



Populism The Polish Case

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Abstract

This thesis inquires into the nature of populism in Poland after 1989. This broad research problem is translated into a number of specific questions: how can we characterize the particularities of the Polish case? What is the relationship between populism and democracy in Poland? Can the growing strength of the populists be seen as a sign of a serious crisis of Polish democracy or does it simply reflect something that might be defined as populist democracy?

This thesis attempts to answer these research questions through case studies of selected politicians (Lech Wałęsa and Stanisław Tymiński), parties (Self-Defence, League of Polish Families and Law and Justice) and a movement (Radio Maryja). The cases chosen meet two conditions: they were identified as populist in the public discourse and they played a major role in Polish political life. The empirical part of the research was based on qualitative analysis of primary party literature, interviews, secondary literature and a limited use of questionnaires.

The thesis confirms that populism can be identified in all the cases studied. At the same time the thesis shows that the form of populism varies between populism as a strategy and populism as an ideology (thin-centred ideology or ideology in a strict sense). Irrespective of its form, the main tool of populism is its discourse. The thesis also distinguishes three waves of populism: two in opposition (1989-2005) followed by a third wave in power (2005-2007). Each wave had its own characteristic features ranging from social, anti-EU to anti-liberal elements. In all cases populism was an expression of conservative and Christian values, which seem to be a specific Polish feature. Yet another important element in the Polish case is the anti-establishment emphasis, an emphasis that derives from dissatisfaction with the settlement of accounts with communism. From this emerges the concept of a 'network', a categorization linking post-communist bureaucrats and compromised opposition forces.

The thesis concludes that populists in Poland were not opposed to democracy as such, but rather to constitutionalism and procedural democracy. Populism was, above all, a warning sign of social tensions in liberal democracy. Polish populists opposed populist democracy to its liberal version. The case of Poland has also demonstrated the ways in which democracy can resist populism.



Jury: Peter Mair, (EUI, Supervisor), László Bruszt (EUI), Cas Mudde (University of Antwerp), Aleks Szczerbiak (University of Sussex).

Bio

Olga Wysocka has a degree in Political Science from the University of Warsaw (2001). After three years work experience in cultural diplomacy, she started a PhD program at the European University Institute, where she received the Master of Research in Social and Political Sciences (2005). In 2008 she won the Józef Tischner Fellowship at the Institute for Human Sciences (Vienna). Her academic interests include democracy, populism, media studies, popular culture and European integration. She now works at the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw.