

POPULISM: DENYING SIMPLE REMEDIES

The history of populism all over the world is long, diverse, and discrepant. “Narodnichestvo” in Russia, in XIX century, and political movement in contemporary USA were identified as populist. Nowadays, populism obstructs the maintenance of liberal democracy in the spheres of politics and policy. Notably, populism never names itself “populism”.

The question of universal theoretical approach to the problem of modern populism, that is applicable in different countries, seems to be quite difficult. However, there are some general features of it that allow us to identify what it looks like, how it influences on forming policies, and whether it can be considered as a threat to constitutional guarantees.

First of all, social science scrutinizes populism as a political doctrine against “corrupt elite”, for the “common people” and “natural order”. Thus, populists appeal to “the people” or “the nation” as a whole, which are opposed to corrupt political elite. They play on the opposition “us” and “them” portraying the existing political elite as a largely politically corrupted. Speaking exactly to people and presenting themselves like ordinary people (but stronger), populists articulate what they commonly think about the way of ruling in the state.

Secondly, populism is against the key ideas of liberal democracy, which implies that freedoms of political majority are limited by constitutional constraints. That is why populists call to change some elements of what they see as liberal concepts, being always in the focus of media attention. Provoking distrust to representative democracy, they appeal to prophesy their unique mission of representing the majority of the people.

Thirdly, populism is a source of mass mobilization. Its value rises under the conditions of lost mobilization force of ideological parties in traditional meaning. Citizens get more active and request fast solutions of problems.

Finally, populism is based not on a coherent program but on people’s expectations of what should be done. Appearance is much more important content. It pretends to solve difficult problem by simple remedies. Therefore, it campaigns against the existing parties while electoral success is to be attributed largely to personality factors but not to programmatic issues.

The named characteristics allow us to extract several reasons which catalyze emerging and spreading of populism. These reasons are:

- The lack of party organization and structure compensated by personal charisma of a specific sort; the lack of programmatic parties in their meaning;
- Nationalism, enlarging the legitimacy of minorities;
- Increasing role of media, defending public majority, national interests, and integrity;
- Weakness of public sector;
- Political, juridical, economical constraints and financial prudence.

Although in general populism is estimated as negative phenomenon, we have to agree that it is inevitable in current democracies providing legitimacy of any political regime. Being the invention of Modern, liberal democracy is functional and rational set of instruments. The values of it do not absorb any sensual components which could appeal to the feeling of ordinary people. The essence of democracy does not have faces familiar to those who are not politically involved. Meanwhile, rational arguments are not always apprehended by citizens because of their complicity. Consequently, political leaders have to use populist images to become closer to “the people” and to fill the gap between public needs and usage of the sources of utilitarian instruments.

The rules of politics emphasize the described conception. Nowadays, it is obvious that those who are involved in different kinds of political competition are keen on gaining the power in various senses. It causes specific approaches towards the selection of methods applicable to prevail. In this case, conversion to populism of any configuration seems to be very tempting because it provides with quick and productive results: popularity among people and, therefore, gaining the power.

Two ideas developed hereinabove allow concluding that it is impossible to eradicate populism out of the sphere of politics. By the way, this finding is valid not only for undeveloped states or countries of transition but also for western democracies, as well. However, the main distinction between democratic and authoritarian form of government is the capability to distinguish the methods of politics and the methodology of policy. While the first ones are considered to be a set of instantaneous reactions on public wishes (or even sudden whims), the last one must base on comprehensive and coherent program which is able to provide with modes of operation in different areas of social life under any crisis conditions. In this case, we can affirm that only democratic states have enough power to keep harmful impacts of populism within the limits of political competition and to implement state policy without populist slogans and actions. At the same time, countries with weak traditions of liberal democracy can not prevent the populist absorption of the sphere of real policy. The first reason of such outcome is the lack of political culture and governance experience, the second one implies the inability of state authorities to elaborate consistent and effective policy. Therefore, inefficient ruling leads to increasing instability of political system of the state.

