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The Growth of Nationalism and Extreme Right Parties as Threat to the EU

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Contents

6   Contents

Preface

Liberal democracies are under pressure. Worldwide and in Europe, populist movements of various types promise protection and security through isolation and a strong, authoritarian state. With their simple solutions, they are heard by people who are unsettled by today's rapid changes and socio-economic upheavals. The European Union (EU) is not excluded from these developments. With various unfolding crises (finance, immigration, Brexit) and the EU's inadequate response to the discontent of its citizens, nationalism and exclusivism have risen in the EU. This can be seen from the success of populist politicians in recent elections, such as in Germany, France, Austria, Poland, Hungary, and Italy, to name but a few. Populist politicians advocate protectionism and anti-Islam sentiments, undermining the liberal foundations of the EU and its Member States. Currently, a new political divide has emerged in Europe, ranging from European identity and libertarian spirit on the one hand to traditionalism, authority, and nationality on the other. In Hungary, a so-called "illiberal national democracy" was proclaimed; freedom of the press and other mass media was demolished, and the rule of law attacked. This was accompanied by popular rises in social benefits, in particular, an increase in the minimum wage. In Poland, the government is following the Hungarian authoritarian example, supported by the Catholic Church, and it has tried to maintain its power by introducing improved social benefits, like the increase in child allowances and pensions. In Romania, the government has changed criminal law and procedural law, in particular, to protect politicians from prosecution for corruption. In Italy, right-wing populists enjoyed success in the regional elections in 2019, arguably endangering not only the stability of the euro but also the fragile collective responsibility of the EU. In Austria, the right-wing conservative government started a creeping reconstruction of the state. Within a few months, the discourse on migration and welfare had totally shifted. Moreover, at the border to Slovenia, the Austrian army conducted "refugee games". In Spain, the wealthy region of Catalonia is trying to achieve political autonomy and avoid sharing its relative wealth with the poorer regions. As a result, the new right-wing party, Vox, received 10.3% of the votes in the May 2019 elections, mainly by labelling the acceptance of Catalonia's independence "treason". Last but not least, the Brexit drama strongly suggests that the great European idea of peace, solidarity and regional cohesion is

in serious danger of collapse. Furthermore, in nearly all EU member states, populist extreme right-wing parties are attracting increasing electoral support.

These developments are accompanied by rising xenophobia against refugees and foreigners, and by attacks against multiculturalism. Thus, the parties of the far-right, who proclaim extremist slogans like "foreigners out of Europe" allow voters to object to migration policies and show societal distrust toward the governing elites. A high level of distrust, distance, and alienation toward the governing elite breed serious threat – a growing number of citizens seem to doubt democratic procedures and institutions. It is thus possible to assert that it is not only democracy and good governance that are endangered, but the EU itself.

The mix of cultures, ethnic groups and nations is just one of the many reasons for the revival of nationalist tendencies in European countries. The sources of nationalism are more deeply rooted in the negative sides of neoliberalism and globalisation. The renaissance of nationalism is a consequence of the inequalities in the distribution of profits, accompanied by a real or imagined sense of exclusion, changes in the political systems of the continent's countries, as well as the degeneration of democracy. Nationalism, often combined with populism or other currents of political thought, is the result of uncertainty and fear of change, with the market or the alienated political and economic elites providing an unclear direction. Social groups that do not participate in the processes of benefiting from economic growth, or which participate to a small extent – called losers of globalisation (in the so-called "old" EU countries) or losers of the systemic transformation and globalisation (in the countries of the former socialist bloc) – express concerns about their future. According to nationalists their sense of security is not satisfied by the European Union. Individuals' sense of security should be restored by the national community in the nation-state. In this situation, nationalism is an alternative to the neoliberal order or to the surrogate ideology for the idea of community within the EU.

This book analyses the threats to democracy that are associated with the rise of nationalism and populism in European Union countries. The main issue concerns the conditions that have resulted in the increase in nationalism and populism in the European Union and the links between those phenomena on the example of Germany, Great Britain and Poland. The aim of the analysis is also to show what could be done to regain democracy.

