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Populist Nationalism, Anti-Europeanism, Post-nationalism, and the East-West Distinction

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In the literature on emergent populism and nationalism in post-communist Eastern Europe, two main assumptions regarding the origins of the phenomenon can be distinguished. One line of argumentation holds that the unexpected resurgence of populism and nationalism after the collapse of the communist regimes is a direct result of the 'valley of tears' that characterizes the post-communist transformation from a communist, centrally planned system, to a democratic, market society. The 'social costs' of the transition and the still 'incomplete' nature of modernization make a large number of 'modernization losers' susceptible to mobilization by populist movements. The emergence of populist, nationalist movements should be understood as a radical form of protest against the degradation of the quality of life and widespread social dislocation and unemployment. A second explanation for the phenomenon is that populism and its nationalist, exclusivist portrayal of the nation is the result of the re-emergence of deeply, culturally ingrained perception of social belonging, and of the foundations of the polity, in which the social whole is considered prior to the individual, and in which local culture is valued differently from Western culture. In this explanation, the structural difference between Eastern and Western Europe is emphasized, a difference that can only be overcome by the former adopting the political model of the latter.

Both lines of argumentation – the modernizationist and the historical-determinist ones – point to similar solutions for the manifestations of 'tribal nationalism' and 'atavistic ethnocentrism'. Both ultimately argue that these phenomena can only be overcome through the adoption of the 'right' institutional structures (the legal-

¹ This article is based on a paper presented at the Workshop "Reunited after bitter experiences", 29 October 2004, Central European University, Budapest and at the Workshop 'The Shadows of the Past(s) over the Construction of Europe: Tensions between Constitutionalization and National Memory Politics', 2 and 3 July 2004, European University Institute, Florence. I thank the participants of both Workshops for their helpful and constructive comments, in particular: Patricia Chiantera-Stutte, Andrea Petó, András Sajó, and Alexander Somek.

procedurally based political institutions of Western European states), and, in general, through the adoption of a 'civic' form of nationalism and by adhering to the 'constitutionalist' model. In this article, it is argued, however, that both lines of argumentation seem to disregard distinct elements of Eastern European populism (and populism in general). The understanding of populist nationalism as a reactionary, atavistic and irrational phenomenon is deemed to be a partial and restrictive explanation, which does not shed light on the distinctly modern political critique of representative democracy as articulated in populism (in spite of the symbolic violence and illiberal discourses of intolerance and xenophobia used by these movements). What is more, a rigid distinction between East and West in terms of political culture should be problematized (thus making the notion of the convergence of East with West problematical), as populism is endemic in modern democracy in general. Further, populist nationalism in Eastern Europe should be understood as articulating a particular experience *with* modernity, rather than as constituting a return to the non-modern past.

A. Populist Nationalism and Modernization

A widely articulated explanation for the resurgence of populist nationalism in post-communist Eastern Europe has recourse to a modernizationist, evolutionary understanding of the transition of semi-modern authoritarian regimes to modern, democratic states. In this explanation, the radical reactions of populist movements towards the social consequences of transition are attributed to the 'stage of liminality' and its consequences.² In the chaotic and fluctuating moments of systemic change,³ relapses into illiberal, reactionary behaviour are understandable

² The temporary suspension of social order, *i.e.*, of being in between two systems, see Zygmunt Bauman, *After the patronage state: a model in search of class interests*, in: THE NEW GREAT TRANSFORMATION? CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE 14 (CHRISTOPHER BRYANT / EDWARD MOKRZYCKI, EDS., 1994). See for various forms of 'modernizationist' argumentation: David Lovell, *Nationalism, civil society, and the prospects for freedom in Eastern Europe*, 45: 1 AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND HISTORY 65 (1999); Michael Minkenberg, *The radical right in postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe: comparing observations and interpretations*, 16 2 EAST EUROPEAN POLITICS AND SOCIETIES 335 (2002); Cas Mudde, *In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe*, 14 2 EAST EUROPEAN POLITICS AND SOCIETIES 33 (2000); Andrej Skolkay, *Populism in Central Eastern Europe*, THINKING FUNDAMENTALS, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences 9 (2000). For a similar critique as mine, see Juraj Buzalka, *Is rural populism on the decline? Continuities and Changes in Twentieth Century Central Europe - The case of Slovakia*, SUSSEX EUROPEAN INSTITUTE WORKING PAPER 73 (2004); GERARD DELANTY / PATRICK O'MAHONY, NATIONALISM AND SOCIAL THEORY. MODERNITY AND THE RECALCITRANCE OF THE NATION chapter 7 (2002).

³ Also in the case of the emergence of new nationalisms in Western Europe the importance of crisis and transformation is stressed, *i.e.*, the crisis of the welfare state and the impact of globalization on the nation-based post-Second World War order, and the transformation to a new situation of post-nationalism, supranational integration, regionalism, and decline of the traditional nation-state. It is in this moment of flux that populist nationalism is deemed to emerge.

as people are insecure about their identities and their well-being, as well as of the immediate future. This irrational form of behaviour is expected, however, to reside with the increasing institutionalization of a modern democratic system and the integration into Western structures as these radical reactions will either lose their direct relevance or increasingly become institutionalized themselves.⁴ As such, radicalism will be relegated to the margins of normal democratic politics.⁵ Thus, in the 'stage of liminality' populist leaders are in a position to mobilize the people by instrumentally referring to nostalgia for the past, the wholeness and solidarity of the people (against the malign intentions of external forces), but the popular receptivity to such a discourse will unequivocally diminish with the construction of a modern society and a functioning constitutional state. The 'modernizationist' argument revisits classical modernization theory as developed in the 1950s and 60s in that it, first of all, understands modernization as the transition from a closed, particularist, undifferentiated, and hierarchical *Gemeinschaft* to an open, universalist, functionally differentiated, and individualist *Gesellschaft*, and secondly, tends to regard any resistance to the archetypal Western model (the constitutional state) as a deviation or pathology. In the post-communist situation, this is translated in the assumption that radical countermovements seek to undo social change and seek to return to the past,⁶ while pathological behaviour will diminish with the increased modernization of societies and the end result will be a 'normal' modern society.

