Populism as a Factor of Destabilisation in Consolidated Democracies

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Abstract

This study offers a discussion of the dangers to the stability of political systems in consolidated democracies posed by contemporary populism, with a particular focus on the dynamic development of extreme right-wing populism. The author considers the consequences of efficient populist campaigns, such as Brexit in Great Britain, lowered trust towards the United States under Trump's administration and practices followed by the Law and Justice party (PiS) under the leadership of Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, which seem especially destructive for liberal democracy. Further examples are those of Hungary and Turkey, where the political systems have eroded into semi-consolidated democracy in the case of the former and an authoritarian system in the latter case. A comparative analysis of freedom indices indicates some dangers related to de-consolidation of the democratic system in Poland. Furthermore, the study points out dangers arising from the transformation of soft populism, understood as communication rhetoric oriented towards the concentration of power in the hands of populist leaders, which clearly paves the way for the dismantling of consolidated democracy in favour of an authoritarian system. The conclusions of the study outlines a variety of actions which can be undertaken to protect the achievements of liberal democracy.

Keywords:

security of the political system, right-wing populism, destabilisation of the rule of law, liberal democracy, consolidated democracy, semi-consolidated democracy, authoritarianism.

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1. Introduction and methodology

Political competition and the attendant alternation of power is a crucial feature of the political system in consolidated democracy. Legal principles, which define the political system of the state, are guarded by an independent judiciary system, in compliance with the separation-of-powers principle defined by Montesquieu, and supported by the fourth estate – free media. The sources of inspiration for the rule of law systems in Western consolidated democracies can be found in different periods of history: Ancient Greece and Rome, the Age of Enlightenment, the political transformations of the twentieth century, including the interwar period, seen as a harbinger of liberal democracy, a system that reached its heyday in Western countries after the Second World War, and in Central European countries – after 1989. In the history of the Western World, free democratic systems with their wide range of civil liberties and universal suffrage have not developed without disruptions, and nor have they always been awaited. Liberal democratic political systems in Western countries have not been homogenous, and they have taken various forms. What constitutes their liberal and democratic foundations is respect for the separation of powers, civil liberties, equality of citizens before the law, freedom of speech and economic freedom. These liberties underlie the democratic rule of law, but they do not make up the full list.

The aim of this study is to analyse the influence of extreme right-wing populism on the freedom of the political system in a particular state. It is based on the assumption that the system of consolidated democracy is a liberal democracy with its democratic rule of law. Depending on the degree of freedom and the level of its restrictions, different political systems can be classified into the following categories: consolidated democracy, semi-consolidated democracy, hybrid regime, semi-consolidated authoritarian regime, and, in the most extreme cases, consolidated authoritarian regime.²

This study aims to offer some answers to the following research questions: What are the factors behind the dynamic development of contemporary populism? What is the potential impact of extreme right-wing populism on the political sys-

² This article adopts a typology of political systems based on their attitude to the concepts of democracy and authoritarianism, as proposed by Andrzej Antoszewski and Ryszard Herbut, who in turn draw on the conceptions put forward by scholars such as Larry Diamond, Joseph Schumpeter and Robert Dahl. Andrzej Antoszewski and Ryszard Herbut emphasise the need to distinguish two sub-categories of democratic systems: consolidated (stable-full) and semi-consolidated (unstable-flawed/limited). Consolidated democracies are those that respect the separation of powers, sustain competitive party systems and adequately competitive elections, do not include decision-making centres uncontrolled by voters, impose limits on executive authority, and guarantee civil rights, as reflected in the unfettered development of civil society. Semi-consolidated democracies are often “new”, or, as Dahl calls them “newer” or “immature”; Diamond describes them as “electoral democracies”. Although they meet the basic criteria characteristic of consolidated democracies, there are nevertheless flaws in their practical application. Consequently, such democracies must be considered incomplete (Antoszewski and Herbut 2001, 18–49).

tems of consolidated democracies? Is liberal democracy and the democratic rule of law coming to an end? What action should be undertaken by defenders of consolidated democracies in order to reduce negative consequences of populism?

The analysis of threats to the stability of political systems in consolidated democracies which are posed by contemporary populism considers the experience of British democracy in view of the results of the Brexit referendum and the process of leaving the EU as well as American challenges which obviously come with the administration of Donald Trump.

The comparative analysis offered here is also based on the examples of Hungary and Turkey, where the political systems have eroded into semi-consolidated democracy in the case of the former and an authoritarian system in the latter case. The case of Poland is particularly emphasised in the study; it is a country which until recently has been pursuing its systemic transformation, has successfully adapted liberal democracy and has set an example for other states. However, since the Law and Justice party (PiS), a right-wing populist formation led by Jarosław Kaczyński, came to power, the country has been pushed onto the path previously marked by Hungary.

The qualitative analysis of facts and consequences of the rule of right-wing populists is supported by a comparative analysis of freedom indices provided by the Freedom House organisation, which every year quantifies a number of key areas that define the components of political systems in countries all over the world. The qualitative part of the study is supported by an analysis of dangers stemming from the transformation of soft populism, understood as a communicative rhetoric oriented towards the concentration of power in the hands of populist leaders. The conclusions of the study outline a variety of possible actions which can be undertaken in order to protect the achievements of liberal democracy.

2. Literature review

Populism is not a new phenomenon in the history of Western civilisation. In Hellenic philosophy, it is possible to observe an awareness of seemingly natural changeability of forms of government and attendant political doctrines (Piskozub 2003, 20). Although in his concept of a cycle of forms of government Plato (Plato 2016) does not mention populism, his observations on the oscillation between the extreme manifestations of those forms allows us to identify a degenerated type of democracy known as ochlocracy, a transitional form which can be most frequently observed between democracy and anarchy (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Ochlocracy in the Hellenic cycle of forms of government

Source: the author's own study, based on the Hellenic concept of a political cycle and its corresponding spiritual attitudes (Piskozub 2003, 20; Kahn 1980, 57)

The term *ochlocracy* comes from the Greek word *ochlos*, which refers to poor, common people (Hansen 1999, 66, 399). Viewed from the perspective of creators of the rule of law based on the principle of direct democracy, the term *ochlos* was not a synonym of *demos* (which referred to all Athenian people and the state of Athens), nor was it associated with a positively perceived rule of the people defined by the term *demokratia*. As can be observed in literature, democrats have always identified the notion of *ochlos* with such negative terms as “mob” or “crowd”. By contrast, critics of existing democracy who had the ambition to claim power used the notion of *ochlos* as a synonym of *demos*. In that way, they identified their own group as Hellenic citizens rightfully contesting the existing authorities. Since then, such an attitude has been appealing to the next generations of populists.