The statistical data cited in individual chapters come from Eurostat databases, national statistical offices, and studies of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD, as well as the results of scientific studies.

When we explore why populism is rising, we argue that rising populism can be avoided if we take decisive action to promote inclusive growth, engage citizens in public life, promote initiatives designed to ensure the transparency of decision-making processes and increase the political accountability of the public authorities. We believe that three paths to strengthen democracy and social peace in the European Union are particularly important: first, through better econom-

ic and social living conditions, the extent of anti-democratic attitudes could be stopped. Second, civil engagement and fighting authoritarian regimes should be supported by strictly using the tools of European law and, in addition, increasing the influence of society on the decision-making process by enhancing governance concepts. Third, the EU should support the urgently needed development policy to improve the livelihoods of people in Africa to reduce perilous emigration instead of more strongly enforcing capital interests and exploiting its raw materials. Furthermore, European countries should stop their arms exports to conflict zones, thus reducing an additional pressure to emigrate. This would simultaneously reduce the immense challenge of integrating refugees into Europe.

The book consists of 10 chapters. The first chapter discusses different aspects of democracy as a guideline. The second chapter shows how market dogmatism and austerity policies, in particular, the case of Greece, gained dominance and produced a severe social crisis, which in turn caused increasing distrust in the EU and the re-emergence of extreme right parties. Chapter Three gives a general overview of inequality and poverty as a result of this paradigm change. Chapter Four then examines how the European Union is trying to reduce the income gaps in the Member States and their regions to achieve greater social cohesion. Chapter Five shows the top-down movement of the EU, which concerns a change to the increasing role of regions and towns in implementing the EU's social and economic goals through the new governance concept, which could contribute to an increasingly democratic culture. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight provide a more comprehensive view of the specific situation in Germany after reunification, in Britain with regard to Brexit, and in Poland, in terms of the policy of the PiS-led government. Chapter Nine analyses the refugee dilemma and the differing reactions and attitudes in European countries. Chapter Ten presents ideas about how the EU could find its way back to solidarity and democracy. Thus, the book not only shows data describing the situation, but it analyses the causes and provides alternative solutions for the social, economic and policy dilemmas.

1. Aspects of Democracy

1.1. Introduction

Democracy has several aspects: political liberalism insisted on the ultimate goals of securing freedom and formal equality through a formal democracy. It includes the separation of powers following the ideas of Montesquieu through the independence of legislative, executive and judiciary powers. In addition, some states are even organised through a vertical separation of powers, mostly as a federal state. In Locke's liberal tradition of democracy the rule of law eliminates arbitrary decisions. Inalienable fundamental rights, human rights as natural law and the protection of minorities, and universal and equal suffrage belong to this type of democracy. Furthermore, rulers need legitimation through the indirect or direct election of governments which guarantee (input) legitimacy for the process of decision-making. Last but not least, there should be a free press as a watchdog to combat nepotism, bribery, and corruption and to guarantee transparency.

The EU stresses the centrality of these features of democracy with its accession criteria for new member states (Copenhagen Criteria). The Treaty on the European Union sets out the conditions and principles to which any country wishing to become an EU member must conform. These criteria include the stability of the institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.[1] The danger remains, however, that after accession compliance with these strict criteria is weak and that monitoring is inadequate. The EU can only then intervene when a member state has seriously contravened EU guidelines. However, to pursue possible infringement proceedings may in turn increase hostility towards the EU (Bergmann 2019: 12).

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1   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhague.html?locale=en (accessed: 18.12.2019).

In addition to this liberal model of democracy, we have to recognise a material type of democracy. The liberal model guarantees equal rights where the latter focus on the material conditions for invoking formal rights. It was already Jean--Jacques Rousseau who expanded this understanding of democracy with his notion of output legitimacy, which relates above all to equality of means and not just formal rights. For him, income, wealth and social inequalities represent not only a threat to peace, but also to freedom. Rousseau's message of the *contrat social* and the associated slogans of the French Revolution see liberty threatened by an imbalance in the distribution of social wealth.