B. The Myth of the 'Civic Nation' and Divergent National Trajectories

A second line of argumentation that has enjoyed wide resonance in studies of resurgent nationalism and populism in Eastern Europe is the historical-structural argument in which Western Europe is deemed the birth ground of 'civic', benign and inclusive nationalism, whereas Central and Eastern Europe is designated the birthplace of ethno-cultural, exclusive nationalisms.⁷ Contemporary populist and nationalist movements in Eastern Europe are deemed to re-articulate age-old ethnic

⁴ As Minkenberg (note 2), 336, argues with regard to the emergence of right-wing extremism in Eastern Europe: '... the overall analytical frame for the CEE radical right is a multiple modernization process, *i.e.*, a transformation from authoritarian regimes to liberal democracies, from state socialist to capitalist market economies, and from industrialism to postindustrialism. The resulting strains of economic and political insecurity, especially the uncompleted process of democratization and consolidation of the new regimes, provide opportunities for the radical right which present western democracies do not...'

⁵ Cf., Mudde (note 2).

⁶ Cf., Minkenberg (note 2).

⁷ The most well-known expression of this line of argumentation is: MICHAEL IGNATIEFF, *BLOOD AND BELONGING* (1993).

hatreds and collectivist imaginaries which were suppressed during the communist regimes. Such a view risks reproducing a determinist, Euro-centrist perception in which the West is equated *a priori* with the benign nationalism of the open, tolerant, constitutionalist type. Eastern Europe, then, would be seen as a malign ethno-centric, majoritarian, exclusive nationalism strongly embedded in the political culture.⁸

The idea of the nation as the archetypal modern form of political community (an alternative and distinctly modern political form to replace both city-states and empires⁹), as was promulgated most influentially in the French Revolution, embodied the objective of emancipation (of the individual and the people from the oppressive bonds of traditional, feudal society), the equality of those belonging to the nation, and a universal definition of human rights.¹⁰ It is this tradition of the nation that is seen as the basis of the modern democratic nation-state. The formation of the nation then involved the construction of a polity on the basis of the inclusion of the people, who were capable of exercising rights shared by all members of society. The nation is here perceived as opposed to the privileged minority-rule in feudalism, and refers to the extension of self-rule and self-determination to the people as a whole.

In the societies where a political definition of the nation could largely overlap with the already existing political boundaries (England, France, Holland, Sweden), the (gradual) inclusion of the masses was the main ingredient of nationalism and focus of contention;¹¹ an ethno-cultural understanding of the nation remained largely latent and unproblematized. In contrast, in the case of the emerging nations that

⁸ This dichotomous view has been strongly criticized by many authors, among which: Johann P. Arnason, *Nationalism, globalization, and modernity*, 7 THEORY, CULTURE & SOCIETY 207 (1990); Robert Fine, *Benign nationalism? The limits of the civic ideal*, in: PEOPLE, NATION, AND STATE. THE MEANING OF ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM 149 (EDWARD MORTIMER, ED., WITH ROBERT FINE, 1999); George Schöpflin, *Nationalism and ethnicity in Europe, East and West*, in: NATIONALISM AND NATIONALITIES IN THE NEW EUROPE 37 (CHARLES KUPCHAN, ED., 1995); ANDRZEJ WALICKI, PHILOSOPHY AND ROMANTIC NATIONALISM: THE CASE OF POLAND (1982); RUTH WODAK ET AL., THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY (1999); Bernard Yack, *The myth of the civic nation*, in: THEORIZING NATIONALISM 103 (RONALD BEINER, ED., 1999). As remarked by Jiří Přibáň, „a strong contrast between civil and ethnic concepts of the nation constitute a ‘gross simplification of post-Communist developments and a misunderstanding of the historical role of nationalism, partly based on the widely accepted difference between the „well-established“ democratic West and the „unstable“ autocratic East‘, Jiří Přibáň, *Reconstituting Paradise Lost: Temporality, Civility, and Ethnicity in Post-Communist Constitution-making*, 38:3 LAW & SOCIETY REVIEW 407, 418 (2004).

⁹ PIERRE MANENT, AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF LIBERALISM (1995).

¹⁰ Cf., Gerard Delanty, *The persistence of nationalism: modernity and discourses of the nation*, in: HANDBOOK OF HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY 287 (GERARD DELANTY / ENGIN F. ISIN, EDS., 2003).

¹¹ LIAH GREENFELD, NATIONALISM. FIVE ROADS TO MODERNITY (1992).

consisted of remnants of collapsed (multi-national) empires, as was the case in Eastern Europe,¹² the construction of a distinct national identity was one of the most significant ways of legitimising the construction of a sovereign, national polity in the wake of imperial rule.

The latter form of nationalism, i.e., as a movement for self-determination for an ethno-culturally and pre-politically defined group, is often interpreted as being highly distinct from the 'benign' nationalism which evolved in polities with already sedimented collective identities. Ethnic nationalism is deemed exclusionary, integral, and the definition of collective autonomy and self-determination that it contains is seen as being distorted and exclusionary towards non-members, as opposed to civic, emancipatory nationalism which promulgates the 'benign' forms of inclusion, national belonging and political community building. Civic-political nationalism is, historically-empirically speaking, associated with developments in Western Europe and the United States, whereas resentful, exclusive nationalism is seen as having its first manifestation in the nineteenth-century romantic nationalist movements in Central (including Italy and Germany) and Eastern Europe.¹³

Although, historically speaking, such a distinction between Eastern and Western nationalism might be defensible to some length,¹⁴ its (often implicit) analytic transmutation of ethno-cultural nationalism into a structural, objective element in Eastern European culture foregoes the transformations that nationalism underwent in Eastern Europe throughout modern history, and underplays the importance of the transmittance and re-articulation of historical legacies and traditions. In this way, the specific relationship of nationalism to particular social groups/élites (rather than being an immutable aspect of a society/culture as a whole), the variety of objectives that nationalism can underpin, and the reformulation and change in substance that this brings with it are ignored in favour of theoretical homogeneity and simplification.

