Populizam u Europi u 21. stoljeću

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POPULISM IN THE 21st CENTURY EUROPE

FINAL THESIS

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CONTENT

SUMMARY

The main topic of this final paper is populism in 21st Century Europe. The public debates on this question often leave the audience without the answer to the definition of this problem. In the process of answering the matter of the problem, it is important to see what science can tell us about the subject. Using the scientific background, populism will be analysed through the causes of its rise and brief history description. Furthermore, the context of the phenomenon will be expanded with the definitions of the authors with a broad knowledge of European political affairs. In defining populism, the focus will be on the supply-side of it as opposed to the demand-side. This approach covers the presence of populism in political actors and parties and it is much better investigated by scientists. Analysis of populism within the European context will be conducted by presenting four political parties. Two of them belong to the left-wing spectrum and two of them to the right-wing spectrum. Half of them have the experience of governing the country and the other half are older parties with no experience in government. Finally, examples of populism in domestic political culture will be presented through the results of three separate studies of populism of political representatives. Lack of scientific research means that there cannot be an overall conclusion of the presence of populism in Croatia.

Keywords: populism, politics, Europe, Croatia, people, anti-elitism, anti-pluralism, party, left-wing, right-wing

1. INTRODUCTION

The usage of the term populism has inundated the public space in recent years. Political analysts and journalists have used this characterization without explaining the real meaning of it. In their discourse, populism has often been portraited in a negative context, but this does not have to be necessarily the case.

This assignment aims to define populism and present examples of such political actors in Europe in recent years based on the literature of scientists who have studied and scrutinized the phenomenon of populism, defined its main pillars and, presented the differences between left and right populism.

In the first chapter, the populism will be explained according to the researchers who have spent a substantial amount of time investigating the questions around it. Nevertheless, the topic will be broadened with a brief history, causes of appearance, its main elements but also with the typical behaviour of populists who have come to power. In the second chapter, there will be a discussion on populism in the European context. Examples of two left-wing and two right-wing populist parties will be presented along with the explanation of the political-societal context in which they were operating. After describing the situation in Europe, the third chapter will look at the populism in the domestic political culture. In this part, the focus will be on the three scientific papers which investigated the traces of populism in some political candidates but also in one political party in Croatia.

2. DEFINITION AND ELEMENTS OF POPULISM

We would probably not be talking about populism if it did not spread through Europe in recent years. As authors agree that it came with the establishment "of representative democracy" (Müller, 2016: 27), absurdity is that populism as a part of this system represents a problem to the normal functioning of it. Although populist actors do not talk about the dismissing the democracy, they do pose a problem by undermining its main principles. Since the support for the populist parties steadily grew from the 1990s with almost every fourth European voting for such an option, it is important to get the whole context of this phenomenon. (Lewis P. et al., 2018) This can primarily be done by analysing the causes of its rise. As it has been said that interactions are ruled by a mechanism of action and reaction, populism as a vivid behaviour is no exception. When Albertazzi and McDonnell described the causes of increasing populism in Western Europe more than ten years ago they probably had no idea that this illustration will precisely apply to the events happening now across the continent:

> The rise of populism in Western Europe is, in large part, a reaction to the failure of traditional parties to respond adequately in the eyes of the electorate to a series of phenomena such as economic and cultural globalization, the speed and direction of European integration, immigration, the decline of ideologies and class politics, exposure of elite corruption, etc. (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008: 1)

As they pointed out and as the history taught us, populism repeatedly emerged because circumstances were negative for a certain group of people and as the conditions worsened or, in the best case, stayed the same, this frustration led to their reaction.

This depiction of causes has also been broadened by the poignant political scientist Ivan Krastev who called our time the age of populism. He convincingly claims that the ongoing destabilization of the political system happened because European societies have never experienced such an amount of freedom and receptiveness. Krastev adds that the rights that citizens were given after the Second World War helped accumulate the mistrust in our governors and democratic institutions. (Krastev, 2011: 12).