"As for equality: we should take this to mean not that the degrees of power and riches are to be absolutely the same for everyone, but that those with power should not sink to the level of using violence, and that their power will always be exercised by virtue of rank and law; and that no citizen will ever be wealthy enough to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself – which implies, on the part of the great, no extremes of goods and credit and on the side of the ordinary folk no extremes of miserliness or greed" (Rousseau 1977a: 56).

"It is therefore one of the most important functions of government to prevent extreme inequality of fortunes; not by taking away wealth from its possessors, but by depriving all men of means to accumulate it" (Rousseau 1977b: 32). The output legitimacy of this *material* democracy has its central focus therefore on the degree of equality. The main goal is to ensure equal opportunities and freedom from hardship. The realisation is the welfare state, which guarantees equal opportunity, justice – especially concerning education in a meritocratic society. The welfare state should be responsible for the quality of life. In the centre of this understanding is the guarantee of "human security", which emphasises the absence of extreme vulnerability, whether due to social, political or economic marginalisation. The concept of human security appeared in the context of peace research projects in the 1980s as a counterpoint to the dominant discourse of "national security" during the Cold War. This concept of human security had gained a wide audience by the time the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) produced its Human Development Report (HDR 1994), which put poverty and the needs of people at the centre of the world development agenda. It also chimes with the *Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace* and the *Millennium Declaration* adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1999 and 2000, respectively. From the perspective of human security, what matters therefore is ensuring social peace. "The guarantor of national security is no longer military power, but favourable social, political and economic conditions, promotion of human development, human rights and inclusive policies" (UNDP Report 2004: 141).

The essential message is that the welfare of humankind is the real meaning of democratic development. The HDR therefore seeks to promote public policies that serve the health, well-being, freedom and dignity of all people. This presupposes security at different levels for all members of society – freedom from physical, from poverty, social exclusion and repression, security of education, housing,

health and the environment. According to the Commission on Human Security, human security "means protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity."[2]

Furthermore, inequality endangers not only social peace, but, as a recent study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) asserts, it is also harmful to economic growth. In the study: "Causes and Effects of Inequality. A global Perspective", the authors write: "Widening income inequality is the defining challenge of our time. In advanced economies, the gap between the rich and poor is at its highest level in decades" (Dabla-Norris et al. 2015: 4); "income inequality matters for growth and its sustainability." (…) Specifically, if the income-share of the top 20% (the rich) increases, then GDP growth actually declines over the medium term, suggesting that the benefits do not trickle down. In contrast, an increase in the income share of the bottom 20% (the poor) is associated with higher GDP growth. The poor and the middle class matter the most for growth via a number of interrelated economic, social, and political channels (Dabla-Norris et al. 2015: 4).

Somehow, Abraham Lincoln expressed the comprehensive meaning of both input and output legitimacy in democracy with the simple words: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."[3] This includes a form of government, where a constitution guarantees basic civil rights, fair and free elections, and independent courts of law.

After considerable criticism within Europe of the EU as an exclusive mercantilist fortress, the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) added special goals concerning solidarity and cohesion. Article 158 of the Treaty states that in order to strengthen its economic and social cohesion, the Community shall aim to reduce disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions or islands, including rural areas. The European Commission underlined in its "Report to the European Council", 21 March 2003: "Exclusion imposes unjustifiable and avoidable costs on society. The Lisbon strategy's response – a European social agenda – is to provide basic skills for all, promote employment for those who are able to work and ensure adequate social protection for those who cannot. This approach recognises the role of well-developed social protection systems in reducing poverty and promoting employment and employability, as well as the need for such systems to be modernised to ensure their long-term sustainability in the face of an ageing population."[4] On the other side, the

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2   Human Security Commission. "Final Report" www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/ (accessed: 19.12.2019).

3   https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/abraham_lincoln_101395 (accessed: 19.12.2019).

4   https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20858/75136.pdf (accessed: 19.12.2019).