A direct implication of reifying an ethno-cultural definition as a structural phenomenon of East European cultures is its unproblematic extension over time, and, therefore, the reading of current nationalist movement as expressions of age-

¹² For the case of Poland, see WALICKI (note 8), for Hungary: ANDREW JANOS, *THE POLITICS OF BACKWARDNESS IN HUNGARY, 1825-1945* (1982), for Romania: see PAUL BLOKKER, *MODERNITY AND ITS VARIETIES. A HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANIAN MODERN EXPERIENCE*, Ph.D. thesis European University Institute (2004).

¹³ Cf., HANS KOHN, *THE IDEA OF NATIONALISM: A STUDY IN ITS ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND* (1961); GREENFELD (note 11); Charles Kupchan, *Introduction: nationalism resurgent*, in: *NATIONALISM AND NATIONALITIES IN THE NEW EUROPE* (CHARLES KUPCHAN, ED., 1995); PETER SUGAR, *EAST EUROPEAN NATIONALISM, POLITICS, AND RELIGION* (1994) [1969].

¹⁴ But see Schöpflin (note 8); WALICKI (note 8).

old forms of 'tribal nationalism' which have not been eradicated yet by the full extension of modern institutions throughout these societies (here, the historical line of argumentation meets the modernizationist one). Instead of perceiving of nationalist symbols and discourses as being constantly in need of reproduction and re-articulation these are seen as a constant factor of sedimented culture. Thus, the post-1989 Eastern Europe setting is – according to this reading – highly susceptible to the resurgence of ethnic nationalism because of the strongly diminished grip of political institutions on social life as a result of the collapse of the communist states. In this 'in-between' situation of institutional breakdown and widespread confusion, 'long-suppressed ethnic tensions' can resurface.¹⁵

A mutually exclusive definition of ethnic and civic perceptions of the nation is, however, problematical in a number of ways. First of all, a clear-cut historical, geographical distinction between Western and Eastern European nationalism is contestable (for instance, the imperialist wave of the end of the 19th century included a strong sense of the superiority of the Western race, and strongly exclusionary definitions of the nation). Secondly, in conceptual terms one can argue that the civic form of nationalism can not do without some kind of 'thick', emotive form of political and social cohesion. In the latter sense, the liberal, legal-procedural understanding of the political nation is highly inclusionary, but lacks a defining element to decide who belongs to the polity and who does not. It thus needs an extraneous element to define the nation (in reality, often in terms of either economically defined groups (class) or in cultural-historically defined groups (nation)).¹⁶ Perhaps more importantly, a strong distinction between civic and ethnic perceptions of the nation fails to grasp the aspects that are constitutive of both, i.e., the nation as a form of collective identity and as an expression of popular sovereignty. Both the liberal pathway to the nation and the romantic nationalist one involve strong claims of popular sovereignty, aimed against the domination of society by extra- or supra-societal political forces deemed to be illegitimate because they are not rooted in the people.

¹⁵ Kupchan (note 13). Liah Greenfeld, although explicitly arguing against a conflation of geographical location and specific forms of nationalism, seems to equate Eastern European culture, both at the time of the creation of nation-states in the nineteenth century and in the post-communist period, as almost exclusively characterized by ethnic nationalism, Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism in Western and Eastern Europe compared*, in: CAN EUROPE WORK? GERMANY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF POSTCOMMUNIST SOCIETIES (STEPHEN E. HANSON / WILLFRIED SPOHN, EDS., 1995). Similarly, Brubaker equates Eastern European nationalism with 'nationalising nationalisms', i.e., as favouring the majority nation, apparently ignoring similar tendencies in early Western European nationalisms, ROGERS BRUBAKER, NATIONALISM REFRAMED. NATIONHOOD AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE NEW EUROPE (1996). See for an extensive critique, Taras Kuzio, 'Nationalising states' or nation-building? A critical review of the theoretical literature and empirical evidence, 7 (2) NATIONS AND NATIONALISM 135 (2001).

¹⁶ Cf., Schöpflin 41 (note 8).

C. Populism and Democracy

A designation of Eastern European nationalism (and its political culture in general) as exclusively based on a 'malign', ethnocultural understanding of the nation, diametrically opposed to Western European nationalism as based on a 'benign', civic perception of the nation does not conform to political reality (even in Western Europe, a 'latent' ethno-cultural identity underpinning political institutions and collective identity is highly important for the maintenance of society)¹⁷ and ignores the necessity of 'enchantment' in any social order. The latter point is especially significant for the understanding of populist nationalism and its political critique of the existing order. Instead of reducing the rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe to a purely transitory phenomenon or an atavistic resurgence of repressed sentiments, it should be understood from within the confines of the general populist critique of the liberal – pluralist and representative – understanding of democracy. It is here that the link between populism as a general phenomenon in modern societies and Eastern European nationalism can be identified; many nationalist movements use an emancipatory discourse in which the nation (equated with the 'true' people) is to be liberated from foreign domination (as, for instance, in the form of the 'transfer' of Western institutions) and domestic subjugation to political élites. In these discourses, an argument is often made for increased popular sovereignty through the granting of absolute priority to the nation, in other words, to the people as an undivided and organic unity, and the expression of its will.¹⁸ Instead of promulgating an explicitly anti-democratic stance, as was the case with the interwar fascist and integral nationalist parties, these populist, nationalist parties often claim to be moving explicitly within the confines of democracy.