To get the wider picture of its causes it is inevitable to present the earliest modern manifestations of this kind of behaviour. First populist dissatisfactions happened more than a hundred years ago almost simultaneously in czarist Russia and the United States of America.

Russian intelligentsia in the 1860s and 1870s became inspired by socialist and revolutionary feelings and with that, they believed that peasants should have more involvement in

the state's affairs. Their movement, usually called Narodnichevstvo, gained the momentum of going to the rural area and talking to the peasants. „The 'going to the people' movement of 1872-74 was an act of expiation on the part of the intellectual" (Pipes, 1964: 443). This kind of communication that we can characterize today as moderately populist "failed because the peasant proved equally unwilling to listen to socialist propaganda and to respond to socialist agitation" (Pipes, 1964: 443). If such ideas were accepted by the larger public, Russian history would look completely different today.

Before the presidential elections in the United States in 1892, heterogeneous agrarian movements which became popular among farmers in Midwest and South merged into the People's Party. Their candidate won over a million votes and 22 electoral votes but in the coming years' popularity of the party, for various reasons, decreased. Even though they disappeared from mainstream politics, acceptance of some of their ideas meant that they managed to influence domestic policies. (The Populist Movement, 2019) Numerous times when the third parties made it to presidential fight with Democrats and Republicans, they did not hesitate to use the populist discourse. One of them is Ross Perot who gained one of the best results as an independent candidate in the 1992 presidential elections. (Schulte-Sasse, 1993)

In Europe in the first half of the 20th century, one group in the German Empire has been characterized as populist. The Völkisch movement arose around the river Rhine before the First World War. Along with the creed of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and soil), its adherents manifested feelings of antisemitism and nostalgia for better times. (Camus and Lebourg, 2017: 26) Praise of German völk (German term for people) pooled with esoteric and mystical beliefs of their mission provided a fundament for the later ascendance of Nazism. Despite the claims that the Marxism and Fascism were inherently populist, scientists Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser have denounced it as rather elitist. (2017: 33)

After the Second World War populism was not so palpable in Europe as in South America where Argentinian Juan Domingo Peron and Brazilian president Getulio Vargas successfully incorporated "people" rhetoric into their politics setting the regular folk against outside threats, primarily imperial influences (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 29). Their behaviour became the prototype of regional politics that emerged later. One of the reasons they are so successful in that part of the world is because the people there are tired of colonialists and they saw salvation in populist actors. In Europe, populism has not been consistent until after the

1990s when it became one of the leading political forces. Discordant examples of European populists right after the Second World War will be mentioned in the next chapter.

Nowadays, when populist actors have deluged national elections, discussion about their role differentiates from country to country. While some see it in a hostile manner calling it a threat others believe it can serve as „the authentic voice of democracy" (Lasch, 1995: 105). One of the first scientific approaches to the problem of populism happened in a now-famous conference held at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1967. Result of it, notably came two years after, in an edited collection that started with an opening line „A Spectre is haunting the world – populism" (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969a: 1). Even though this harsh description was a product both of cold war mentality and the fear for democracy, unintentionally it contributed to the vagueness in defining populism. As the interest in this subject was rather low between the two world wars, it has increased in the 1980s and 1990s when the new protagonists appeared. Problem was, even to this day, that scientists have used different methods and the consequence was the incoherent conclusions. Between the two main approaches, the supply side which studies political aspect of populism (political party, main actors, rhetoric) and the demand side which concentrates on the public domain (public opinion, variations in it and the reasons for the support of populist candidate), this work will the remain within a supply side, mostly because of the better scientific background.