In his analysis of populism, Adrian Kuzminski (Kuzminski 2008) identifies its positive aspects: the populist agenda comes as a direct answer to political and economic faults of the existing system. He also points out the bankruptcy of our unrep-

representative system of governance: a plutocratic oligarchy reinforced by the manipulation of general elections and referenda which claim to be “democratic”. According to Kuzminski, “populism holds out the hope of dissolving, peacefully and over the time, the domineering personal and corporate concentrations of wealth and political power that characterize our society, so as to free and advance, rather than hinder and exploit, the private energies of labour, talent, and ambition” (Kuzminski 2008, 17). Such an interpretation of populism captures its contemporary ideas and its previous types, which aimed to implement some utopian ideas of common equality under the slogans of “power to the people”. The most extreme example of severely distorted implementation of the idea of equality was the fate of people who lived under communist rule in the twentieth century. It should be noted that communist countries often defined their governance systems as “democratic” (suffice it to mention such names as the German Democratic Republic or the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea). They willingly applied a nationalist and populist form to pseudo-socialist contents. Regardless of attempts to dignify populist movements, the term is often used in a pejorative sense.

The vicious circle of the cyclical triumph of populism is emphasised by economists Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991, 7–13). In his research studies on the countries of South America and South Africa, David Fowkes identifies economic factors as the crucial ones in the process of falling into a trap of populism. He also points out some normative implications and attendant dangers, and observes that “populism is problematic because it produces institutional and economic damage in predictable ways” (Fowkes 2011). The positive heroes of Fawkes’ analysis that have successfully avoided the trap of populism are Brazil and South Africa, which implemented a relatively reasonable economic policy. Unfortunately, the story does not end with this study: in 2018 the election campaign in Brazil brought victory to a die-hard populist, Jair Bolsonaro. Considering a certain cyclicity of the rise of populism discussed by Dornbusch and Edwards, we can assume that it comes as an uncomfortable but probable form, which is conducive to alternation of power or its seizure in democratic systems.

It is impossible to pinpoint one crucial reason which could explain a serious stumble of the seemingly well-established system of liberal democratic states that we can witness today. The current crisis of liberal democracy and democratic rule of law can be attributed to such phenomena as adaptive difficulties that some social groups have experienced under the conditions of advancing globalisation. It seems that what dealt a blow to the liberal systems in the 2010s was a combination of independent processes and inspired activity. The challenges faced by liberal democracies can be divided into three levels: (1) meta-level – social and economic inequalities stemming from globalisation; subsidisation of selected sectors (e.g. agriculture) at the expense of economies of third countries (leading to their degradation); job insecurity resulting from the relocation of industry and services; distortion of the financial system (which has become separated from the material value) leading to

economic crises, e.g. in 2008; (2) macro-state level – relatively low alternation of power and limited possibilities of pursuing social activity by non-establishment groups; exhaustion of the elites, their persistence in power and some cases of corruption generating additional lack of trust in the political system; pauperisation of activists and their further radicalisation; (3) micro-local level – crises and exclusion of peripheral societies and economies; different, often low levels of education in peripheral regions; disproportionally strong influence of extreme ideologies or religious factions which are negatively oriented towards the system of the democratic rule of law and liberal democracy.

A system characteristic of Western countries of the second half of the twentieth century, liberal democracy has faced the populist challenge in the 2010s. Political theoreticians and philosophers point out a difficult partnership of liberal and democratic concepts (Bobbio 1987). They also stress the primacy of liberal values over the democratic principle: while liberal values must be democratic by definition, democracy, boiled down to casting a vote, can function without the civil liberties offered by the liberal system. It follows that *demos* does not necessarily have to be liberal. Quite the opposite, *demos* can be brutal, reactionary and oriented towards the exclusion of others (Mann 2005; Schmitt 1985, 9).

Contemporary political, social and economic differences in Western societies are often associated with globalisation, which has been growing stronger since the mid-1990s. Criticism of globalisation and a growing rebellion against open and liberal economy have become common elements in various contestation movements. Critics of globalisation based on liberal economic values blame it for the stratification of societies and an ongoing decline of the middle class, which so far has been the agent of social cohesion. Christophe Guilluy (Guilluy 2018) states that “Western people have been falling apart into two worlds: those at the top and those at the bottom, the wealthy and the poor, the contented and the unhappy, the cosmopolitans and those who are strongly set in their environment, the mobile and the settled, those who are progressive, open and – it is impossible to avoid that terrible word – those who are populists” (after Leick 2018).

Contestation movements, including populism, which can be understood in such terms to a certain extent, can function as a legitimate channel for expressing the needs of groups who are somehow socially excluded (Ben-Ami 2016; Kozłowski 2008, 2010). The indignation of the excluded can be expressed in various forms and with various levels of intensity. It can be a simple vote for a party which eagerly criticises the condition of the state and the social and economic condition of the electorate (a famous slogan of the PiS party: “Poland is in ruin”, used during the 2015 general elections), but it can also be a violent social protest involving street riots, as could be observed in the case of the yellow-vest movement in France at the turn of 2018 and 2019.

The explicit identification of transitional forms of populism is hindered by the lack of clearly exclusive features of populist movements. However, some common characteristics of such formations can be observed in Western countries on both sides of the Atlantic. According to John B. Judis, a definition of American or European populism cannot be limited to the traditional division into the right-wing, the left-wing and the centrists. American and European populists operate using ideology to a lesser extent, as they more often refer to the political logic of taking advantage of opportunities and contexts to gain support for their slogans and activities. From this perspective, left-wing populism does not aim to overthrow the capitalist order but to find its own place in that system. Judis believes that the central aspect of left-wing populist movements is their orientation on the division into “the people” and “the elite”; right-wing populism, in turn, is oriented on the division into “the people”, “the elite” and the third group – allegedly preferred by the elites – immigrants (Judis 2016).