Many analysts have affirmed the rise of populism in both East and West in the last two decades or so.¹⁹ Their analyses attest to a growing discontent aimed against the political establishment in both Eastern and Western Europe, and underline the supposition that, rather than being merely a transitory phenomenon restricted to situations of social deprivation and unfulfilled popular expectations, populism should be regarded as a more structural phenomenon whose critique strikes at the

¹⁷ See Schöpflin (note 8); Yack (note 8).

¹⁸ See, for one example, the programme of the Romanian Greater Romania Party, *Doctrina Partidului România Mare*, available at <<http://www.romare.ro/prm.html>>. For a concise analysis, see Laurentiu Stefan-Scalat, *Partidul România Mare. Un profil doctrinar*, 67 SFERA POLITICII (1998), available at <<http://www.dntb.ro/sfera/67/mineriade-3.html>>.

¹⁹ See HANS-GEORG BETZ, *RADICAL RIGHT WING POPULISM IN WESTERN EUROPE* (1994); *THE POLITICS OF THE EXTREME RIGHT: FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM* (PAUL HAINSWORTH, ED., 2000); PAUL HOCKENOS, *FREE TO HATE: THE RISE OF THE RIGHT IN POST-COMMUNIST EASTERN EUROPE* (1993); HERBERT KITSCHOLT, *THE RADICAL RIGHT-WING IN WESTERN EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS* (1995).

centre of the modern democratic system itself. Recently, the close relation between the populist critique and democracy has been highlighted in a useful way by a few insightful analysts of populism.²⁰ Populism is understood by most of these analysts as a political 'style' and a set of distinct arguments, rather than as a coherent ideology in its own right (which would need, apart from a coherent set of core superstructural, politico-philosophical premises, to include the 'translation' of the latter into a set of institutions, such as those found in liberalism as a political doctrine and its institutional derivations in the form of representative, pluralist democracy, the division of powers, and 'checks and balances').²¹ The distinctive set of populist arguments includes an absolute prioritization of the people, its political participation (however defined) and its sovereign will, anti-élitism and an anti-establishment attitude, a claim for radical freedom and 'direct democracy', a re-enchantment of the alienated people (an alienation which is deemed the result of the artificial constructions of legal-rational institutions) through the unification of the people with political power, combined with a disdain of formal institutions and pluralist representative democracy, and an organic and undivided vision of the 'people'.²² Populism can be understood as both more and less than an ideology: more in the sense of constituting a kind of trans-ideological phenomenon which can be incorporated in ideologies at both the left and the right end of the political spectrum,²³ less in that it does not form a coherent, fully developed ideology in itself.

²⁰ See, in particular, Margaret Canovan, *Trust the People! Populism and the two faces of Democracy*, 47 *POLITICAL STUDIES* 2 (1999); YVES MÉNY / YVES SUREL, *POPULISMO E DEMOCRAZIA* (2001); Benjamin Arditi, *Populism as a Spectre of Democracy: A Response to Canovan*, 52 *POLITICAL STUDIES* 135 (2004); Mabel Berezin, *Re-asserting the National: The Paradox of Populism in Transnational Europe*, WORKING PAPER 21, August, Center for the Study of Economy and Society (2004). For a rejection of this vision, see Nadia Urbinati, *Populism and democracy*, 1 *CONSTELLATIONS* 110 (1998).

²¹ See GREENFELD (note 11), as well as Mudde (note 2), Sorin Ioniță, *În numele poporului. Scurtă analiză a populismului, ieri și azi*, in: *DOCTRINE POLITICE. CONCEPTE UNIVERSALE ȘI REALITĂȚI ROMÂNEȘTI* 197 (ALINA MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, ED., 1998).

²² Cf., Canovan (note 20), 5.

²³ This explains why one can also find some populist arguments in the doctrines of leftist parties (for a Western European example, see the Dutch Socialist Party (see its program for the elections of the European Parliament of June 2004, 'Wie zwijgt stemt toe!', available at <<http://europa.sp.nl>>), for an Eastern European example, see the programs of the Romanian Social Democratic Party, the PDSR (Partidul Democrației Sociale din România; since 2001 PSD), e.g., its *Programul Politic al Partidului Democrației Sociale din România*, available at <<http://www.pdsr.ro/documente/>>). Conventionally, however, populism has been attributed to political parties on the right and extreme right such as Le Pen's Front National, Haider's Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, the Italian Lega Nord, and in Eastern Europe, the Polish Self-Defence Party, the Greater Romania Party, and the Hungarian Party for Justice and Life (MIEP).

The acknowledgement of a distinct relation between populism and democracy (most directly through the importance of the demos for both) also means that populism cannot be treated as a mere pathology of modern democratic society, as argued by many analysts.²⁴ Populism should be understood as a distinct interpretation of democracy, rather than as a wholesale critique and rejection of democracy. As most forcefully argued by Margaret Canovan, “populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to the ‘people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society”,²⁵ and therefore constitutes a ‘perennial possibility’, as it arises in the inescapable tension between what Margaret Canovan calls the ‘pragmatic’ and ‘redemptive’ interpretations of democracy.

“Populism is not just a reaction against power structures but an appeal to a recognized authority. Populists claim legitimacy on the grounds that they speak for the people: that is to say, they claim to represent the democratic sovereign, not a sectional interest such as an economic class.”²⁶

Populism should be understood as entailing a rather one-sided and particular view of democracy, emphasising its emancipatory, redemptive features,²⁷ rather than the fulfilment of ideal democracy. In contrast, the ‘pragmatic’ view of democracy is about order and the rule of law, and in this sense emphasizes an opposed but equally one-sided view of democracy.²⁸ In political reality, both visions exist at the

²⁴ See, for instance, Minkenberg (note 2). Yves Mény and Yves Surel formulate this critique on mainstream approaches to populism as follows: „The road that opens is dangerous, because it would become easy to define as pathological everything that does not enter into the known repertoire of the procedures that benefit from a stamp of democratic respectability”, MÉNY / SUREL 24 (note 20). Yves Mény and Yves Surel identify two principal points of view with such an analysis of populism: its equation with the repugnant ideas of the extreme right (providing a moral condemnation of populism rather than an analysis) and an elitist perception of democracy.

²⁵ Canovan 3 (note 20).

²⁶ *Id.*, 5.

²⁷ That is, the possibility of human salvation through political action and the idea that society is malleable and thus open to human intervention, in other words, the idea that „through political action society can be transformed in the image of the political” (DELANTY / O’MAHONY 6 (note 2); see, also, SHMUEL EISENSTADT, *FUNDAMENTALISM, SECTARIANISM, AND REVOLUTION: THE JACOBIN DIMENSION OF MODERNITY* (1999).

²⁸ Margaret Canovan bases her distinction between the ‘redemptive’ and ‘pragmatic’ faces of democracy on Michael Oakeshott’s account of two political styles of modernity: the ‘politics of faith’ and the ‘politics of scepticism’. A similar distinction of two components of democracy can be found in MÉNY / SUREL who refer to populism on the one hand (the fulfilment of popular sovereignty in which the people is understood as a single entity), and constitutionalism on the other (democracy is about the *Rechtsstaat*

same time (just as liberalism, for instance, contains a pragmatic and redemptive side) and have to exist side by side as democracy, in its redemptive guise without the restrictions of pragmatism, would lead to totalitarianism, whereas pragmatism without faith would lead to uninspired, instrumental, and technocratic politics. According to Margaret Canovan, populism moves in when there is “an asymmetry brought about by an excess (of pragmatism) and a deficit (of redemption).”²⁹

As reformulated by Yves Mény and Yves Surel:

“Democracy, as Janus, presents two faces and can therefore be the object of two contradictory readings. Democracy presents in fact a redemptive vision (the best possible way of governing the city), but also, more banally, a mode of governance and regulation of conflict by means of rules and ad hoc procedures. In any way, the notion of popular power is at the centre of the redemptive vision (cf. Lincoln’s formula), while the Schumpeterian definition (competition for the selection of those who govern) leads us to the pragmatic vision. The redemptive approach, in the end, refers to the total and direct power of the people (the sovereign), while pragmatism calls for the limitation of power and the institutionalisation of its exercise. Democracy, any kind of democracy, is therefore constructed on this tension, on this indissoluble relationship between Utopia and realism, between faith and pragmatism. Faith is necessary in order not to reduce democracy to weary and hardly convincing rituals; scepticism or pragmatism are equally necessary, in order to reduce the expectations and to temper the risks of which unrestrained enthusiasms or the Utopias of political voluntarism might be the bearers.”³⁰

Democracy can thus be interpreted in its dominant pragmatic, constitutionalist way, but is also open to different interpretations, in which the problematic features of liberal democracy are often underlined (élitism, alienation, the failure of pluralist democracy to represent the social whole, the failure of the liberal state to address substantive

which protects specific social spheres against the infringement of the arbitrary power of the state) (MÉNY / SUREL 42 (note 20)).

²⁹ In the words of Arditi (note 20), 138.

³⁰ MÉNY / SUREL 34 (note 20), my translation.

issues at the political level, the exclusive attention to instrumental, rational values without representing sentiments, emotions, and the collective identity).

Margaret Canovan's two dimensions of democracy are developed in reference to the emergence of populism in the Western, post-industrial societies, in which the traditional party-system as based on the Schumpeterian mechanism of party alternation through elections is increasingly being undermined by the declining importance of social classes in voting behaviour, the growing importance of the mass media in politics, and the rise of new social ('one-issue') movements. In this context, populist movements are understood as one form of critique among a rather diffused political critique on the post-war political constellation.

I believe, however, that the idea of a dual dimension or imaginary of democracy can also shed important analytical light on the earlier mentioned question of civic versus ethnic nationalism, and on the erroneous contra-distinction of a benign Western political, pluralist model versus a malign Eastern, ethnic-majoritarian model. As indicated above, both the approaches that regard populism in Eastern Europe as a transitory phenomenon and those that regard the resurgence of nationalism in the post-1989 era as a 'return of the repressed' propose in their normative alternatives to political systems ridden by the radicalism of populist, nationalist movements, the Western, constitutional and legal-rational model. The assumption of constitutionalism as a solution to populist radicalism means the acceptance of the idea that the gap and the tension between the two faces of democracy can be cancelled out by means of institutional engineering.³¹ However, both Michael Oakeshott and Margaret Canovan seem to conclude that, rather than an existing possibility of reconciliation of redemptive and pragmatic politics, a constant balancing and thus conflict over democracy is a constitutive feature of modern politics. In this line of reasoning, populism is not (not even in its Eastern European guise) a deviation or pathology in the modern setting, to be transcended by liberal institutions, but a structural element of modernity, instead. In the words of Benjamin Arditì:

*"If populism is a shadow of democracy, it will follow it always as a possibility – and probably as something more than a possibility, since no one can choose whether or not to have a shadow."*³²

In other words, institutional democracy based on the rule of law and legal-proceduralism is always open to the political critique of serving particular social forces (in Eastern Europe often reformulated as foreign, alien forces) rather than the

³¹ Arditì (note 20), 138.

³² Note 20, 140.

social whole. More importantly, pluralism, parliamentary negotiationism and compromise, and institutionalized conflict can be portrayed as structurally incapable of representing the societal, organic whole and therefore as undermining the real interests of the people.³³ From the populist point of view, legalism and the rule of law hinder the full realization of the rule of the people. Benjamin Arditi refers to Michael Oakeshott who claims that 'politics of faith' is a political style which is characterized by "an absence of scruple, a suspicion that formality in government and the insistence on the letter of the law will hinder the enterprise".³⁴

D. Populism and the Nation

One should hold in mind, that, even if in the post-communist construction of new political orders the liberal constitutional and proceduralist model prevailed, the rebuilding of popular sovereignty and statehood could not do without the reconstruction of some form of national identity and ethno-cultural unity.³⁵ A crucial element in the Eastern European transformations was thus the re-identification of national identity (or resettlement of the 'national question'), and in this sense populism provided one understanding of the nation, that is, as comprising all those who are deemed part of the 'true' people and thus eligible to political participation.

