



2nd Training in Kyiv at “Communicating Europe – Making the EU Understandable” Summary on “Rise of Populism in the EU and the impact on European integration”

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The last two decades have witnessed an unprecedented rise of populist parties and anti-European sentiments across the European Union. Starting from the raise of the Freedom Party of Joerg Haider in Austria in 1999, the populists have made it into the mainstream of European politics. In subsequent years populist parties doubled and often tripled their support base in France, the Netherlands, Finland and other EU member states. In the last decade populist parties have made major inroads in Central and Eastern Europe, taking the reins of government in Hungary and Poland and raising a major challenge in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Populists’ movements in Europe are very diverse and often contradictory, however, they have some common features, including Euroscepticism and criticism of globalisation. Populists in Western Europe are critical of the Eastern enlargement of the EU and base a considerable part of their argument on the xenophobic sentiments that have been on the rise since the enlargements took place. They are also pro-Russian and reject closer integration of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the rest of EU Eastern neighbourhood with the EU. The populist in Central Europe are less overtly anti-EU though they don’t support the EU in its current form and would like to see the rolling back of European integration. All populists share an introvert outlook and revert to Brussels-bashing on frequent occasions.

The rise of populism has multiple sources, of which the three most recent are: the end of traditional politics, the impact of the 2008 economic crisis and the challenge of globalisation. Since the 1970s the traditional left-right divide has been blurred. The right-wing parties accepted the welfare state, the left accepted the role of the markets. With parties rushing towards the centre void emerged both at the left and right wings, which has been than fulfilled by more extreme movements. The 2008 economic gave a negative image to globalisation and the role of the markets. The packages stimulating the economy were mostly aimed to rescue banks and other financial institutions that created the crisis in the first place. The subsequent austerity measures hit again the middle class. This created a deep resentment of globalisation, which extended to its cultural areas and a deep resentment of emigration. As a result there was a surge of support for the populists movements that resulted in Brexit, elections of Donald Trump in the US and popularity of illiberal democracy discourse in Central Europe.

Since 2017 the support for populists has been experiencing a moderate decline in Western Europe. This is probably first and foremost a result of improvement of the economic conditions in the Eurozone. The same however is not true for Central and Eastern Europe, where their young democracies are being under assault from populist forces, possibly with some irreversible results in Hungary and Poland.

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