2.1 From contestation to right-wing populism

Although racism, hostility towards immigrants and disdain for liberal democracy are common features of American and European populisms (and are sometimes declared with pride), we can observe some significant differences between them. Paul Krugman writes that European populism is “at least partly real”, whereas Trumpist populism turns out to be “entirely fake, a scam sold to working-class voters who are in for a rude awakening” (Krugman 2016). European populists implement solutions which, to some extent, can be taken at their face value – they can meet the expectations of socially excluded groups. Let us just mention those introduced in Poland: the so-called 500+ programme, a cash benefit scheme for all children under eighteen (which was, however, not available to the first child in the family – this issue has been left as a bargaining power for the next parliamentary election and introduced few months beforehand appropriately), an increase in the minimum wage, a partial ban on Sunday trading, and a lowering of the retirement age. Welfare-state programmes are also on the agenda of other populist parties in Europe, for example the National Front in France (of course, the state is only supposed to take care of “proper” citizens who match all the declared ideological slogans). By contrast, Trump’s populism – declared under the slogan “Make America great again” – actually cares for rich citizens. At present, America has been taking advantage of favourable economic conditions, as reflected by a number of economic indices; however, the open theatres of the trade war have not yet brought any measurable results for the populist proletariat. The reversal of the health-insurance programme implemented by Barack Obama’s administration will undoubtedly result in the exclusion of millions of American people from the health-insurance system.

Referring to the very beginning of Trump’s presidency, which – considering its style and actions – comes as an affirmation of populism, Robert Singh points out its destructive potential. Discussing the looming danger, he introduces a “defla-

tionary” interpretation of Trump’s populism (Singh 2017). He provides three arguments: firstly, Trump’s populism is ambiguously flexible. Trump confirms populist principles but the application of such principles is insufficient to describe Trump. The American president “illustrates its capacious adaptability and thinly fluid normative content that functions as an artefact of whatever ideological prefix is attached.” Secondly, populism is a necessary but insufficient condition for Trump’s critical involvement, both in terms of populism in elections and populism in power. “Structural accounts exaggerating Trump’s significance as vanguard of a transnational awakening misinterpret surface similarities and temporal coincidences” of the rise of some similar “arguers”. Thirdly, Singh believes that “the constitutional threat of Trump in power is less than meets his ubiquitous ‘I. Democratic deconsolidation cannot be discounted.”

Once in power, populists do not abandon the strategy applied during the fight for it. They continue to stir a sense of danger, present themselves not as winners but as victims, mobilise voters to stay vigilant, and foster the polarisation of the public opinion. These tactics come as a cover and can lead to the gradual dismantling of a liberal democratic system, which is sometimes referred to as a “crawling coup d’état”. The consecutive stages of the scenario are as follows: “colonisation” of public institutions, mass-scale clientelism, systematic repressions and, eventually, replacement of pro-institutional officials with “our own people”, who may be mediocre but will remain loyal. All that is done in the name of the so-called opposition to the old system. Hence, institutions of the democratic legal order are attacked: the judiciary (of all levels) and the media, both public (which can be transformed into an instrument of government propaganda) and those which are not controlled by the authorities and are critical about the government (the use of subsidies or the allocation of advertising budgets of companies controlled by the government to particular pro-government media). Moreover, as can be observed in Poland – where certain press titles are not available at petrol stations owned by government-controlled companies – also the system of press distribution can become an instrument of discrimination against independent media. Populism in power, then, is not a model plebeian populism but can be highly sophisticated in its pragmatism. Anne Applebaum (Applebaum 2019) observes that it is also possible to get an impression that it is mere hypocrisy. It should be, however, admitted that populism in power generously invests public money into activities which maintain its popularity or are oriented towards particular interests of groups supporting the government.

2.2 Unbidden allies of populists

Communication with and integration of socially excluded groups are certainly important, but they do not seem to fully explain the success of contestation movements. Another significant factor at play here is support to new right-wing populism provided by centres oriented towards the destruction of institutions of Western countries. What should be stressed in this context is not only cyberattacks from

Russia and ISIS, but also threats coming from other countries, such as North Korea or China. Russia has established a special unit which in Western countries is referred to as the Troll Factory (MacFarquhar 2018, A11). Its task is to run disinformation campaigns aiming to destabilise the European Union or its particular member states. As discovered, such campaigns were conducted in Great Britain before the Brexit referendum and in Germany, where fake news was spread in social media. In Poland, the activity of Internet haters whose posts were written in incorrect Polish (which could indicate their Russian origin) intensified before the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2015. In the United States, special counsel Mueller and his staff, which investigated links between the circles of President Donald Trump and Russian oligarchs, found many irregularities in this respect.³ Although the committee did not confirm the accusations of criminal collaboration of the Republican candidate with Russian services, it identified an extraordinary amount of contacts and established facts proving their direct involvement in discrediting the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton.

The American election and the referendum in Great Britain were among the first projects of social manipulation involving IT technologies.⁴ In a sense, the application of advanced technologies and skilful use of social media amounted to a Stalinist-type operation of social engineering (Westerman 2011) – the objective was to change the political discourse, and it was successfully accomplished. Although the cases under consideration involved the use of social media, the communication method was based on a simplified model of imagined social problems conjured in order to form the spirit of new right-wing populism.

Drawing attention to fake news and deliberate manipulation aiming to foster instability has increased the vigilance of regulators and institutions responsible for state protection. In 2018 the presidential election in France and the parliamentary election in Germany were of particularly high significance in Europe. Although

3 Numerous news agencies, such as CNN, BBC and others, keep informing us about new facts proving some links between the US presidential candidate of that time, Donald Trump, and Russian business and intelligence services, observed during the election campaign. In the exclusive interview published by *Time* on 29 December 2018, readers could learn about some financial dependencies between Trump's consultant Paul Manafort and Oleg Deripaska, a Russian billionaire close to the Kremlin circles. In 2016, during the presidential campaign, an agent of the Russian intelligence service, Victor Boyarkin, acted as an intermediary between Deripaska and Manafort. Manafort and Boyarkin were supposed to agree upon the conditions for the repayment of multi-million debts of the American politician, which he owed to the Russian oligarch. The cases against Manafort have not been concluded yet, but he has already been sentenced for eight economic offences (August 2018) and for conspiracy against the USA (September 2018); he has also lost the case in which he is accused of hindering cooperation with the Justice Department. After the sentences, Manafort has declared his closer cooperation, so it is possible that some new facts will soon be revealed (see Shuster 2018).

4 Mark Zuckerberg and his company, Facebook, are also accused of not actively addressing major issues of unethical social manipulation. The notorious role of Facebook and an affair of the Cambridge Analytica company has been widely commented upon by media all over the world. Investigations of their activity have not yet concluded.

populist formations were rejected in both cases, what could not remain unnoticed was a systematic increase in their popularity.