2.1. SUPPLY-SIDE OF POPULISM

Political philosopher Jan-Werner Müller sees populism as „a form of identity politics" (Müller, 2016: 11) and by accepting this judgement, he says, it is not wrong to say „that populism tends to pose a danger to democracy." (Müller, 2016: 12). The same author also agrees that populism cannot be viewed as a unique concept but rather like a package of specific assertions with inner logic. (Müller, 2016: 17-18) Political scientists Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017: 6) define it as a „thin-centered ideology"mainly because it never stands alone and „almost always appears attached to other ideological elements, which are crucial for the promotion of political projects that are appealing to a broader public." Even though every political party seeks for its supporters using the ideological code, populists enhance it with other instruments that eventually help them gain the votes. Description of populism by Albertazzi and McDonnell went by defining it as an ideology "which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people

against a set of elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice." (2008: 6). Positioning people against those in power is one the means populists use to galvanize their voters. While the legality of these actions is undeniable, every person ought to be aware of them, so they do not get manipulated. Presented definitions roughly tell us what the populism looks like, but to get a more detailed picture, further elaboration is needed.

Identity and anti-elitism play important role in populist rhetoric. These two elements interact and supply each other with ever-flowing inspirations. Müller (2016) said that populists generally prefer to rely on a figurative image of the 'real people' for whom they believe they can express their opinions and wishes unanimously. This belief is also deepened with the moral superiority of regular folk who are opposed to the corrupt elites. For Grbeša and Šalaj populism stresses the unity of people but also the homogeneity of the political elites (2018: 39). They understand that „populists idea is permeated by an idea of good and honest folk who were tricked and manipulated by corrupt and incapable political elites." (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018: 40). Additionally, they are also anti-pluralists. When saying that they represent the people, they often discriminate against everyone who is not on their side. Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini revitalized anti-pluralism in his book Secondo Matteo in which he wrote: „Our young people are leaving and being replaced by foreigners" (according to: Donadio R., 2019) This distinction is based on moral principles and the professor Müller says „the core claim of populism is thus a moralized form of antipluralism" (2016: 28).

This unique voice Cas Mudde calls the general will and presents it as a third basis concept of populism. He explains the term with the help of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who had set the differences between general will (*volonté générale*) and the will of all (*volonté de tous*) by saying that "the former refers to the capacity of the people to join together into a community and legislate to enforce their common interest, the latter denotes the simple sum of particular interests at a specific moment in time." (according to: Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 16). Political theorist Canovan said that the task of politician is to realise what is the general will and then transform it into the "cohesive community that can be counted on to will it." (2005: 115) Disputes generally occur when the question about who is the 'real people' is asked. Populists never answer

but they are confident who is not part of their team. Targets are commonly journalists, foreign intelligence, and political opposition.

In most cases, politicians who are saying that they are backed by hard-working people are different from the mainstream ones. It can be their appearance, their speech, or the whole strategy of communicating messages to the audience. In some countries, they even do performances and actively challenge conventional politicians. Taggart states that populism "requires the most extraordinary individuals to lead the most ordinary of people." (2000: 1) This can also be applied universally. From South America where populist figures such as Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales were assimilated in regional political culture to European personas like Silvio Berlusconi, Viktor Orban, and Nigel Farage who affected European policies to a great extent. Although populist actors are often put on right or far-right of the political spectrum, truth is there are also left and centrist populists and they all share their presentation of themselves as a 'voice of the people' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 21) With the prescribed accusation of attacking democratic standards when they come to power, populists act peculiarly.

As populists test the limits of democracy, they intend to push democratic standards to the edge but rarely fully suspending it. When governing, their political will tends to go in three ways, says Müller (2016). In Hungary and Poland, where populists are in power, they legalised laws that hindered the regular operation of independent media and the judiciary. It is no surprise that the consequence of such behaviour is manifested in changing chief editors and the judges with the ones loyal to the party. This is what Müller calls "colonization of the state". (Müller, 2016: 52) It is concerning that some people today are ready to give up their rights in exchange for ideological satisfaction. Those who are loyal to the party are usually rewarded with benefits. This is what Müller diagnosed as mass clientelism. (Müller, 2016: 53) Even though this also happens with mainstream parties, the difference is, says Müller, that populists speak openly about it with moral justification of such acts. The third habit is their attack on non-governmental organisations. (Müller, 2016: 56) Their work is usually described as harmful to the wider society and to disguise hostile feelings towards NGOs, the government tries to camouflage it with transparency. (Ciobanu C. & Kość W., 2017) When Hungarian PM Viktor Orban ratified law "that required nongovernmental organizations that received foreign financing to identify themselves as such and to disclose their donors" (Novak B., 2020) European Court of Justice ruled that such legislation

was „discriminatory against NGOs and donors" ("Hungary 'broke EU law with foreign funding rules'", 2020).

