EVROPAEUM SUMMER SCHOOL – GRADUATE ABSTRACTS

Populism and Anti-Politics: Is Democracy in Crisis?

El Escorial Palace, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 9th–14th July 2017

A. ROBERTO LÓPEZ TORRIJOS, PhD student in Political Science and International Relations, Complutense University, Madrid - Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora and His Bet on the Continuity of Dictatorship After Franco’s Death

Despite of being over the top, the transition process of Spain has been very criticised by far-left wing and far right wing since its very beginning. The current discourses of anti-politics in Spanish populisms are partially rooted in some intellectual, political discourses during late Franco’s regime, both far left wing and far right wing. One of the most accurate of these discourses is the one made by technocratic thinker and minister Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora, maybe the best representative of Francoist far right in Spain, who had developed an antidemocratic and entirely anti-politics discourse which was called “the decline of ideologies” (like Daniel Bell’s one). The goal of the ideas by Fernández de la Mora was to structure a modern society, which can promote social and economic development but it does not need the legitimation of democracy. The closed aim of Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora’s doctrine was to allow the continuity of the Francoist regime after the death of the dictator. Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora made his critics against Spanish democracy from the theoretical parameters of democracy as the Spanish transition was a reality. The goal of his conclusions was just to persuade Spanish society of abominating and voiding democracy. His critics were a success, but not between Spanish society. In fact, the essence of his critics to the new brand democracy in Spain - partidocracia, in his own words, this is to say party oligarchy- is the core of the rhetorical discourses of current anti-politics in Spain, which targets to corruption and nepotism and party discipline in the parliament which becomes useful and an institutional masquerade for an irresponsible government. Much of these critics are strictly the same that the critics made by some left-wing intellectuals and politicians. It is convenient to insist in this point, some thinkers which are in the ideological antipodes of Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora have been underlining the same critics to Spanish democracy in the same ways.

B. MATTHEW M. SCHNEIDER, MA in International Economic and Political Studies, Charles University, Prague - To What Degree Are All Politics Popular?

Populism is the ideological strain of politics that focuses on the concerns and beliefs of the electorate’s “common-man”, or, ordinary people. Why, then is it such a bad thing to be a populist? It certainly sounds like a UK Labour party campaign slogan, but one doesn’t see the party name admonished with adjective “populist” in the news like La Front National. This paper seeks to point out populist leanings in most of our political parties, and addresses the presence of a naming fallacy in our current political theatre, in what could be described as nothing short of a labelling war. Through an examination of the political platforms of European parties, I will show that the ideological gap between political parties is smaller than what is portrayed, and that the path to continued European political progress is made of dialogue, compromise, and the understanding and respect of different opinions, not discrediting attempts through the usage of labelling.
C. FELIPE VAN DE KERKHOF, MA in International Relations, University of Leiden

Austerity in the Media: Journalists as the Fourth Estate of Democracy

Dubbed the ‘fourth estate of democracy’, journalism plays a very important role in European democracies. One of the main tasks of media organizations in the democratic process is to investigate politicians and ask the questions private citizens cannot so they can hold them accountable. This is a costly process. However, widespread austerity measures in different nations in the European Union led to severe budget cuts in media organizations. This begs the question whether there are enough funds available for media organizations to fulfil their democratic duties. One of the countries with severe budget cuts is the Netherlands. Using a mixed method approach I will investigate the decreasing budgets for Dutch media organizations (quantitative) and interview journalists of the main public broadcaster NOS about their perception of budget cuts and if they feel they can fulfil their democratic duties (qualitative). The idea is to establish a methodology that people from other countries in the European Union can then use to analyse their own public broadcasting systems with.

D. JACOPO CUSTODI, MA in Political Philosophy, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona

Populism, Left-Wing Populism, and Patriotism

In the last two decades, populist movements have been on the rise in vast areas of Europe and the Americas. Why are we witnessing a populist outbreak nowadays? Starting from this question, this article sets out an overview of populism and proposes a combined approach to study populist phenomena, based on Laclauian and Ideational accounts. This provides the necessary framework to move on to the analysis of left-wing populism, which is less studied in academia. As this article claims, left-wing populism presents specific features that make it substantively different from both right-wing populism and traditional radical leftist forces. Moreover, it seems about to establish itself as the main tendency within the contemporary Western radical left family. Hence, the need to foster the research on left-populist actors. Focusing on their patriotic values, the article suggests that they endorse a form of non-ethnical nationalism that mingles constitutional patriotism with the leftist focus on social issues, framed within the populist ‘people-elite’ dichotomy, alongside with the emotional and moral elements of populism. However, left-wing populists also back supra-national identities and regional integration processes, to the point that regionalism represents an important part of their patriotism.

E. JIŘÍ CULKA, MA in Law and Jurisprudence, Charles University, Prague

Politics and Economics – Conflicts of Interest?

My paper will deal with the issue of inter-connection of political and economic power. I would like to address the essentials as well as the issue of limitation of conflict of interests. This aims at those politicians accumulating the ownership of media with holding high political positions that have (sometimes even direct) influence on their economic interests. This is/was not only the case of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy but also the case of Andrej Babis in the Czech Republic, who happens to cumulate the position of the leader (and de facto owner) of the strongest political movement, MP, owner of major media corporations, owner of a big consortium of food enterprises and the position of minister of finance of the Czech Republic (until recently). How does the society feel the consequences? What could be the impact of this cumulation of power on the perception of democracy by the society? And could the ownership of media even be free of any influence given the act that any sort of (big) media would hardly survive without an additional economic background? This also brings about the questions whether and how to limit this conflict of interest in democracy and what sort of influence it does/does not have on the trust of the people in the democratic process. The way how do the media owned by the “oligarchs” influence the public opinions and contribute to the “disgust” of the people (i.e. resulting into some voters seeking alternatives to the traditional parties and also another group of voters seeking an alternative to the oligarchs) could also be included.
F. PETRA A. BERÁNKOVÁ, PhD student in Sociology, Charles University, Prague

*Where is the Boundary of Activism? Relating Activism to the Realm of Politics*

In recent years, a growing body of work (e.g. Holzer, Sorosen 2003; de Vries 2007) recognizes a change in the way politics works within democracies around the world. Such notions build on Ulrich Beck’s concept of “subpolitics” (1997), i.e. the blurring boundary of the realm of politics. Yet little of the work has collected empirical evidence of such change. In the context of the Czech Republic, scholars reflect on an influential discourse of “apolitics”, “anti-politics”, or “nonpolitical politics”. Anti-politics is usually traced back to major Czech thinkers like Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia (Havelka 2016), or to Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic (Kopecek 2002). However, the concept of anti-politics is rather used for describing a specific tradition of thinking, so it is not linked to an empirical investigation of Czech political culture. Drawing upon the concept of symbolic boundaries by Michele Lamont (1992), I tackle the question of how Czech activists relate to the realm of politics. I identify two strategies of crossing the boundary of politics: the change of identity and developing a new sphere of activist politics. First of all, I frame the topic in the context of social movement literature; secondly, I present interviewees’ biographical paths from activism to politics. My argument suggests that the Beck’s concept of subpolitics can be seen also in terms of the concept of activist politics.

G. BEATRIZ LAGARTO, MA in International Relations and Political Science, Católica University, Lisbon - *The Danger of Ideologies*

In my presentation I would like to present some ideas on the problem of ideologies, which includes populism, inspired by professor John Kekes. Politics that defend ideologies assume that there’s a highest good that must be protected no matter what, and so are willing to put aside other political goods, which are also important, if needed in order to protect the highest good. The political goods we are talking about are autonomy, justice, liberty, order, security, education, etc. For instance, populism separates society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”; populism also argues that what matters is the general will of the people, meaning the majority. So, for populists the highest good old be the general will of the people. Through his arguments in the “The Art of Politics”, professor Kekes helps us to understand why ideologies are so dangerous as they simply give us a systematic way of thinking which ignores particular circumstances of time and space. Populism suffers from the same symptoms of other ideologies, especially because it seems to deny any conflicting interests within “the people” and gives no space to political opponents. It’s not easy to answer the question “Is Democracy in Crisis?”, but even so we should be alert to the rise of populism in Europe and consider the dangers that come with it.

I. KATHARINA LAWALL, MPhil in European Politics and Society, University of Oxford

*The Disappearance of the Radical Right Gender Gap?*

Until recently, there seemed to be a scholarly consensus that men supported and represented radical right wing parties in greater numbers than women. The “radical right gender gap” proved a consistent finding across studies on the demography of the radical right electorate in Europe. However, since the Front National’s successes in 2009, political science research from France has hinted at the potential disappearance or diminishing of the radical right gender gap. Have women started supporting radical right-wing parties in greater numbers? And if so, why? I am examining how radical right populist parties have reframed immigration and Islamophobia as “women’s issues”. In line with Sara Farris’ recent book on femonationalism, my research explores in how far the appropriation of feminist discourse and framing by radical right populist parties is a successful vote maximising strategy.