It is further helpful to distinguish between various dimensions of the nation. An understanding of the nation as an undivided whole, characterized in a Herderian way as a 'national individuality' with its own specific, unique features, which provides its members with a way of relating to the world and a form of identity, can be interpreted in a number of ways. First of all, its exclusivist features can be underlined, and as such, nationalism can be predicated as a fragmentary and

³³ Populism as a phenomenon should therefore be understood as a possibility *within* democracy, although the full realization of its demands could lead to the undoing of that same democratic system. As Lefort observes with regard to totalitarian tendencies: 'democracy is instituted and sustained by the *dissolution of the markers of certainty...* in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law, and knowledge...'. He goes on: 'When individuals are increasingly insecure as a result of an economic crisis or of the ravages of war, when conflict between classes and groups is exacerbated and can no longer symbolically be resolved within the political sphere, when power appears to have sunk to the level of reality and to be no more than an instrument for the promotion of the interests and appetites of vulgar ambition and when, in a word, it appears *in* society, and when at the same time society appears to be fragmented, then we see the development of the fantasy of the People-As-One, the beginnings of a quest for a substantial identity, for a social body which is welded to its head, for an embodying power, for a state free from division', CLAUDE LEFORT, *DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL THEORY* 19-20 (1988).

³⁴ Arditi (note 20), 137.

³⁵ Přibáň (note 8), 415.

conflictive force (as in the cases of separatism in Czechoslovakia, ethnic strife in former Yugoslavia, or in the conflicts of the titular nations with national minorities in Romania, the Baltic states, and Slovakia).³⁶ The essentialization and naturalization of the nation leads to the rejection of non-members of the nation and “allows the development of concepts like democracy within ethnically defined boundaries and the articulation of the right to self-determination without concern for the consequences of this claim for those who are not members of the majority/dominant nation”.³⁷ By the same token, however, the emancipatory features of nationalism can be stressed, that is, the call for national self-determination or the enhancement of the autonomy and sovereignty of a distinct group of people, which has been subject to oppression by foreign powers for centuries (or so it is claimed). In the latter reading, reference to national self-determination allegedly enhances the positive freedom of an ethno-cultural group or people, as, by obtaining formal political sovereignty, it is able in a more complete way to express its own will. Understood in this way, nationalism understood in this way can be regarded as fully part of modernity as it involves a claim for the radical freedom of the people.³⁸

These two dimensions of nationalism, *i.e.*, nationalism as a homogenising and exclusionary phenomenon, and nationalism as the invocation of popular self-rule, collective autonomy, and as an integrative force have both been a common feature in the emergent populisms in post-communist Eastern Europe.³⁹ If the former - exclusive - dimension often leads to a wholesale rejection of liberal notions of democracy, pluralism, and individual autonomy (in particular, through the construction of national histories in which the nation is portrayed as an organic unity between people, history, and territory), the latter - emancipatory, ‘redemptive’ - dimension finds common ground with the notion of popular sovereignty as found in liberal understandings of democracy.

It is not the place here to attempt a full account of the cultural, political, and ideological manifestations of populism in Eastern Europe. Rather, I will try to sum up some (often underthematized) features of populist nationalism which may help to understand the populist critique of liberal democracy and the formal process of

³⁶ Cf., BRUBAKER (note 15).

³⁷ Julie Mostov, *The use and abuse of history in Eastern Europe: a challenge for the 1990s*, 4 3 CONSTELLATIONS 376, 380 (1998).

³⁸ DELANTY / O’MAHONY (note 2), xv.

³⁹ See, for an insightful account, MICHAEL WALZER, THICK AND THIN. MORAL ARGUMENT AT HOME AND ABROAD Chapter 4 (1994).

European integration.⁴⁰ The emancipatory and socially integrative aspects of the nation as invoked by populist nationalists in post-communist Eastern Europe comprise various aspects that relate to the 'redemptive' side of democracy, *i.e.*, the radical imaginary of popular sovereignty or the rule of the people, formulated against a strictly 'civic', 'constitutionalist' reading of the democratic political system (as well as the European project read as a predominantly constitutionalist project for that matter):

At least part of the program of national populists is about the mobilization of the people around the idea of *national emancipation* and *collective autonomy*, and consists of a critique of existing institutions and the defenders of the status quo as failing to represent the 'true' people and its sovereignty. The populists claim to more fully represent the national will and interest and therefore the people.⁴¹ The people are defined as the true bearers of national culture (often related to rural traditions and village culture), whereas political élites are depicted as serving self-interest or external forces. As Cas Mudde defines political populism: "a political style that builds upon a rigid dichotomy of "the pure people" versus "the corrupt élite".⁴²— This is a sentence fragment—kind of awkward—feels like something is missing after 'the corrupt elite'.

The invocation of the nation is connected to a call for the direct rule and increased *participation* of the people in the political arena. Participation does not necessarily have the liberal connotation of active participation in politics, but can also be invoked as the imaginary of 'rapprochement' between the state and society. Populism seeks in this way to cancel out the gap between the rulers and the ruled as established by political liberalism and to recreate a direct link between the people and politics.⁴³

⁴⁰ The emphasis on the emancipatory features of populism should not be seen to mean that I negate the radical, violent, exclusionary, and xenophobic attitudes that are often integral parts of populism. Rather, it is an attempt to understand populism in the context of modernity and the latter's inherent openness to interpretation.

