

POPULISM: A CAUSE OF THE EUROPEAN UNIONS' PROBLEMS

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“We have been infected. The virus of populism, racism, xenophobia that has affected Europe. This European virus is called Le Pen in France, Farage in Great Britain, Orbán in Hungary, Northern League in Italy and Kaczynski in Poland”, said Giani Pitella about two years ago. I think that this affirmation is the most suitable to describe and draw attention to the problems suffocating Europe today. This paper is a short analysis of the difficulties that European Union confronted in the last two years, but also an attempt to draw an alarm signal about the needs of young Europeans for a prosperous and sustainable development.

In the last two years, the populist parties gained ground in the European Union's countries, fighting against the actual liberal direction of the European policy, to promote a nationalistic, euro sceptic current characterized by a populist rhetoric, by the importance they give to “maintaining national sovereignty”, chauvinism and a firm opposition toward immigrants and multiculturalism. But these are not the only problems the populists have created, but on the contrary, a more important problem would be the fact that democracy is threatened in the countries where these parties have the power and it is enough to take some examples around the European Union to demonstrate this theory. Hungary is a very good example, as Viktor Orban's government has been accused repeatedly of turning to authoritarianism as he imposed censorship, by silencing most of the media trusts that have exposed his illegal actions. Some experts say that the last election, which has firmly established, for a third term, Viktor Orban's place at the top of Hungary's political leadership could be a bigger threat for the European Union than Brexit is, because it is proof of the use and growth of nationalism in the country, an indirect attacks for the EU. Under these circumstances, Hungary has the lowest Democracy score in Central Europe (3.54 / 7).

Democracy is not only threatened in Hungary but also in neighbouring countries like Poland, where a similar government turns the political system in its favour and encourages an ultranationalist policy that has lately become the main subject in political speeches, and we can say that this does not respect the civic norms. The result of these speeches and encouragements from Jaroslaw Kaczynski's national-conservative Law and Justice Party is an increase in xenophobia which has also led to increased racial attacks and public harassment speeches against minorities. The same thing happens in countries such as Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, France and England, where it probably has the greatest magnitude because here the first clear results of the populist actions, and more precisely the Brexit, have settled here, when after 17 years, Nigel Farage has fought for Britain's exit from the European Union. The problem with the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union besides social and economic aspects could be the example that this political unconsciousness might give to other states, mainly to those states with extreme right-wing parties that promote Euro scepticism, and in the next years other referendums for leaving the European Union could appear on the continent.

On the opposite side, there are countries such as Sweden, Ireland, Finland, Luxembourg and Portugal, which have proved to be complete democracies, where political freedoms and human rights are respected, but also reinforced by a political and civic culture that leads to the prosperity of the democratic principles. These nations have an independent judicial system, whose decisions are well enforced, governments that function properly and a diverse and free, uncensored press. Looking to Sweden, we discover not only a true example, but also the most democratic country in the world. Here we can find a decentralized system with trustworthy and transparent institutions where public documents are accessible to any citizen. Ireland doesn't lag far behind, either, being called "the most innovative democracy in Europe" after it proved the trust it has in its citizens by creating a Citizen Assembly, and positive examples are not lacking, giving the EU hope for a better future.

The only hopes in solving these problems are the younger generations and an education to give them the true European values of tolerance and diversity. The difference between populist and truly democratic countries is that the latter have understood that civic education does not happen in a vacuum and that young people have to learn to become citizens in communities where they spend most of their time, namely family and school. Thus,

Irish high schools introduced civic education, and Swedish schools organize regular civic activities to increase the democratic spirit of students. Sweden also took measures to ensure good family education, extending maternity / paternity leave. Portugal ensures involvement in society and increases civic awareness through the so-called parishes or local governments, arguing that citizens' involvement in society is the purest form of democracy.

As such, the greatest impediment for the developing of valuable youths is a lack of political and civic culture that is observed in their level of involvement in society, in voting attendance, in people's attitudes towards governmental attitudes, in tolerance towards immigrants and in blind national pride that is instilled in children, in some cases, from childhood. But for a brilliant future, besides quality education and investment in young people, the European Union must take steps to reduce corruption through transparent and democratic institutions, which is totally lacking in many Member States. Young Europeans need more than ever to follow worthy models of honorable, loyal, patriotic, right leaders, but the main characters that come to the eyes of young people are Nigel Farage, Marine le Pen, Viktor Orban, Dragnea, Berlusconi, Putin, Dodon, Trump or Erdogan, who, in my view, cannot give a good example.

In conclusion, we can say that the peace and welfare of the European Union is politically destabilized not primarily by external factors but by the interior, trying to be sabotaged by the Member States themselves. I believe that a strong mobilization of the EU Member States is needed to return to the true noble values promoted by this organization, first of all to introduce real democracy, not interpretations of this regime.