To be more specific in detecting populists and differentiate them from regular politicians, Grbeša and Šalaj pointed out a couple of helping tools that all derive from the discourse. No matter the political spectrum, populists are keen on dealing with the "dangerous others" (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008: 3). Left, in most cases, sees the danger, in the financial elites. Right, for example, blames minorities or migrants, as we have seen in the example of an Italian minister. After the migration crisis in 2015, this attitude has become the political programme of some nationalist parties. By trying to protect the national security they use, what Grbeša and Šalaj described, 'empty signifiers' and "by this we understand the expression, phrase or an idea of elusive character in which people of different ideological orientations can attribute different meanings" (2018: 63). In a political campaign, politicians prefer to speak about the urgency of fighting corruption and serving justice but rarely have they elaborated the exact way of achieving that. The last tool is the one we already mentioned when we spoke about the populist power of hearing a unique voice of people.

Hence, components that distinct populists from the non-populists are mainly in their discourse. Identity politics, anti-pluralism, and anti-elitism are notable parts of it. People who portrait someone as populist in the public sphere often want to eliminate certain ideas or politicians by using a term which many people do not fully understand but see it in a negative context because of the framing. One must bear in mind that populists are a type of politicians who adopt special discourse by opposing ordinary people to the elites who, in their opinion, have betrayed them. In this two-dimensional worldview, danger always comes from those at the top.

3. POPULISM IN EUROPE

The amount of studies on populism in Europe gives us a much better look at the political actors who have influenced affairs across the Old Continent. Soon after the Second World War, currents of populism have not been much visible except in the disparate occurrences as those in France (Pierre Poujade), Italy (Guglielmo Giannini), Netherlands (Hendrik Koekoek) and Denmark (Mogens Glistrup). As they were just one of the political actors with not much influence, the real change happened in the 1990s when populism became a "significant political force" (Zaslove, 2018: 320). Earlier beliefs suggested that European populism was mostly right-wing (Mudde: 2004) and short-lived (Albertazzi McDonnell, 2015) when in power, but newer findings and happenings deny such opinion. From the 1990s until now, populist figures have been part of our everyday political life.

     As we already described the definitions of populism, we will stand to the one that Mudde (2004) gave us saying that populism is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people". A peculiarity of European populism is in the political and societal context of each country. The common thing between the left and the right populists is in their discourse and the difference is in their primary objectives.

3.1. LEFT-WING POPULISTS

     Left-wing populist parties emerged in different periods through Europe. From the 1970s until the 1990s, various parties with the adjectives of socialism wanted to come to power in France, Scotland, and the Netherlands but rarely have they crossed the border of outsiders. Prevailing ties in their political programme was a mixture of "democratic socialist ideology with a strong populist discourse. They presented themselves no longer as the vanguard of the proletariat, but as the *vox populi* (voice of the people)." (Mudde, 2004) They also propagated anti-capitalism and anti-globalization and many of them appealed for social justice too. Today, left parties are losing support because of their inability to reconcile "the universal nature of rights and their actual exercise in a national context" and the main issue that revealed that is the migration crisis. (Krastev, 2017, 36) This crisis can also be attributed to the loss of usual political compass in which left and right are not so distinct as they used to be.

One of the parties that gained certain popularity on the demanding question of reunification is the German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Founded in 1989, this party is not a typical populist party because the formation did not happen by one charismatic figure and in terms of political institutionalization it was a fully accepted party with a clear ideological background. Still, actions that were taken by their leaders (Gregor Gysi or Lothar Bisky) together with the battle for the institutionalization do place this party into a populist frame. (Zaslove, 2008: 329) Powerful leaders like Gysi helped the party gain some political success using the rhetoric of the unsuccessful reunification in which 'others', meaning Western Germans and West, exploited the good people of East Germany. They found the electorate by protesting capitalism and globalization and with requests for more social justice. All that was emphasized by the defense of women's rights and the environment but also with their self-proclaimed exclusiveness in propagating pacifism. (according to: Zaslove, 2008: 329-331) Party had support in East Germany where in the 1990s they regularly won between 15 and 25 % of the vote in state elections. (Conradt D. P. et al., 1995) In 2005, the party was renamed The Left Party.PDS and in 2007 it merged with Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) to form a new party called The Left (Die Linke). (www.en.die-linke.de) In the last 2017 elections for Bundestag, they have polled 69 seats which makes them fifth party by strength. ("Bundestag election: final result")

In Greece in 2015, after the years of financial setbacks caused by the financial crisis in 2008 and austerity measures that the EU demanded, a coalition of radical left parties called SYRIZA won the national elections with 36,3 % of votes. (Alderman L. & Yardley J., 2015) Before they came to power, among other postulates, they called for the termination of the loan agreement signed between Greece and lenders in 2010 and renegotiation of debt.

"If Syriza can be designated as populist, then this surely follows from the central role reserved for 'the people' in its discourse and its division of the social space into two opposing camps: 'them' (the establishment) and 'us', the establishment and the people, the power and the underdog, the elite (domestic and European) and the non-privileged, those who are 'up' and the others who are 'down'" (Stavrakakis, 2015: 277).

Nine months after the elections, Greeks had to choose again. In that period, Syriza accepted the EU's austerity programme and they looked for the confirmation of such decision from electors. When they won again, the party stayed in the power until elections in 2019 when the conservative New Democracy took the power. (Tidey A., 2019)

Greek Syriza is comparable to PDS in Germany in populist discourse through which they attacked the center of powers. Populist politicians of PDS expressed anger at West Germany and Syriza's blamed Brussels and Berlin for the problems they were caught in. The difference between them is that PDS was never a strong party in Bundestag while Syriza held the power for four years.

3.2 RIGHT-WING POPULISTS

Right-wing populists have been more popular in Europe than left-wing. They "emerged as important political actors in the 1980s and the 1990s, becoming permanent fixtures in Austria, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, and Switzerland." (Zaslove, 2008: 326) These parties have capitalized on the slow economy, post-industrialization, globalization, and migrations. With the combination of condemning the ruling party and typical populist discourse in which 'hard-working people' are opposed to the rich elites, they managed to become a significant political force in Europe. Events in 2015, when the migration crisis escalated, gave some right-wing populist parties energy to become the main opposition in a parliament or even enter the government.

The French party famously known as a National Front until 2018 when they changed the name into The National Rally is one of the oldest parties in Europe considered to be populist. Founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen party achieved the first success in 1984 when they won around 11,2 % of votes in the European parliament elections. (Rydgren, 2008, 168) Le Pen was even close to becoming the president in 2002 but was beaten by Jacques Chirac in the second round. In 2002, his daughter Marine replaced him as a party leader, and from that time party has gained new momentum. The main elements of populism in the NR are the feelings of anti-elitism and discourse that centers around people.

"Le Pen's 2017 manifesto claimed to "give France its freedom back and give the people a voice". The FN's idealized people are constructed as the 'silent majority' (*majorité silencieuse*), referring to all the 'left behind', the 'invisible' and the 'forgotten ones who have been abandoned by political elites', and who, according to the FN, embody a 'generous and hard-working France'[1]. The FN accuses news media, journalists, and intellectuals of being complicit with the political elite and financial powers" (according to: Ivaldi, 2019: 3)

Marine lost in 2017 presidential elections to a pro-EU and centrist Emmanuel Macron. In her campaign, she advocated a reduction in immigration and measures which would fight "the so-called identitarian closure (*communautarisme*) of French Muslims." (Ivaldi, 2019: 5-6)

Euroscepticism that appeared at the party in the mid-1990s has not left their programme. From then until the last campaign, Le Pen's have denounced European Union "as the incarnation of neoliberalism" and they characterized it as "the first step towards savage globalization" (according to: Ivaldi, 2019: 6). Marine Le Pen also stressed that in case of their win French people will be asked, through a referendum, whether they want to stay or leave the EU. (according to: Ivaldi, 2019: 6)

Hungarians on the other side have become tired of the left-wing parties. After a series of economic downfalls and corruption scandals, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) was overthrown in the 2010 elections by Viktor Orban's conservative Hungarian Civic Alliance – Fidesz. In a ten-year reign, this party has irritated chief politicians in the EU like no other. The new constitution that was brought soon after taking the power showed that Fidesz will not listen to critics from outside of Hungary. After Orban announced in 2014 that they are building "an illiberal state" (Toth C. (2014), Europe knew that this kind of discourse contradicts its main principles. Anti-immigrant attitude along with national-populist speeches resulted in Orban's rise in popularity among euroskeptics and antiglobalization actors not just in his country but across the continent also.

Fidesz's populism was greatly manifested after the migration crisis. Mixing „the migration/refugee topics with terrorism, the problems of co-existence and integration in Europe and the NGOs financed by George Soros, a Hungarian-American financier with a Jewish background, as well as the ineptitude of decision-makers in Brussels (influenced by Soros)" (Glied, 2020: 38) Orban managed to use the political vacuum to his benefit. The central component that he talked about was the urgency of protecting the Hungarians and other citizens from the repercussions of the migrant crisis. Through the installation of fear and emphasizing the use of preventive action he regulated new measures that were enacted by the governing party. (Glied, 2020: 38)

By putting migrants and refugees under the same category, he created an atmosphere of fear for which he blamed the EU. Finger-pointing at the elites and protecting its people from the outside dangers are the main reasons why Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orban are considered populists. Although they are a bit younger than the French National Front, the Hungarian party has not achieved victories until 2010. From then on, the party has been a constant threat to the political climate in Europe while their French colleagues are still waiting on the opportunity. Similarities

between the two parties are, again, in their discourse but the interesting thing is that the Hungarian party Fidesz contradicts European policies in many ways but does not share the opinion with the National Rally that there should a referendum about staying in the EU. Although populists can be alike, it is important to remember that populism is not a unique movement, and politics they propagate can be different from case to case.

4. POPULISM IN CROATIA

As almost everywhere in Europe, the phenomenon of populism has not avoided political life in Croatia either. The problem in dealing with this subject in this European country is that it has not been examined as much as it is in global literature, and only a few authors have dealt with the problem. From this shortage of scientific sources, only three reputable research papers currently exist. Therefore, one of the targets of this paper is to contribute not just to the quantity but also to the quality of approaches to the subject.

State of a young democracy and ever-present corruption (Corruption Perception Index, 2019) is a fruitful soil for the groups who simplify the complexity of inner problems. Relying on records of international institutions about the levels of political and economic malfeasance but also on the uncertainty that came with the migration crisis, two political parties gained popularity through an expression of discontent not only to those questions but others also. Most (The Bridge) and Živi zid (Live wall) changed the understanding of the political course in Croatia and even compelled mainstream parties HDZ and SDP to adopt a practice that was not characteristic of their attitude.

In Croatia, populism has not been intensively explored except the "broadly describing the term, using various definitions" (Mustapić and Hrstić, 2016: 1) and authors that did the investigation are Milardović (2004), Cipek (2008), Grbeša (2010), Zakošek (2010) and Šalaj (2012a, 2012b). Besides the different definitions they gave, to this day, only three extensive research have been made. The common approach to all three research is that populism is examined as a political ideology and as a style in political communication.