Maastricht Treaties and the Lisbon Strategy commit the European Union (EU) to neoliberal dogma with its demonisation of state debt and of active fiscal intervention, and a primary stress of budgetary austerity. Member states are thus more concerned to avoid the sanctions of the Stability and Growth Pact and to encourage private investment via "crowding-in" strategies, including generous reductions in capital taxes. While tax harmonisation makes very slow progress, member states become competitors for the favours of international investors, thereby risking the intergovernmental solidarity invoked in the EU's "social cohesion rhetoric". The EU thus appears as a competitive Europe in which intergovernmental solidarity is at risk (Händel, Puskarev 2016).

The data confirm the dominance of market dogmatism in policy-making. Despite social policy commitments to greater equality and welfare in the member states, the EU's failure is clearly evident in a greater degree of inequality and in high levels of poverty, where higher unemployment rates hit the already vulnerable sections of the population. Income and wealth inequalities rose in all member states over the last four decades. Furthermore, the political responses to the crises triggered by the 2008 financial crisis – namely austerity – exacerbated the social situation in the countries, worst hit by budgetary problems and increasing debt. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many European citizens became profoundly disappointed by policy-makers and by policy failure, and increasingly attracted by the rhetoric of the emerging group of right-wing populist parties.

Italy exemplifies the dramatic and rapid rise of populist parties. The 2018 general election saw two major populist parties emerge, the Five-Star Movement and the Lega (formerly Lega Nord), to form a centre-right coalition government. Despite clear differences in certain policy areas, they shared both a marked Euroscepticism and an opposition to immigration. Under the leadership of Salvini, the coalition has directed its main focus on blocking immigration but began to emphasize other populist themes. The Lega consequently formed a European alliance with other right-wing populist parties such as France's Rassemblement Natuional, the Netherlands' Party for Freedom and the Freedom Party of Austria. Under Salvini, the Lega reached record heights of popularity, both in the North and in the rest of Italy.

The Five Stars Movement promotes policies usually advocated by the Italian Left, like citizen's income and environmental issues. Nevertheless, its Eurosceptic and anti-immigration attitude clearly puts it into the category of populism. The short-lived populist coalition in Italy reflected a broader trend of Euroscepticism, where – according to the standard Eurobarometer 90 from 2018 – a full 48% of respondents in the 28 Member States indicated a lack of trust in the EU. Figure 1.1 shows differences between the states.

Rising anti-democratic attitudes and the increasing strength of extreme right parties can therefore be traced back to a paradigm change in the political economy from a Keynesian welfare state to a neoliberal "competition state". This change, with eroding welfare-levels, diluted labour protection and deregulation has led to widening inequalities between rich and poor.
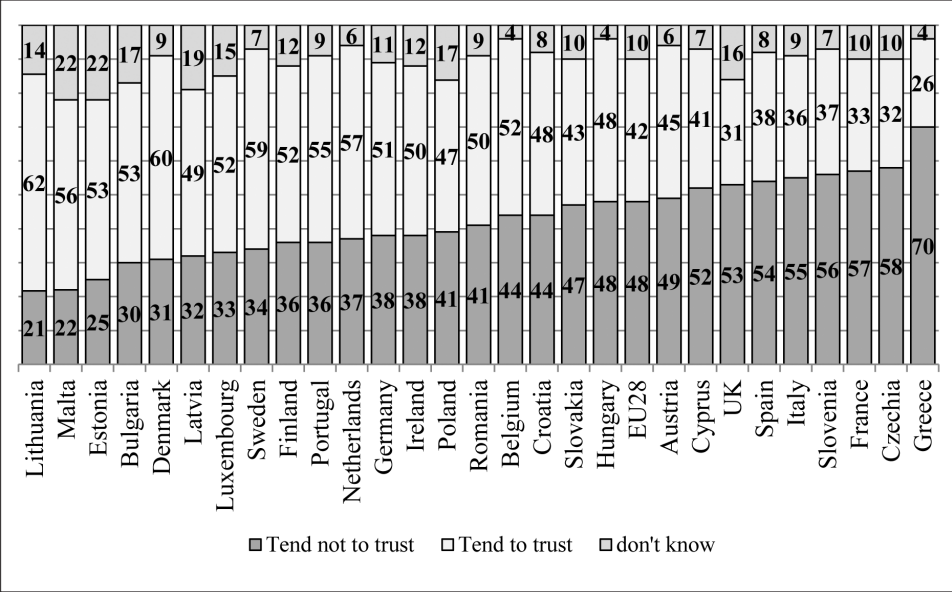
Figure 1.1. Trend of trust and distrust in the EU in %
Source: Standard-Eurobarometer 90, the public opinion in the EU, Novemver 2018: 6.

As a result of this process, the historically identifiable groups of disadvantaged poor households at the bottom end of the income distribution have now expanded to include a growing number of "working poor" households which, despite participation in employment, earn less than 60% of net median income. The alienation of these groups from disproportionately enriched top ten and 1 percent of the distribution is arguably evident in the Eurobarometer poll results (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2. Which are currently the two main problems for the EU? Answers in %
Autumn Survey 2018
Source: Eurobarometer 90, November 2018; max two answers.

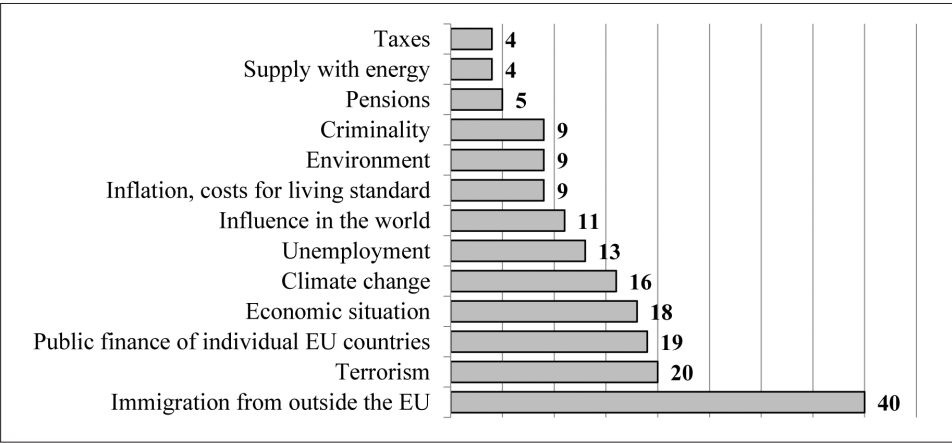Right wing parties made use of distrust evident in these polls, criticising both parliament and traditional parties for their neglect of issues like immigration which is identified as by far most important concern of respondents. Populist parties were able to exploit marked increases in migration in many EU member states with alarmist and xenophobic propaganda which resonated particular with poorer households that were often competing for housing and employment with migrants. The situation worsened with the sudden influx of refugees in 2015 (Figure 1.3).
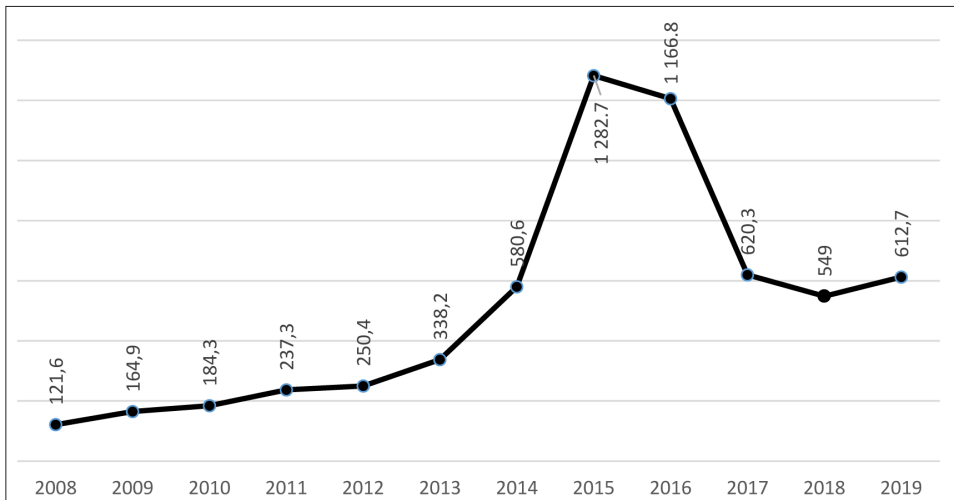

Figure 1.3. New asylum applications in thousands in the EU
Source: Eurostat, 2019.

