

On the Integration of Populism into the Democratic Public Sphere

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Abstract: The central thesis of this article is that populism is a side effect of liberal democracy and a reliable indicator of the relationship between liberal democracy and its polar opposite – illiberal majoritarianism. As long as liberal democracy prevails over illiberal majoritarianism, populism remains dormant. Populism rises and becomes conspicuous only if certain manifestations of illiberal majoritarianism or illiberal elitism reach a critical point in terms of number and impact. More exactly, populism becomes active when there are too few reasonable and effective responses to the growth of illiberal majoritarianism. Illustrating the defense mechanism of compensation, the rise of populism correlates with a cluster of exaggerated or overdone reactions to actions inspired by illiberal majoritarianism. These reactions vary sharply from one society to another according to (a) the specific challenges of illiberal majoritarianism, (b) the reactivity of people who bear the liberal democratic values, and (c) the credibility enjoyed by the mainstream liberal democratic forces in that society. In brief, although illiberal majoritarianism sets off a cluster of populist reactions in any society, the rise of populism always takes distinct forms. Thus, it is confirmed the status of populism as a chameleonic phenomenon.

The argumentative thread has four main parts. Firstly, it is developed a constitutive model of liberal democracy as an ideal political system that is underpinned by the following organizing principles or attractors: inclusiveness, political equality, political participation, predominance of concurrent majority, the containment and predictability of the government power, and the enforcement of the non-aggression principle. Secondly, the attractors of liberal democracy are contrasted against the recent state of affairs in the Euro-Atlantic space to illustrate the assertion presented here that today illiberal majoritarianism tends to prevail over liberal democracy. In the third step, it is argued that the countless definitions of populism only

emphasize different symptoms of the rise of populism, depending on the particular circumstances in which society evolves. Finally, it is substantiated the claim that populism and populists can and should be integrated into the democratic political system, in particular into the democratic public sphere.

Keywords: populism, populistness, liberal democracy, illiberal majoritarianism, polar opposite, side effect, overdone reaction, attractor