"The key difference between populism as a political ideology and populism as a style is in that that in style there is no strong expression of anti-elitism, that is, those politicians never advocate a dualist view on political processes but rather incline towards the pluralistic view." (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018: 186)

Conducted between 2014 and 2017, these studies, all done by Marijana Grbeša and Berto Šalaj, have explored the supply-side of populism mostly by questioning the qualitative and quantitative content of political communication of certain politicians. Likewise, main aspects such as the mention of people, anti-elitism, and presence of "dangerous others" are amplified with more variables but for the reasons of avoiding giving too many details, this study will focus only on three that we have already mention. Frequent remark on 'people' makes a politician a populist

only in style but if that element is reinforced with the feelings of animosity towards elites then a politician should be considered a 'real populist'. Fear of 'others' is valuable in distinguishing various forms of populism. (Grbeša and Šalaj: 2018, 187) By facing those who are considered populists to those who seem the opposite, authors wanted to "investigate elements of populist discourse not just with the 'usual suspects' but rather with mainstream politicians too" (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018: 185) so they can find out do the standard politicians resort populist rhetoric and to what extent.

The first research examines interviews of Croatian politicians that were published in a couple of the most read Croatian newspapers between the local elections in 2009 and 2013. In this paper, the focus will be on politicians who are still relevant on the political scene. The second research scrutinizes 39 interviews of 4 presidential candidates before elections in 2015. The last one evaluates the presence of populism in political party Most by studying the content of all statements that were given by their politicians in 2015. It is worth mentioning that this party polled 19 parliament seats in the first 2015 elections and 13 seats in 2016 elections which significantly affected the duopoly of HDZ and SDP that existed in the last 15 years.

Initial research investigates 11 politicians – 6 of them who were considered populist (Dragutin Lesar, Ivan Grubišić, Nikica Gabrić, Milan Bandić, Ruža Tomašić, and Željko Kerum) and 5 of them who were considered mainstream (Ivo Josipović, Jadranka Kosor, Vesna Pusić, Tomislav Karamarko, and Zoran Milanović) - between the period of 2009 and 2013. While there are 8 tested variables, we will stress only three factors that we have already written about. Targets will be politicians who made some impact on the political course and from the first group, those are Milan Bandić (mayor of Zagreb), Ruža Tomašić (representative in European parliament) and Željko Kerum (ex-mayor of Split). They were all candidates in the parliamentary election held on 5th June 2020. In the second group, every person has been or still is an important member of political life in Croatia.

Mainstream politicians gave much more interviews than ones who are assumed as populists. Milan Bandić and Željko Kerum both gave 11 interviews and Ruža Tomašić gave 6 interviews. From the mainstream candidates, Jadranka Kosor talked 17 times to the press while all other mainstream candidates gave more or even two and half times more statements. Considering their reference on people, Kerum prevailed among them mentioning people in 91 % of cases mostly in a positive context. Bandić is at the same percentage but with a more neutral frame of folk. From

mainstream politicians, only Josipović and Milanović talked in more than half of the occasions about people but with a rather neutral description. Kerum talked about elites in 73 % of situations of which 45 % in an unfavorable way while Bandić rarely opened that subject. No one from the mainstream politics talked negatively about elites even though Kosor mentioned them in 47 % of interviews. Looking at the presence of "dangerous others", Kerum and Karamarko have mentioned them in 54 % and 36 % of cases, respectively. Ruža Tomašić spoke about them in 33 % of interviews. Overall, the 'strong populist' considered by these elements can only be Željko Kerum who mentioned people in almost every interview mixing it with antipathy towards different kinds of elites in which he sees 'dangerous others'. Milan Bandić is recognized as a 'weak populist'. All others for whom we said that we will focus on are not considered populists. (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018: 190-205)

Similarly, the second study analyses content through the examination of interviews with the four presidential candidates which were published in the country's leading newspapers and magazines in the period between 1st November 2014 and 11th January 2015 when the election day was. (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2016). Candidates are president Ivo Josipović, main opposition candidate Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, right-wing challenger Milan Kujundžić and a relatively unknown figure to the public Ivan Vilibor Sinčić.