An observation summing up contemporary populism should point out its chaotic and heterogeneous nature. It can be identified as leadership populism, which is very close to semi-consolidated authoritarianism. Its various features can be traced in such various political leaders as Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, Beppe Grillo, Viktor Orbán, Jarosław Kaczyński, Jeremy Corbyn or Boris Johnson. Therefore, populism cannot be identified as one consistent ideological system, one type or one element, often of right-wing nature. For example, in Great Britain, Corbynism includes a very strong populist component; however, in many ways, its pluralistic features are more distinctive than those observed in its opponents (Molyneux and Osborne 2017). On the Polish political scene, a left-wing politician, Robert Biedroń, has also taken a populist-pluralist path.

3. Findings

As it is today, populist ideology is mainly based on nostalgia, with its idyllic image of an imagined past: “Much of the current upheaval in Europe evokes Edmund Burke’s repudiation in 1790 of the French Revolution as the product of a misguided faith in ideas that defied people’s attachment to history and tradition” (Ben-Ami 2016). Although right-wing populism in Western countries is nothing new, it has been marginalised in public life for several decades. In Central and Western Europe, it has been absent in the mainstream of political life since the 1930s. References to the rhetoric of those times can be observed in the current political discourse, which is now additionally enhanced with the specific language of communist newspeak used in the countries which experienced the so-called people’s democracy (as is the case of speeches made by Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the PiS party, which has been in power in Poland since 2015).

The revival of populism should be attributed to an increased sense of threat in some Western societies which had to face an unprecedented wave of immigration in 2015. The fear of immigration from regions which are culturally different from the West has reinforced the sense of cultural threat and it has, in a way, redefined nativism. A strong stress on slogans voicing the need to protect the nation, culture and religion against foreign invaders has become the common denominator for populists of various Western countries. Considering the fact that in 2015 Europe received approximately 1.5 million refugees and immigrants (mostly Muslims), of whom about a million came to Germany, it is easier to understand why new right-wing populism has become a mass-scale phenomenon. It should also be remembered that reluctance and concerns expressed by Western societies towards Muslims are related to a number of terrorist attacks conducted by Islamic extremists; let us just mention the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York (11 September

2001), on the underground in Madrid before the parliamentary election in Spain (a quick change in the public opinion contributed to the smashing victory of the right wing in 2004), on public transport and communication routes in London (in 2005 and 2017) and others. The fear of radical Islam has been drawing the attention of Western societies for some time, integrating various movements radically oriented towards the fight against cultural differences (not only against Islam). One clear example here is the activity of a Dutch politician, Geert Wilders, whose popularity has been constantly growing under extremely nationalistic and anti-immigrant slogans aimed against, among others, Polish people who work in the Netherlands.

Contemporary right-wing populism is characterised by the policy of isolationism and anti-globalism. European populists turned against Chancellor Angela Merkel, who was accused of running the policy of open borders in 2015, which contributed to mass immigration, presented as an invasion of Europe. Political choices of right-wing populists are not limited to personal aversion against the leader of the German government. They often perceive the German state itself as hostile, because of the increasingly important role that it plays in the European Union. The self-definition of right-wing populism is based on the identification of agents – people, states or institutions – who/which are hostile towards their ideals and, in this way, also towards their country. Hence, the European Union has become the enemy number one, and the Euro-sceptical attitude has become a point of honour for right-wing populists. However, this has never prevented anti-European members of the European Parliament from claiming their parliamentary allowances and other benefits. Indeed, hostile attitude towards the European Union must have been the reason why Marie Le Pen, a French presidential candidate and Member of the European Parliament, not only received allowances from the institution she hated so much, but also claimed ineligible expenses, extorting extra money from the EU budget (Strzałkowski 2017).

The anti-EU attitude gained momentum when British membership in the EU was used in some political games within the UK. Although the country joined the EEC relatively late and under some exceptional conditions, this former world power has never assumed the role of the European integration leader. The struggle over the leadership of the Conservative Party prompted then Prime Minister David Cameron to announce a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. Following an unprecedented wave of manipulation in the referendum campaign, what seemed a mere formality taken to secure his position in fact brought unexpected results. Apart from the total criticism of globalisation and great concern over the collapse of the nation state, the campaign also relied on the idyllic image of the past, presented as the times when people lived a safe life in a friendly environment and were free from the worries of everyday existence. Such distorted idealisation of the past, however, was not the essence of the false image of reality which was created by populists and which tipped the Brexit vote.

British Brexit supporters did not focus their campaign on criticism of the European Union; let us just mention often discussed questions of unemployment of the young, a deficit of democracy in the EU institutions, excessive Brussels bureaucracy and the imposed policy of public finance, for example. The anti-EU campaign appealed to basic instincts and used arguments based on data which could not be actually proved – it stirred fear and hatred of “strangers”, and economic arguments were brought down to some absurd and fictional data. The new dimension of populism was apparent not in the use of facts and data but in the use of emotions and manipulation engineering of social media (one perfect example is the activity undertaken by a British company, Cambridge Analytica). The “good practices” of such populism have already been adopted by populists in other countries. One of the main characters of the British anti-EU campaign is Boris Johnson, “whose clownery sets him as an example of what we could call the idiocy of authority in a democratic society”, as Molyneux and Osborne put it (Molyneux and Osborne 2017, 6).

New right-wing populism has finally found a way to present itself as an alternative to the current political system. Adopting an uncompromising rhetoric of protest, populism provides easy answers to complicated questions in a clear and explicit way. At this stage, the main elements are isolationism and an anti-immigrant attitude. In such a political discourse, the questions of economy and everyday existence are less important; however later on, they become the main tool applied to win voters’ favour (Woods 2016). Simplified message and shallow rhetoric used in demagogic attacks on political opponents contribute to the quick spread of populism. What makes a picture of the situation complete is the digital support provided by external actors aiming to cause disruption in Western democracies; it has not been sufficient to tip the vote in favour of anti-system actors in some places. Once in power, populists eagerly reach for public money to reward their politicians and officials with salaries and benefits which are disproportionally high in relation to the economic efficiency of their work – a phenomenon referred to by Karl August Wittfogel (1957) as “beggars’ democracy”.

Populism has not been avoided by the United States, the world power crucial in the post-war order. The phenomenon of Trump’s victory in the election was based on the application of several techniques and methods of mass-scale impact on society by social media, which exceeded generally accepted ethical standards. Applying modern IT tools in order to spread the message about political programmes is not a new practice. Barack Obama’s double victory was also based on the application of such modern communication channels. What came as a major innovation of Trump’s campaign was an unprecedented scale of fake news and automation of messaging (use of bots). Importantly, Trump’s campaign staff turned for help to Russian politicians and services, who became engaged in the disinformation campaign against Trump’s rival, Hillary Clinton.

The methods applied by Trump to exercise power make us think about the intentions and directions of the endorsed governance practice. It is possible to observe some risk of collapse of the liberal democratic system even in such a stable democracy as the United States. It is also emphasised that “if Trump’s regime descends – as seems perfectly possible – into outright authoritarianism this will not be simply down to its populism but down to the illiberal intolerance of Trump and the fragility of institutions – representative and legal – to counteract that intolerance” (underlined by A. R. Kozłowski) (Molyneux and Osborne 2017, 8; Ostiguy and Roberts 2016).

Indeed, nationalist and populist pressure on institutions of Western democracies severely affects their position in both national and international contexts. Although this pressure undermines trust in democracy, as can be observed in the chaos caused by Brexit, so far it has not brought about any systemic reduction in the scope of liberties of the democratic system. The situation is different in the countries where liberal traditions have not been so strong and which have proved to be susceptible to authoritarian tendencies. The degradation of the system can be observed in the countries which have experienced long years of right-wing populism governance, such as Turkey and Hungary. Poland under the rule of the PiS party also displays a tendency towards abandoning the system of consolidated democracy.

The decline of democracy has already become a fact in Turkey, the country ruled by a politician who fits perfectly into the model of a populist leader: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The fact that the Freedom House organisation downgraded the political system of Turkey to the category of authoritarian regimes reflects long years of rule which involved limiting civil liberties and freedom of media, repression against political opponents and people groundlessly accused of involvement in opposition, organising a legally defective constitutional referendum leading to the centralisation of power in the president’s hands, mass-scale purges of officials, including state school teachers, and other practices limiting civil rights in favour of obedience to the government. In the aftermath of the failed coup of 2016, about 60,000 people were arrested, over 160 media outlets were closed and over 150 journalists were imprisoned, as were the leaders of the third largest political party in the parliament; almost 100 town mayors in the country were replaced on the basis of exceptional measures or as a result of political pressure exerted by the president.⁵

A serious threat of destruction of the democratic system can be observed in Hungary, where the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, openly attempts to suppress the civil society. Government pressure on the opposition is growing, and citizens, who live in the atmosphere of intimidation, are reluctant to discuss any political topics. Among the countries of Central Europe, Hungary has systematically reported the steepest decrease in the freedom index of the Freedom House organisation for ten

5 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>

Table 1
The change in the value of Freedom Indices in Turkey, Hungary and Poland, 2010–2019

	Freedom index	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Turkey	Freedom Rating	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	3	3	3	3.5	3.5	3.5	4.5	5.5	5.5
	Political Rights	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	5	5
	Civil Liberties	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	3	3	3	3	3	4	5	6	6
	Press Freedom Score	0 = Best, 100 = Worst	51	54	55	56	62	71	76	n.d.	n.d.
	Press Freedom Status		Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Not Free	Not Free	Not Free	n.d.	n.d.
	Aggregate Freedom Score	100 = Best, 0 = Worst	63	63	63	61	60	53	38	32	31
	Aggregate Freedom Status		Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Not Free	Not Free

Hungary	Freedom Rating	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	1	1	1.5	1.5	2	2	2.5	2.5	3
	Political Rights	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	3
	Civil Liberties	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
	Press Freedom Score	0 = Best, 100 = Worst	23	30	36	36	37	40	44	n.d.	n.d.
	Press Freedom Status		Free	Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free	Partly Free
	Aggregate Freedom Score	100 = Best, 0 = Worst	91	90	88	88	82	79	76	72	70
	Aggregate Freedom Status		Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Partly Free
	Freedom Rating	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5	1.5	2
	Political Rights	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
	Civil Liberties	1 = Best, 7 = Worst	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Poland	Press Freedom Score	0 = Best, 100 = Worst	24	25	25	26	27	28	34	n.d.	n.d.
	Press Freedom Status		Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Partly Free	n.d.	n.d.
	Aggregate Freedom Score	100 = Best, 0 = Worst	93	93	93	93	93	93	89	85	84
	Aggregate Freedom Status		Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free

Source: the author's own study based on the data provided by the Freedom House organisation; available at <https://freedomhouse.org/content/free-dom-world-data-and-resources> (last accessed 10 March 2019)

years. The country has been downgraded from the category of consolidated democracy to the category of semi-consolidated democracy.⁶

Anti-immigrant and Euro-sceptical attitudes have provided an impulse for integration of extreme right-wing circles in Germany. The wave of fear of strangers and deep scepticism towards EU institutions have contributed to the establishment of a party named Alternative for Germany (AfD). Although the party has not managed to come to power in Germany, the fact that it entered the parliament in 2017 comes as a symbolic breakthrough: an extreme right-wing party won seats in the German Parliament for the first time after 1945. The slogans proclaimed by the AfD remind us of the morose interwar period. Let us just mention that in their election campaign the members of this party openly declared the need of deporting large numbers of refugees and defined Islam as incompatible with the German national identity. The fear of the growing popularity of the AfD has undoubtedly mobilised the main political parties of Germany to make alliances, including some unlikely ones, and to make difficult decisions in order to avoid the return of the rule of the extreme right-wing party in the country with the infamous tradition of Nazi rule.

In the Netherlands, a xenophobic Party for Freedom has won strong popularity and came second in the last election. The Dutch system of proportional representation is a serious barrier to that populist party, and at present it seems that even if it came first at the polls, it would not have much chance to form the majority coalition. In Austria, the situation is different. Although the Islamophobic Freedom Party of Austria (originating from a neo-fascist Federation of Independents) has won the third position in the parliamentary election, it has been invited to rule with the conservative Austrian People's Party.

3.1 Right-wing populism in power in Poland

In Poland, the political discourse adopted in the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in 2015 by the right-wing parties, with the PiS party as the leader, was oriented towards populist rhetoric. They implemented such a strategy as a means to win at the ballot box – their main aim was to remove from power a centre-right party, the Civic Platform (PO), which had been ruling for eight years. The strategy of their election rhetoric was based on the total negation of the achievements of the ruling party, regardless of the obvious economic success of Poland, which was able to cope with the global economic crisis. The PO conducted its campaign under the slogan of Poland as a “green island” amid the red sea of recession elsewhere in the EU. The PiS party attacked the government with the slogan of “the country in ruin”.

⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>

Prime Minister Donald Tusk (PO)⁷ and his government were groundlessly accused of the alleged “assassination” in Smolensk (President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, twin brother of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of PiS, died in a plane crash on Russian soil in 2010).