⁴¹ The Greater Romanian Party, for instance, founds its political program exclusively on the 'National Doctrine' and the priority of the national interest: „The National Doctrine is the theoretical and ideological basis of our party, being a synthetic expression of the multi-millennial existence of the Romanians, having its origins both in the Christian-Orthodox religion in which the Romanian people has been formed, as well as in the ideas of liberty, justice, and independence of the major figures of the people. The National Doctrine combines faith, the sentiment of liberty and justice, love for the ancient homeland and ancestral traditions”, available at <<http://www.romare.ro/prm.html>> (my translation).

⁴² Mudde (note 2), 37; see, also, Buzalka (note 2); Ioniță (note 21), 207.

⁴³ Mudde (note 2), 37.

The nation serves as a *'vehicle' of the past, i.e.*, it consists of an 'imagined community' or discursive/symbolic reconstruction of the past which 'proves' the continuity of an ethno-culturally defined group so as to legitimate national sovereignty (by means of reference to ancient national heroes and territorial and cultural continuity). The troubled experience with modern statehood and national independence of many nations in the region makes the discursive construction of a collective identity through a national myth highly significant for national independence, social integration, and political order.⁴⁴

Populists often refer to the need for the protection of a particular culture (relativism), by which they claim that the universalist understandings of human rights, representative democracy, and pluralism as embodied by liberal democracy and civic nationalism undermine the particularism of a distinct culture. Ultimately, populists invoke a romanticist understanding of positive freedom here: a person can only be free and emancipated in their own specific cultural sphere. In contrast, Western models, institutions, and ideas are portrayed as foreign imports, having alien roots and are deemed to be lacking in local significance.⁴⁵ As Fine remarks: "from the perspective of ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism may appear as an oppressive doctrine of privilege which forgets its own origins".⁴⁶

A call for the protection of national culture, what one could label 'cultural' nationalism rather than 'ethnic' nationalism,⁴⁷ often goes hand in hand with *an understanding of Europe* different from the 'official' vision, namely, a "Europe of the Nations" or a "Europe of the Regions". Europe is often understood as the cooperation between sovereign peoples, rather than an incremental form of supra-

⁴⁴ Miroslav Hroch, *Nationalism and national movements: comparing the past and the present of Central and Eastern Europe*, 2 (1) NATIONS AND NATIONALISM 35 (1996); Klaus von Beyme, *Rechtsextremismus in Osteuropa*, SONDERHEFT RECHTEXTREMISMUS. ERGEBNISSE UND PERSPEKTIVEN DER FORSCHUNG, 27 POLITISCHE VIERTELJAHRSSCHRIFT 423 (JÜRGEN W. FALTER / HANS-GERD JASCHKE / JÜRGEN R. WINKLER, EDS., 1996). As attested by Istvan Csurka, the leader of the Hungarian MIEP: „Wir sind Söhne eines tausendjährigen christlichen Staates und einer mehrere Tausend Jahre alten Nation. Für uns ist Europa in der Tat ein Wert, es ist unsere Heimat, es ist gleichzeitig die Stephanskronen und die jugendhafte Aufwallung von 1848, die Selbstaufopferung von 1956, und vor allem die Freiheit“ („We are the sons of the thousand-year Christian state, and a nation of more than a thousand years old. For us, Europe constitutes a value indeed, it is our homeland, it is simultaneously the Stephan's Crown and the youthful rebellion of 1848, the self-sacrifice of 1956, and above all freedom.“) (Istvan Csurka, *Mit ungarischen Augen*, MAGYAR FÓRUM, 10 February 2000, *italics added*, available at: <http://www.elpok.de/de/ma-d0.htm>).

⁴⁵ Cf., Mostov (note 35).

⁴⁶ Fine (note 8). See, also, CAN LIBERAL PLURALISM BE EXPORTED? WESTERN POLITICAL THEORY AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN EASTERN EUROPE (WILL KYMLICKA / MAGDA OPALSKI, EDS., 2001).

⁴⁷ Cf., Will Kymlicka, *Misunderstanding nationalism*, in: THEORIZING NATIONALISM 131 (RONALD BEINER, ED., 1999).

nationalism designed to gradually overcome national differences.⁴⁸ Here, popular sovereignty is directly linked with the survival of a nation with its particular culture and history.

E. Conclusions

My argument in this article has been that, instead of regarding populism in Eastern Europe exclusively as a reactionary movement against the 'transition costs' of systemic and social change, and therefore as a transitory phenomenon (as in the modernizationist understanding) or as the 'return of the repressed' of ancient ethnic hatreds (as in the historical-structural 'orientalist' explanation), populism should be understood as a structural element (or rather a 'perennial possibility')⁴⁹ of modern democracy. This also means that populist, ethno-cultural nationalism as it has resurged in the 1990s in Eastern Europe cannot be regarded an exclusive and unique feature of the East, but should be considered as a possible critique inherent in modern societies as such.⁵⁰ At least part of the critique promulgated by populist movements in both the Eastern and Western parts of Europe should, therefore, be taken seriously and carefully examined.⁵¹ In this light, a critical reconsideration of the solutions suggested for the 'overcoming' of populism and integral nationalism, *i.e.*, civic nationalism, constitutionalism, and deliberative democracy, can be helpful to understand the immanent vulnerability of democracy to populist demands.

What emerges from the preceding discussion is that populism is a phenomenon which is hard to capture in a single definition and cannot be reduced to one particular end of the political spectrum (the extreme right). Instead, populism

⁴⁸ See Cas Mudde / Petr Kopecky, *The two sides of Euroscepticism. Party positions on European integration in East Central Europe*, in: 3 (3) EUROPEAN UNION POLITICS 297 (2002). Formal European integration is criticized for its weakening of Europe, as acclaimed by Istvan Csurka, the leader of the Hungarian MIEP: „Europa ist gezwungen, seine immanenten nationalen Souveränitäten zu beschränken, die Abtretung der nationalen Unabhängigkeiten, der eigenen Kulturen, der örtlichen Selbständigkeiten an Brüssel ist jedoch kein europäisches, sondern außereuropäisches Interesse. Diese Abtretung ist eigentlich eine kosmopolitische Homogenisierung. Ein Prozeß der Gesichts- und Charakterlosigkeit. Für Europa ist es der Tod schlechthin“ (“Europe is forced to reduce its immanent national sovereignties, the transfer of national independencies, local cultures and autonomies to Brussels is, however, instead of a European, an extra-European interest. This transfer is in reality a cosmopolitan homogenization. A process of lack of identity and character. For Europe, it is death as such”) (Csurka (note 42)).

