point of national harmony somewhere in the distant past (in the case of wretched Gruevski, it is Alexander the Great; for Orban, it is the ancient Hungarian tribes and the myth about the Four Fathers of the Asian Hungarians; and for Erdogan, it involves the famous sultans of the Ottoman Empire; etc.).

Then, from that point in history, there is a construction of a mystic bridge connecting such point with the present reborn dictatorship, suggesting this dictatorship as continuation or revival of that heroic age. This is the construct, matrix that is repeated, product which is ideological tool of the dictatorship and which is sold, in the meantime, to the always shocked citizens living in transition.

It is interesting to note that all of these dictatorship phantasms have anti-European profile (although these countries have some European history as well). None of those profiles is part of European history. They originate and express an impulse for pure heroic macho primordial civilizations (???) that are created out of nothing (*ab nihilo*).

Implicitly such phantasms, politically processed by the dictatorship regime, maintain the contempt towards the present European discourse. They repeat the sidelined dream for penetration into the whore of Babylon, i.e., Europe, crushing it, showing the proper place, and getting what Europe deserves (a classic pornographic dream).

Let me conclude. The authoritarian populism is dangerous because of its ability for internalization of crime and repression (trading off democracy and freedom for safety), into the values of a zombified individual and zombified mob. Thus the proponents of this populism secure "their own people" and hence their own (political) reproduction. The first result of this trend is the dissatisfaction of "these people" and disconnection with the EU values. Hence, the people show this later at public polls and at elections. Thus, an absurd is created; actually, the circle of the absurd is closed: there exist the regime and its dark, perverted side that the regime itself produces. There is no credible democratic alternative.

Local rulers of this kind in the Western Balkan countries sell their politics surprisingly well to the Eurocrats – working together on policy of EU enlargement!?! They seem to find the fabulous G-Spot in the EU policy towards the region of Western Balkans: security before democracy. Moreover, the result is: STABILOCRACY offered by the authoritarian local rulers to the Eurocrats, in exchange for EU tolerance for violation of human rights and demolition of the rule of law in their own countries!

Most Eurocrats evidently are incapable to create a complete picture from the data they collect from these countries, from all such databases – about how this autocratic machine operates and where all this leads to. Perhaps, such Eurocrats are not cold administrators or "evil" bureaucrats; however, they are certainly naïve well-intended persons who behave like "like a bull in a china shop."

3. WHAT COULD BE THE EXIT STRATEGY?

What could be the exit strategy of the EU, faced with such development of events?

The first thing I should say is that such new strategy does not require more money from those now spent by EU and it does not require any further human resources. However, it certainly requires: **better knowledge of what happens in these countries; and a better plan!**

EU should seriously take into consideration its own values that it promotes and demands to be realized from the candidate countries. It is alright to give time for adaptation, but it is not alright to make bad compromises on the results. This especially means that the first package of the so-called Copenhagen criteria, which relate to the basic norms of democracy and rule of law, should be kept open and monitored until the very end of the period of accession negotiations and very membership of a candidate country. And not like now, to open and close them at the very start of the negotiations with empty conclusions that a candidate country fulfills the criteria. As experience shows, it is clear that the criteria are DIFFICULT and substantial for democracies of these countries. Also, it can be seen that those criteria are fulfilled in insincere manner (especially in context of the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, freedom of expression, system of qualifications and education when recruiting employees for public administration, etc.), and that authoritarian systems develop under their auspices; systems that are later very difficult to decompose.

In this context, EU must not make any compromise whatsoever concerning the results. EU must be able to conduct strong monitoring, exert pressure, blackmail, eject, and even block, when required criteria are not fulfilled at satisfactory level.

When special problems appear in some candidate countries (it does happen sometimes), EU should then go one step further in interference, like creating permanent “soft arbitrations”, membership of Eurocrats in local public administration recruitment committees together with local bureaucrats, or establishing some kind of international judiciary board to deal with ruling political party interference in the independence of the local judiciary.

All of this means that the policy of “conditionality,” which is promoted by EU in controlling the candidate countries, should be enhanced, made stricter, and given new prioritization, in order to achieve real results in the preparation of the candidate countries for their EU membership.

* This text is revised edition of the presentation made by the author at the Conference in Berlin titled: “Social Impact of the European Crisis on the Western Balkans / Southeastern Europe,” 28-29 November 2013. The presentation was delivered at the conference panel: “Autocracy or Democracy? Role of Political Parties, Trade Unions, and Civil Society”. The conference was organized by Sudosteuropa Gesellschaft (info@sogde.org).

ABSTRACT

The text deals with the new form of populism, the so-called authoritarian populism in the countries of the Western Balkans. The big picture of reform processes, taking part in some of them during a ten-year period toward EU membership, ended up with more authoritarianism than with democracy.

EU technocratic brokers miss the real conclusions in this situation, turn to be supporters of new generation of authoritarian rulers who are impressed more by Putin than by EU values!

Brussels's conclusion that something is basically wrong in this region is not followed by scrupulous analysis of what goes on and in which direction! Eurocrats generally underestimate the very gravity of the authoritarian populism as an "alternative" of democracy in the region.

TAGS: authoritarian populism, democracy, rule of law, leadership.

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