The level of emotions and intensity of accusations were not supposed to start a serious discussion but to foster integration of socially and economically excluded groups. The PiS party was supported by voters who were against the existing system. These were people who expressed their dissatisfaction with the liberal and democratic order, who wanted to break up the system of the Third Polish Republic (as post-1989 Poland is often referred to in public discourse) and who were dreaming about some imaginary Fourth Polish Republic, which would be a country proud of its history, fully independent, oriented towards an alliance with the United States, and which would emancipate itself from “the imaginary community” of the European Union (an expression used by Andrzej Duda – the President of Poland since 2015, a former member of PiS). The PiS party decided to make economic promises to attract the excluded or those who had a sense of injustice about the economic order: a 500 Polish złotys (about 120 EUR) cash benefit for all children under the age of eighteen except the first one in the family, and a favourable conversion of mortgage loans denominated in Swiss francs for approximately 700,000 citizens who were unhappy about their situation (most of them had taken out loans denominated in CHF at a very low exchange rate; soon after the global financial crisis, the CHF exchange rate almost doubled, leaving them in high debt). There was also a promise of lowering the retirement age to attract elderly voters – whatever could increase the chance of winning voters’ support, regardless of the economic consequences for the country, was eagerly promised.

In the field of politics, the right wing offered voters a programme of specific racial purity by attacking and denying the agreements entered by the Civic Platform government with the EU countries on the quotas of refugees from war-stricken Syria. In this way, some radical, fascist-oriented circles were attracted to the PiS party and to the Kukiz15 party, a formation cooperating with PiS but not included in the government. The language of the public debate did not change after the election. It aimed to convince voters that the government was besieged in its fortress as the only power on the side of citizens. Hate speech was in its full swing, spread by public media which were completely subdued to the ruling party as a convenient propaganda tool. Donald Tusk, Paweł Adamowicz and other former or present prominent politicians of the Civic Platform were presented as public enemies. In 2019 hate speech

7 Donald Tusk, who defeated the leader of the Law and Justice Party, Jarosław Kaczyński, in elections several times, has been particularly criticised by right-wing populists. Tusk was Prime Minister of Poland from 2007 to 2014, and since 1 December 2014 he has been the President of the European Council. Law and Justice sees Tusk’s strong political position as a threat to the party and its government rather than as a chance to secure Polish interests on the international scene.

took its toll during an annual event organised by the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, which had long been attacked by the PiS government and the Polish Catholic Church but had numerous supporters, especially among young people. During the event in Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz, the mayor of the city, was stabbed and died the next day.⁸ It was the second political murder in the history of Poland since it regained its independence in 1918 – the first one was the assassination of President Gabriel Narutowicz in 1922. The tragedy integrated anti-populists and brought a marked decrease in the level of hate speech in the polarised society for a short while. The public media, however, continued to present a one-sided message, which further strengthened their perception as an outlet of the ruling political party. In power since 2015, Polish populists have implemented social communication based on the strategy of a “besieged fortress” and “success propaganda”, resembling the language of the communist era.

Considering international politics, Germany and the European Union came to be perceived as enemies. The British were favoured (and the idea of Brexit did not change that attitude), as were the fascist-oriented and extreme right-wing presidential candidate in France, Marine Le Pen (the 2017 election), and similarly Italian's Matteo Salvini, while he was in a government (a visit to Poland in 2019). There was also an attempt to reach a political consensus among the countries of Central Europe based on the Three Seas Initiative, with Poland as a leader, however without any spectacular results. Undoubtedly, the international position of Poland has declined since then, which will probably result in a lower level of EU funds allocated to Poland. The obstruction of the EU institutions can also make it difficult for Poland to participate in key political and economic decisions which may directly affect the economic development of the EU countries. The attacks of the governing party on the EU also mean that it is against the European currency. This fact may additionally complicate a potential debate about Poland's joining the Euro-zone. Such negligence has some significant consequences, as it may result in the exclusion of Poland from the group of decision-makers.

Considering home affairs, the governing party has abandoned a relatively well-established system of junior-high-school education (introduced in 1999). Instead, they have implemented a system consisting of primary and secondary or vocational secondary schools, without junior high schools. Such a system used to function in the communist period in Poland. The reform has been implemented without proper educational programmes or infrastructure in place – the most important thing has been to put it into effect in order to mark a clear break from the existing educational system.

Although the Law and Justice party has such noble and democratic words in its name, it has been applying them in accordance with its own interpretation since the moment it came to power. One of the first decisions made by the newly

8 Mayor of Gdańsk from 1998 to 2019.

sworn-in President, Andrzej Duda, was to pardon his friend who acted illegally in the special services in favour of the PiS party; the decision was made before the final and binding sentence of the court.⁹ The ruling party's dissatisfaction with the existing system of justice (expressed in spite of the fact that the party had been in power a decade before) resulted in a decision to dismantle it. Numerous activities were undertaken by the ruling party, the Minister of Justice, Zbigniew Ziobro, the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, or the members of parliament who voted in accordance with the PiS party instructions in order to attack and to illegally appoint and remove members of the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court. Changes were made to the judicial structures at all levels of jurisdiction, if only it was considered favourable for the interests of the ruling party. The intensity of interference in the judicial system reached a scale unprecedented in consolidated democracies. It was much closer to the authoritarian system than to the democratic one. The European Union initiated the procedures of reviewing the state of the rule of law in Poland, and it was only because of the EU's resolute response and numerous interventions that the presidency of the Supreme Court was returned to Professor Małgorzata Gersdorf, who had been holding that position since 2014.¹⁰ The steepest decrease in the democracy index was reported in Poland as a result of interference by the executive power in the judicial system and its independence; the decrease in the democracy index also resulted from the politicisation of state media, activities undertaken against non-government organisations and the violation of parliamentary procedures.¹¹

In Hungary and in Poland the populist leaders have been ruthlessly continuing the process of taking control over democratic institutions (Sierakowski 2018). In both countries some illegal or almost illegal steps have been taken against non-government organisations (in Poland they involved the invigilation of some members of the organisation called the Citizens of the Republic of Poland, or illegal surveillance of Ryszard Petru, a member of parliament).

9 Controversially, President Andrzej Duda granted a presidential pardon to his party colleague, Minister Mariusz Kamiński, even before the court of appeal passed a final and binding judgment. Kamiński was sentenced to a term of three years in prison and banned for ten years from holding public posts for abuse of power and authorising illegal actions of the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau during the so-called "land affair" (*afery gruntowa*) in 2007. The trial concerned a special undercover operation from summer 2007, in which agents of the Bureau paid a "controlled bribe" to Piotr Ryba and Andrzej K. with a view to ensuring that the Ministry of Agriculture led by Andrzej Lepper issue a favourable decision to rezone farmland in the tourist region of Mazuria. The operation served to discredit and dismiss Andrzej Lepper, leader of the Samoobrona Party, from the coalition government.