⁴⁹ Canovan (note 20).

⁵⁰ Cf., Buzalka (note 2).

⁵¹ As seems obvious, but perhaps needs to be repeated, the attempt to understand and deconstruct populism and ethno-cultural nationalism do not entail or presuppose normative agreement with the articulated ideas by the researcher.

forms a particular style of argumentation (including anti-élitism, anti-technocracy and formal institutions, a strong emphasis on unmediated popular sovereignty, and a portrayal of the people as an organic unity) that has a much wider appeal than merely the 'lunatic fringe'. As such, populism constitutes a highly ambivalent phenomenon, but, at the same time, articulates deficiencies in current modern societies (be it in an often radical, uncompromising and unrefined way). Populism can thus both be perceived as a threat to constitutional, democratic regimes, but also as a signifier of popular discontent and of the structural deficiencies of the democratic system.⁵²

In as far as civic nationalism, constitutional patriotism, and deliberative democracy are explicitly designed as antidotes to the surprisingly resilient forms of exclusivist nationalism and populism, the immanent emphasis on procedural, 'legocentric' solutions and increased rationalization of the polity seem *a priori* to ignore significant aspects of the populist critique. Civic nationalism or constitutional patriotism are both to transcend narrow and exclusive nationalisms and to provide an alternative form of social cohesion, but it is not clear how they relate to the 'redemptive' vision of democratic politics and therefore how they provide a sufficient answer to the political critique pertaining to unmediated popular sovereignty and the direct representation of the people as a cultural community. Constitutional patriotism builds on a shared political culture of the liberal-democratic state based on popular sovereignty, individual rights, and association in civil society, and further on the „use values of social welfare and mutual recognition among the existing varieties of forms of life“.⁵³ In this, it invokes the 'pragmatic' vision of politics and builds on the increased rationalization of society as a solution to conflict. However, if we turn to the Eastern European context, it is not clear how civic nationalism would provide a convincing answer to anxieties over endangered national sovereignty, alienation as a result of imported structures and models, and claims for the preservation of cultural self-identity.⁵⁴ Instead of as a model for social integration, liberal democracy and civic nationalism are being portrayed as foreign (inauthentic) impositions. They are reconstructed as a new 'orientalism'⁵⁵ by populist movements, a critique often sustained by national

⁵² Cf., MÉNY / SUREL (note 20).

⁵³ Jürgen Habermas, *The European Nation-State – Its achievements and its limits. On the past and the future of sovereignty and citizenship*, in: MAPPING THE NATION 281 (GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN, ED., 1996); JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *THE POSTNATIONAL CONSTELLATION. POLITICAL ESSAYS* (2001); *DIE EINBEZIEHUNG DES ANDEREN* (1999).

⁵⁴ Cf., Gerard Delanty, *Models of European identity: reconciling universalism and particularism*, 3:3 PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPEAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY 345 (2002).

⁵⁵ Fine (note 8), 153.

traditions of anti-Europeanism. In other words, populist movements discursively seek to deconstruct the model of 'civic nationalism' or 'constitutionalism' and the formal project of European integration as impeding national emancipation, collective autonomy, and self-rule. Here, the political project of constitutionalization of the European polity 'from above' – even if promoting to be 'united in diversity'⁵⁶ – does not convincingly rejoin the widely shared concerns in terms of popular sovereignty, local autonomy, and cultural diversity in Eastern Europe.

Put in a historical perspective, the articulation of absolute and naturalized images of the community by Eastern European populist movements is partly to be understood in the context of 'belated' nation-building in Eastern Europe, the experience with communism (which often reinforced rather than eradicated nationalism), and the continued relevance of the nation for social integration, popular sovereignty and state legitimation in the post-1989 context. In this sense, the national question has forcefully re-emerged in post-1989 Eastern Europe as the result of both the loss of collective identity due to the collapse of communism, and the erosive effect of globalization and European integration on the unit of the nation-state. The distinction between East and West is about a more explicitly problematized national question rather than about structurally different forms of nationalism. Whereas in Western Europe, democracy and the nation-state developed in tandem and „civic solidarity as the cement of national societies“ was the result of a long-term process of societal homogenization,⁵⁷ the same cannot be said for Eastern Europe, where borders have been shifting with frequency and identities have often been imposed from above (or from without). This does not mean that a national political culture based on a shared language and culture is irrelevant in Western Europe, but rather that it is a more latent, 'background' kind of phenomenon.⁵⁸ If constitutional patriotism and civic nationalism (especially when projected at the European level) are to be understood as convincing substitutes for rather than in conflict with national identities and 'thicker' forms of the social bond, the populist critique might indeed be pre-empted. But if a particularist form of defining the community and a shared sense of attachment is more significant for the vitality of democracy (in particular in defining membership

⁵⁶ Preamble of the 'Treaty establishing a Constitution of Europe', 13 October 2004, CIG 87/1/04 REV 1.

⁵⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Why Europe needs a constitution*, 11 NEW LEFT REVIEW 5 (2001); it should be underlined, though, that early nation-building in Western Europe and the United States was certainly not a peaceful process.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Will Kymlicka's discussion of the importance of societal culture in Western societies, Will Kymlicka, *Western political theory and ethnic relations in Eastern Europe*, in: KYMLICKA / OPALSKI 13 (note 43).

of the polity, and the creation of mutual trust and solidarity between members) than that assumed in legalist and contractualist constitutional patriotism, then the tensions articulated in the populist critique might prove to be more persistent.