As in the first research, mainstream politicians gave more interviews than actors who are not considered part of mainstream politics. Guided by the same principle of interpretation, the focus will be only on three variables. Taken the first one, people were mentioned in almost every interview but as opposed to Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović, Kujundžić had positive connotations of people in 4/5 interviews while Sinčić talked more neutrally than positively about them. An interesting thing happened with the perception of elites, president Josipović mentioned them in almost half of the statements, and every time in a negative context. Sinčić overtook Kujundžić in a commentary of elites talking about them in every interview and always with a negative prefix. Kujundžić has in 80 % of cases mentioned elites and in the same percentage opposed them as an adversary. Considering the 'dangerous others' only Sinčić has talked about them and in 67 % of the given interviews. Results of the study showed that Kujundžić and Sinčić can be acknowledged as populists, while mainstream politicians like Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović used populist rhetoric only on occasions and probably because of the advised strategy. (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2016: 106-127)

Last research was carried out as an analysis of statements given by the most eminent representatives of political party Most for the newspapers and magazines (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018) Tested period is divided into two parts, from 1st September until the day of elections 8th November 2015 and from the time of elections 9th November to the constitution of Parliament in 23rd December 2015. The division is also made based on their statements given before the elections and after the elections because the surprising result (19 parliament seats) made media more interested in newcomers. Before the elections they gave only 16 statements and after the number increased to 41. This paper intends to avoid going too wide into the explanation, so all statements will be brought together.

References to the people happened in 32 of 57 statements and they were mostly neutral, with only 3 of them in a positive context. Considering political elites, members of Most, mentioned them every time with 50,9 % in a neutral context and the rest in a negative way. Because of Most's position in which they held the keys to creating the government, authors of the study investigated how their members felt in terms of political unprofessionalism, do they advocate the measures which reduce the power of elites and is there in their discourse traces of blackmail towards two mainstream parties. Numbers are rather low in the first two categories but they are higher in blackmailing discourse which they expressed in 18 statements. Their relation towards the possible coalitions changed after the elections and while some of them talked only about tripartite government before the elections, after elections 19,5 % of them talked about the coalition with HDZ, 9,8 % preferred SDP and 82,9 % were in favour of mixed government between all parties. In conclusion, "the results of this study suggest that there are reasons to consider Most a combination of a moderate centrist populist party and an anti-establishment reform party (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018: 21). Therefore, it is not a true populist party.

Taken all into account, there cannot be a major conclusion on the populist actors in the Croatian political scene. The deficiency of studies makes it hard to create a general picture of the presence of populism. As the political and societal map has changed in the last five years and with the fresh elections and new candidates that took part in them, new studies into this issue are required.

5. CONCLUSION

An overall picture of populism that was presented above shows that even though it can be a hard-defining term, there are still some guidelines on detecting its currents and leaders. The political discourse of dividing the voters into regular people and the elites is one of the signs. If it is combined with the anti-pluralist view of politics and talks about the 'dangerous other' then the populist portrait is full.

With all this in mind, populism can still serve as a reminder that there are a number of people who feel that they are not an integrated part of the society and that the politics that mainstream parties execute do not satisfy them. In some cases, the appearance of populist parties can even generate a better election turnout. The positive side of the parties that are considered populist is that they introduced the questions which were, intentionally or unintentionally, avoided before they emerged at the political scene. Thus, it can urge mainstream parties that have lost their compass in the political arena to adopt policies that can benefit a larger number of people.

On the other hand, some populist actors are openly racist and even fascist. If they enjoy the popularity of the masses, then it can be a problem for a democracy. Basis of this system is the right for everyone to talk and give their opinion and if some voices are muted, no matter the cause, then people must be aware that one day their voice might be silenced. We all must work together on creating a better world without denying anyone a right to say what they feel.

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