10 In a bid to take control of the Supreme Court, the Law and Justice Party, with the approval of President Duda, passed an act lowering the retirement age, insisting that it applies equally to members of the judiciary over the age of 65, even though their term in office is guaranteed by the constitution.

11 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2018>

Table 2
Democracy Indices in Central Europe, the Freedom House organisation, 2001–2018

Democracy Score History by Country																		
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Bulgaria	3.42	3.33	3.38	3.25	3.18	2.93	2.89	2.86	3.04	3.04	3.07	3.14	3.18	3.25	3.29	3.25	3.36	3.39
Czech Republic	2.25	2.46	2.33	2.33	2.29	2.25	2.25	2.14	2.18	2.21	2.18	2.18	2.14	2.25	2.21	2.21	2.25	2.29
Estonia	2.13	2.00	2.00	1.92	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.93	1.93	1.96	1.93	1.93	1.96	1.96	1.96	1.93	1.93	1.82
Hungary	2.13	2.13	1.96	1.96	1.96	2.00	2.14	2.14	2.29	2.39	2.61	2.86	2.89	2.96	3.18	3.29	3.54	3.71
Latvia	2.21	2.25	2.25	2.17	2.14	2.07	2.07	2.07	2.18	2.18	2.14	2.11	2.07	2.07	2.07	2.07	2.04	2.07
Lithuania	2.21	2.21	2.13	2.13	2.21	2.21	2.29	2.25	2.29	2.25	2.25	2.29	2.32	2.36	2.36	2.32	2.32	2.36
Poland	1.58	1.63	1.75	1.75	2.00	2.14	2.36	2.39	2.25	2.32	2.21	2.14	2.18	2.18	2.21	2.32	2.57	2.89
Romania	3.67	3.71	3.63	3.58	3.39	3.39	3.29	3.36	3.36	3.46	3.43	3.43	3.50	3.46	3.46	3.46	3.39	3.46
Slovakia	2.50	2.17	2.08	2.08	2.00	1.96	2.14	2.29	2.46	2.68	2.54	2.50	2.57	2.61	2.64	2.61	2.61	2.61

Key: 1 = most free and 7 = least free

Source: *Nations in Transit 2018*. *Confronting Illiberalism*; online: www.freedomhouse.org (last accessed 2 February 2019)

The values of the freedom index clearly indicate a decline of the state of democracy in such countries as Hungary and Poland, a slight drop in such countries as Slovakia and Lithuania, and a minimal decrease in the Czech Republic (see Table 2). It is particularly significant that the freedom of the political system in Hungary has declined – as a result of Viktor Orbán's rule, a consolidated democratic state has become a semi-consolidated democracy (see Table 3), which scores less in particular categories of freedom and displays strong tendencies toward the authoritarian system. Several years ago, the leader of the PiS party declared he would turn Warsaw into the second Budapest. It should be admitted that once in control of the most important institutions in Poland, he has taken gradual steps to abandon standards of liberal democracy. Although he has been less dynamic on this front than his Hungarian predecessor, the path he has taken leads towards semi-consolidated authoritarianism.

The value of the Freedom Index for Poland in 2018 equals the value for Hungary in 2013. In Poland, the results have deteriorated mainly because of the score in the Judicial Framework and Independence index. In 2018, under the rule of the PiS party, it dropped to the level of 4.25 (it was 2.75 in 2016), and the corruption index was at 3.5 (without any changes in relation to the value in 2016). The data from 2018 did not include a number of affairs involving politicians of the PiS party which were revealed at the turn of 2018 and 2019.¹² It should be noted that although populists gained power under the slogans of struggle against the elites who allegedly won their wealth illegally, they have quickly become involved in illegal affairs themselves, forming structures and entering quasi- or strictly corruptive transactions (Goldston 2018).

3.2 New populism and the state: internal and external consequences

The values of democracy indices in the countries governed by populists reflect a worrying phenomenon of limiting the scope of liberties in particular areas of social life. Contemporary populism strives for the concentration of power at one decision-making centre. Actions undertaken by populist leaders often go beyond current legal standards, generating legislative problems or, in some cases, violating the constitution in the process. Therefore, the judiciary system has become the main focus of “reforms” or even direct political attacks. Some such examples can be observed in Hungary and in Poland (Bonikowski 2016). The violation of independence of judicial power breaks the principle of the separation of powers and leads to some well-grounded concerns about impartiality in the administration of justice. The politicisation of the judiciary system undermines the reputation of the state and comes as a factor limiting the inflow of foreign investments.

12 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_NationsInTransit_Web_PDF_FINAL_2018_03_16.pdf.

Table 3

Freedom of the political system in selected countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Turkey, according to the report provided by the Freedom House organisation in 2019

Country	Freedom Status	Political System	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Freedom Rating	Aggregate Score
Czech Republic	Free	Consolidated democracy	1	1	1	91
Slovakia	Free	Consolidated democracy	1	2	1.5	88
Poland	Free	Consolidated democracy	2	2	2	84
Hungary ¹³	Partly Free	Semi-consolidated democracy	3	3	3	70
Ukraine	Partly Free	Intermediate regime	3	4	3.5	60
Turkey	Not Free	Consolidated authoritarian regime	5	6	5.5	31
Belarus	Not Free	Consolidated authoritarian regime	7	6	6.5	19

Source: the author's own study, based on the data provided by the Freedom House organisation; available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/> country (last accessed 23 May 2019)

The “colonisation” of the state by the populist government is not limited to taking control over the running of the judiciary system. The spoils system is not limited to positions in the central administration but operates in almost all public institutions and companies where the State Treasury is the owner or a shareholder. Officials who support the governing party have become an economically privileged group. In this way, a mutual interdependence is formed, in which a populist leader has to remunerate his supporters generously, and the supporters – who are under permanent threat of losing their position as a result of the decision of their leader or possible electoral defeat – demonstrate their absolute obedience. Described excellently by Wittfogel (Wittfogel 1957) in the context of the functioning of an authoritarian state, such a self-propelling mechanism develops almost slave-like dependence of all participants in power, and increases suspicion, distrust and alienation of the government from society.

13 A detailed explanation of a decrease in the freedom index in Hungary provided by the Freedom House organisation can be found at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/hungary> and <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/hungary>.

