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EDITORIAL

How to cope with the rise of populism in Europe

Since its early beginnings Europe is facing the most dramatic challenges, caused by the uprise of nationalistic and populistic movements and parties. This issue is quite timely as – at the time this editorial is written –, the results of the 2019 elections to the European Parliament nor the outcome of the Brexit process is known. Regarding the elections we do not yet know the real strength of the Eurosceptic parties, and regarding the Brexit everything between a “hard Brexit” and a second referendum seems to be possible. As Europe is based on its Member States, the politics of the Member States are relevant as well. Across Europe right-wing populism and nationalism is on the rise. The Spanish case is one of the examples this issue is looking at.

Why do I hold a second Brexit referendum possible? In the history of Europe the most important case is the Irish one. Ireland has seen two different referenda that saw in the beginning two negative outcomes but were over-ruled by a second referendum: on the Nice Treaty in 2001–2002, and again on the Lisbon Treaty in 2008–2009. The reason for this was very simple: misleading campaigns manipulated the electorate. A reasonable campaign of the government could convince the citizens. However, the British case is more difficult: as the British government stubbornly keeps to the results of the first plebiscite, it is up to the Civil Society and, indeed, the business communities, to overcome the stalemate between the Brexiters and the Pro-Europeans.

But what are the reasons of these worrisome perspectives? Among the many reasons cohesion, on regional, national and European levels seem to be the major drive for this development. This is another topic this issue is dealing with.

Hence, despite being an open issue it has a clear focus on European politics and policies. It deals with merely politics-related topics as well as with the analysis of the causes for the current situation.

Let me elaborate:

The rise of populism as a challenge to European politics and policies

In the contribution “The “Big-Bang” of the Populist Parties in the European Union (EU). The 2014 European Parliament Elections’ Martin Cubas & al. argue that there is a major challenge to the European democracy and the concept of an ever-deepening integration of the EU. Whereas the electoral support for the traditional political parties is decreasing, the upswing of the right-wing populists is significant. This is true for the 2014 elections and according to the opinion polls for 2019 the trend goes in the same direction; despite the (expected) Brexit an increase of the populists groups in the European Parliament has to be expected. Based on empirical research on microdata the authors offer some hypotheses on the reasons of this trend.

A very interesting case in this respect is the British referendum on the Brexit in 2016. However, Jack Black has a deeper look on whether the referendum can be
defined as the success of an English nationalist movement. In this respect, he distinguishes two approaches, the analysis of sentiments, in Aughey’s and his term “mood” and the analysis of political action, in Aughey’s and his term “movement”. “Mood” could be described as English anxiety regarding its lack of national sovereignty, which leads to the desire to reclaim sovereignty. In this respect, he understands the result of the Brexit referendum “as a statement of national change and belonging”. This quite challenging contribution should be considered; however, it ignores the importance of the faulty campaign of the Brexeters’ faulty campaign, and possibly of the influence of the world-wide “Zeitgeist” that is characterized by the growing influence of the rising populism.

By contrast, Emilio Rodríguez López and his colleagues take the example of Spain to show that the rising of intergovernmental conflicts, and hence the decrease of governmentality is due to the rise of nationalist parties, and more particularly of peripheral nationalist parties. To illustrate their argument, they offer an analysis of the political history of Spain between 1984 and 2014.

**Problems that contribute to the rise of populism and ways to counter the challenge**

Beyond any doubt, the rising gap between winners and losers of globalization contribute to the rise of populism. Hence, the contribution of Xavier Fonseca et al. deals with the issue of social cohesion by providing an overview on the current studies and proposes a framework for the analysis. They relate it to the resilience of cities and show ways how social cohesion can be strengthened.

Another social aspect related to cohesion and influencing the attitudes towards the EU are social rights for its citizens. The EU guarantees the free movement of goods, capital, services, and labour – the “four freedoms” – within the EU. But what does this mean for the citizens in terms of “tangible realities”? The contribution of Anoeshka Gehring explores this issue by using the example of mobile pensioners and their rights to touch the benefits of their work after retirement. The author explores the value of EU citizenship for four groups of mobile retired European citizens and relates it to their attitudes towards the EU and, more specifically, towards the value of their European citizenship. The result of the study suggests that the “tangible reality” of European citizenship is more complex than expected; it is diffuse and related, among other factors, to the way in which individuals practise their EU citizenship rights.

Finally, besides the social aspects, but related to these, the competitiveness of the EU depends on its innovation capacity. Karin Sakowski and her colleagues look at this issue by comparing “Old” and “New” Member States of the EU. This does not only affect the competitiveness, but social cohesion on the European level as well, and hence the attitudes towards the EU. As expected, Western European countries perform better in innovation than their counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe. Based on the Community Innovation Surveys analysing the firm-level innovation data the reasons for this disappointing result seems to be the difference between the “Old” Member States and the “New” ones management styles of the respective companies: whereas Western European companies rely on complex internal innovators, or complex innovators, Eastern European companies seem to exclusively operate work management-oriented. To foster cohesion the companies have to converge in management styles. However, the different styles seem to be related on the societal (and possibly cultural) levels.

This issue of our journal is related to the complex challenges the EU faces. Arguably, the EU is at the crossroad between its further deepening, or its regression in national
egoisms. This issue wants to contribute not only to the scientific debate, but to political considerations as well.

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