On the one hand, there were impressive signs of welcome from some state authorities and from civil society in face of the plight of refugees, in particular in Germany. However, the picture has changed in the meantime. Populist parties and other right-wing organisations make much of media stories of criminality among young North-Africans, of supposedly higher health and social benefits for migrants and the associated burden on German taxpayers. Migrants, as 'Others' – particularly those with distinctive cultures and religious beliefs – provide convenient vehicles for the mobilisation of xenophobic hatred and the marketing of simplistic populist messages.

1.2. Democracy, nationalism and populism

In Western Europe, after the Second World War, the efforts of representatives of legal, political, philosophical sciences and many political leaders focused on building such democracy that would prevent the recurrence of extreme forms of

nationalism. In the past, nationalism, combined with racism and xenophobia, constituted the ideological basis of fascism and its most extreme form – Nazism. The goal of strengthening democracy was to build safeguards that would balance the political powers and increase the role of non-elective institutions or those relatively non-accountable to voters like constitutional courts designed not only to defend individual rights but also democracy in general against the return of extreme forms of nationalism. In short, in post-war Europe the perception of nationalism was definitely negative in most European countries, and distrust of unlimited national sovereignty and acceptance of liberal democracy was widespread. In the last thirty years of the 20th century, subsequent countries overthrew authoritarian regimes (Spain, Portugal, Central and Eastern Europe) and returned to liberal democracy (Müller 2016).

After 1945, nationalist movements were clearly weakened in Europe but that does not mean that they completely disappeared. Their return to politics occurred at the beginning of the 21st century. Today we are dealing with a wave of nationalism, known as the extreme right. We wrote about the factors that revived nationalist sentiments and the creation of new nationalist movements and parties in section 1.1. Below we will focus mainly on those aspects of European nationalism that are related to the policy of the European Union and the European integration processes.

The European Union built an anti-totalitarian and anti-populist political order on the foundations of distrust of national sovereignty. By limiting the "will of the people" it became particularly sensitive to the allegations of political actors speaking on behalf of the nation as a whole, whose participation in politics was diminished (Müller 2016).

In fact, nationalists and populists are not interested in increasing the political participation of the people, but in gaining the support and legitimacy of power based on the belief that the source of power is and should only be the nation. Meanwhile, the post-war order of Europe is based on the idea of keeping the "nation" at bay.

The negative attitude of the majority of Europeans towards contemporary nationalism is not only the result of historical experience, but also the criticism of political agenda and the ways in which nationalist parties and their leaders operate, based on demagogy and populism. In language practice, both of these terms are used synonymously and understood as "flattering the masses, referring to the psychology of the crowd, preying on irrational hopes, building political influence and its mass foundation on awakening emotions, illusions and claims, promises without coverage, etc." (encyklopedia.pwn.pl). In addition, the populism based on the stereotype of a simple man and the wisdom of simple people (nation) perceives people not only in social categories, but also in religious ones, and opposes them to the power, elites and strange groups (in terms of class, religion, ethnicity) which is usually associated with intolerance and xenophobia. Appeal to the wisdom of the nation is characterised by both nationalist parties who oppose democracy and

those who claim to be the defenders of democracy in their agendas. The latter are usually parties with neo-fascist provenance.