Considering the internal dimension, the populist government uses all institutional resources of the state in order to sustain power. As far as public media, or media dependent on the state in any other way, are concerned, such a situation results in a one-sided pro-government message, limitation of access to impartial news, and censorship. Limiting the freedom of media and attacking the media which are not controlled by the state contributes to the aggravation of social conflict. An extreme polarisation of society affected by new active populism comes as a factor which not only limits trust in the state but also affects the essence of state integrity. In the long run, a prolonged period of high social tension may lead to civil wars or attempts to disintegrate the state. Hence, it is not surprising that populist parties receive support – whether they ask for it or not – from actors who have a hostile attitude towards Western countries.

Obviously, the protection of consolidated democracy favours pluralism in the political life of the state, but it also comes as an important factor in the development of entrepreneurship, the increase in investments, the development of the civil society and civil liberties. Although in any democratic system it has to be taken into account that radical populist parties may come to power, it is difficult to hope that “the invisible hand of the market” will be able to cope with such a challenge by itself, without any involvement of anti-populist movements, as the recent experience has already indicated. Today, it is possible to see the difference in the protection of consolidated democracy undertaken in the countries of various democratic traditions. American democracy seems to have fewer problems than Hungary and Poland, which keep struggling, or Turkey, which has not been able to cope with such problems at all.

Negative results of populist governance are not limited only to internal institutional or social relations. Undoubtedly, considering international relations, the prestige of the countries swarmed with their internal problems suffers a lot. Relations with fully democratic countries deteriorate and some alliances with non-democratic countries – or with countries where democracy is treated in an exclusively instrumental way – are formed. Hence, the choice of a populist path is the choice of orientation in international alliances. Although Erdogan’s authoritarian Turkey is still an important partner in the NATO, its relations with the European Union are very restrained, and its EU membership is no longer seriously considered. Ostracism towards Hungary has spread onto more and more Western countries, and some improvement in the relations with Putin’s Russia does not have to soften the attitude of the Western countries towards Orbán. So far, the government of Polish populists has proved to have very little international success on the international arena. They have been instrumentally treated by the United States of America, they have been rebuked by Israel, betrayed by the countries of the Visegrad Group, they have been offended by Germany and France, two driving forces of the European Union, they have lost their influence on the situation in Ukraine and they have not been able to develop relations with Russia. Since 2015, Polish foreign policy has

been on the way towards international isolation and to a dramatic fall of prestige, which was restored with so much hardship during the transformation of the social and economic system after 1989.

Discussion

In view of the growing popularity of populist movements, it is advisable to look for some answers to the question about activities which should be undertaken by defenders of consolidated democracies in order to overcome populism. Considering the economic aspect, the American experience illustrates how the trap of populism can be avoided. After the crisis of the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt implemented a vast investment programme, known as the New Deal. At that time, American democracy was reinforced and it resisted European tendencies towards a totalitarian or at least authoritarian system. According to Ben-Ami, the source of the victory over new populism is to be found in “a new deal – one that corrects the EU’s yawning democratic deficit and puts an end to self-defeating austerity policies – is precisely what will save Europe today” (Ben-Ami 2016).

Since anti-populism requires an active, educated and open civil society, what is required is vast investment in soft power. This means providing support to citizenship education included in school curricula, and to the organisation and promotion of training schemes which will foster tolerant attitudes, counteract discrimination and strengthen the civil society. Considering the influence exerted through culture, it is necessary to support events and actions which promote positive value judgments of attitudes of empathy, tolerance and social commitment. It is not enough to organise some commemorative events. One thing that needs to be done is to develop attractive new products that will have a potential to foster social attitudes, such as, for example, computer games, feature or short films, and images to be presented in social media and in other places where support for cultural action is required.

At the same time, the propagation of fake news should be curbed by implementing organisational and legal solutions. In this field, the role of regulatory bodies and institutions protecting the rule of law is highly significant. Some examples of good practice come from Germany, where the first regulations against portals which allow fake news to be distributed through their networks are already in place. The fight against fake news in the media and social media should be the task of not only non-government organisations but also services responsible for the security of the state, including the police. In order to implement such tasks in an efficient way, it is necessary to provide proper support and a system of regular trainings to ensure efficiency in the operation of relevant services. Legal regulations, instruments and training will not be enough to protect society against the surge of fake news. The fight against disinformation campaigns will require the development of new, spe-

cialised workplaces, as this seems necessary in order to protect the achievements of the democratic state against the high tide of populism.

In many respects, fighting against centres spreading fake news will require international cooperation. Special services of the allied countries and the NATO have already been monitoring cyberattacks. The development of the protection of Western countries against such threats must be continued. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop legal standards, international regulations and mechanisms for the efficient monitoring of the rule of law in this respect. They should also apply to such business giants in the field of social media as Mark Zuckerberg, the owner of Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, and to any other actors whose position in the industry is significant for the security of society. Practices which violate principles of the rule of law for political and economic profit must be prevented, and this should be a *sine-qua-non* condition of a democratic country, at least at the level of the European Union.

Some less significant and questionable heroes of populist movements are fundamentalist religious movements. Although they take advantage of all the liberties offered by the countries of liberal democracy where they function, they often attack these liberties, using a strongly ideological reference to the fight against Satan. Such a situation does not lead to any social dialogue – quite the opposite, it becomes a dangerous foundation underlying national and religious hatred. Sometimes it is difficult to talk about the dissemination of faith anymore because some practices are typical of spreading religious fanaticism, which may very likely bring damage to the Church in the long run, as can be currently observed in Poland. Hence, one should not ignore actually existing problems. For the welfare of the social community, the state should efficiently protect followers of all religions as well as non-believers. The efficient implementation of the principle of the secular state (*laïcité*) should guarantee the unrestricted possibility to profess one's faith, as long as one respects all other members of the community.

Conclusions

It can be often heard that democracy is the best system ever invented. However, democracy without freedom loses its appeal. The challenge of populism reveals weak points of consolidated democracies. Conditions required for the implementation of civil liberties cannot be provided by the election principle alone, because elections can be used as an instrument by the authoritarian government. A democratic state governed by the rule of law is free when it guarantees civil liberties and the separation of powers. Various types of political systems manifest strong points of systemic solutions. Contemporary populism has revealed the crisis of the party systems functioning in the West, and this fact should trigger a serious social debate. Two-party systems in Great Britain and the United States have not protected these

countries from negative consequences of populist campaigns. An antidote can be the Dutch system of proportional representation; however, it is difficult to find its successful adaptation in any other Western country. Undoubtedly, it is necessary to strengthen the civil society, which comes as an authentic expression of citizens' participation in activity undertaken in favour of the state governed by the rule of law.

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