It is worth emphasising the fact that in everyday language the concept of populism is often abused. It is used in various meanings to describe any manifestations of extremism, which leads to the lack of distinction between different political qualities, e.g. the extreme right and extreme left. It is also not enough to define populism by referring to "anti-elitism" if we do not explain what underlies it.[5] Jan-Werner Müller argues that populists who see themselves as the sole representatives of the nation's interests are characterised by the rejection of pluralism. And further indicates that the inevitable consequence of populists gaining strong power is the creation of the authoritarian state. In turn, Dani Rodrik (2018) combines populism with uneven development and capitalism crises that aggravate inequality. According to this author, economic measures are needed to reduce inequality and strengthen the sense of security. The lack of reaction will deepen nationalist sentiment and may lead to conflict and violence. This conclusion also applies to today's European Union where economic and social inequalities – especially in the times of crisis – stimulate nationalist tendencies and reinforce precisely those political forces that are not aptly called populist today.

Before we take a closer look at the party's nationalist projects in the 21st century Europe and their views on democracy, we will briefly characterise the concept of nationalism and the controversy that arises around it.

The dictionary definition points to the following features of nationalism. "It is the belief that the nation is the most important form of socialization, and national identity is the most important component of the identity of the individual, combined with the imperative to put national solidarity over all other relationships and obligations, and everything that is national over everything that is foreign or cosmopolitan; political ideology, according to which the basic task of the state is to defend national interests, and its territorial scope should correspond to the areas inhabited by a given nation (encyklopedia.pwn.pl).

It is clear from the above definition that nationalism lies in the fundamental contradiction to liberalism because it refers to values that are the opposite of the axioms of liberalism. Above all, it puts the good of the nation above the good of the individual, which means a moral imperative to sacrifice the life, rights and dignity of the individual to achieve the goals of the collective. The nation is recognised as the highest sovereign of the state, and the nation-state the most appropriate form of organisation of the community united by a community of origin, language, history and culture. All political actions are evaluated through the prism of the good and interests of this nation. Nationalism usually proclaims elitism, often combined with xenophobia and ethnocentrism, racism and anti-Semitism.

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5   Not all critics of the elite are populist. Criticism of the ruling elite can be a manifestation of an attitude of civic engagement.

In extreme form, it recognises the right of own people to conquer and rule other nations, to nationalize them and destroy their culture.

In practice, nationalism takes various forms in space and time. Perhaps there are as many different types of nationalism as there are countries and cultures. The kind of nationalism we are dealing with depends to a large extent on the historical conditions in which the nation-forming process took place and the factors that had a dominant influence on the formation of the nation.[6]

Nationalisms can be described according to various characteristics and types such as Eastern and Western, particularistic and universalistic, illiberal and liberal, reactionary and progressive, aggressive and defensive.

Breakdowns multiply conceptual entities, while the differences between "really existing nationalisms" are not as sharp and clear as is often claimed. Seemingly diverse forms of nationalism may in some respects – as Wang Shaoguang (2003) writes – "resemble each other, but they differ from each other. In a sense, all forms of nationalism are "unstable amalgams" (Spencer, Wollman 1998: 270) that combine wandering elements and are constantly changing (p. 6).

The above-mentioned author, searching for the properties underlying the various forms of nationalism, assumed that contemporary nationalism is based on four pillars (Table 1.1). The main components of nationalism are:

(1) A national population understood as community, existing in three variations: Ethnic, Cultural and political-legal community, and Sovereign state;

(2) People's psychological attachment: a national population based on a sense of belonging, such emotion is linked to longing for self-esteem, sympathy with national in-group, affection for homeland, and zeal for its defence. It may take the form of humiliation, anxiety, and pride;

(3) People's loyalty to the national community: loyalty rang on a continuum between supremacy of nation balanced to universalism. From treating nation as an absolute priority to direct one's primary obligations to all human beings;

(4) The people's attitude toward out-groups. No matter how benign nationalism is in form, it must delineate where the boundaries of the nation begins and ends. Nations may assume one of the following three stances toward others: xenophobia, arrogance, confidence.

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6   This criterion allows to distinguish between the political and civil nationalism, if a given nation developed as a result of consolidation of various social groups and geographical territories due to centralisation of state authority. If in the process other factors were more important, e.g. culture, community of origin, language, we speak about cultural or ethnic nationalism. Another criterion of the classification of nationalism is attitude „to others". There are nationalisms allowing assimilation of people from outside the national community, living within the borders of the same national state and nationalisms seeking their rejection.