Presuming that populism is a by-product of unstable and undeveloped political system and low level of political culture of officials and citizens, it can be examined as an ideology or a style of political communication. For example, in Bulgaria and Poland there are some politicians political parties which can be called populist in ideological sense because of general logic of their statements and activities during electoral period and in the phase of working in different representative authorities as well. In other words, firstly, their choice of instruments which is widely used at the stage of political competition (or politics) is applicable during realization of real policy:

secondly, such approach accepted by bounded group of political actors is inadmissible for the rest of them. On the other hand, in such countries as Ukraine, Estonia, or Croatia populist rhetoric is used by all or almost all political actor. Therefore, we can not apply the model of populism as an ideology to these countries because in this case we have to agree that there is only one widespread ideology there.

In consideration of the question of the role of political parties in the process of populism formation and diffusion, one can claim that strong party system can be regarded as a bail of preclusion of extension of populism. High level of importance of ideology and good practice of party governance in variable authorities cause obvious for ordinary people benefits of representation and decrease affects of populist rhetoric on public consciousness. But another suggestion is based on the distinction of strength and stability of parliamentary parties and their populist support beyond the legislative authority. This idea can be illustrated by the example of Hungary. Hungarian electoral law is quite strict: it is easy to form a party but difficult to win the elections. The outcome of such kind of regulation is shaping of exclusive system of political representation. Limited number of parliamentary parties and slow rotation of them reduces the level of public support of main political power in the country in a natural way. Such circumstances make them find other measures of retention of loyal electorate. Populist declarations about people's expectations and benefits from the state neglect the real sources of social distribution but such promises can never be embodied because of political and economical reasonability logic. Therefore, maintaining etatism in Hungary and securing symbolic role of the state as a source of legitimization current power does not reject populist methods, although party system of the country is quite stable and strong. Concluding, stable parties do can prevent from populism if they are capable to handle the state governance under any different and specific conditions, which may be crisis, revolutionary, or even military.

In the case of Ukraine we speak about the country of transition with bright communist past and, therefore, weak democratic traditions, which cause instability and inconsistent development of political system as a whole. Collapse of ideology, emerged in early ninety's, determined the direction of party system formation, in particular. Traditional opposition between right and left ideological branches was neglected by stressing the marking line between communist past and prospective future described in term of national democracy. "Us – them" opposition became one of key features of party life of Ukraine. So, it is acceptable to state that populist rhetoric absorbed political sphere at the beginning of Ukrainian independence.

New century has changed pivotal issues of contradiction but logic and general approach towards bipolar party system remained to be the same. Under these conditions, the rules of opposition make populist methods the most efficient and applicable by representatives of both poles of party spectrum. The main cleavages of positions of the powers which represent the named

poles are the questions of Ukrainian-Russian relations and eurointegration. But in fact, the speculations upon these issues are considered to be alienated from the problems which should be solved by political instruments. So, the lack of efficient policy in Ukraine leads to increasing role of political technology and extension of populist politics beyond election periods.

Besides, even the fact that there are more than 100 political parties registered in Ukraine and more than 40 of them took part in last parliamentary elections (although only 5 of them had enough interior and exterior sources to be represented in Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine) can be estimated as populist one.

To sum up, it is obvious that ideological spectrum of Ukrainian political parties is degraded and uncertain. It sets up fruitful ground for the spread of populism. Political leaders manipulate public expectations and demands without any responsibility for their declarations regarded as official ones. Moreover, the lack of transparency of decision making process inside and outside the parliament causes the crisis of public trust to the state authorities and political parties.

Thus, the difficulties of coping with populism are caused by multidimensional and contradictory nature of this phenomenon. So, it is impossible and useless to struggle against its existence as a global problem. But efforts to minimize negative impacts of its manifestations can become more prospective and productive. Such approach rises and increases the role of public sector, which has enough of sources for preventing the spread populism and its influence on different spheres of social and political life of the country.

Under mentioned conditions it is very important to elaborate a kind of methodological vision of activities which public organizations should take in order to prevent the spread of populism. In this case we should take into account the role of analytical centers, but not only those, which monitor media space. Unfortunately, pure declarations of political leaders are not the only products of populist impact on political process in the state. That is why populist slogans, statements, and claims, that we hear every day, can not be regarded as an object of prospective scientific analysis because they illustrate temporary positions of politicians and political parties on the chessboard of *today's* politics but not ideological visions of them which lead to the understanding of the roots of populism in the sphere of national policy. Therefore, revelation of the reasons and origin of populism should be one of the most significant methodological principles of NGOs' work.

Defining concrete activities of public sector in the field of preventing the spread of populism in the country, we presume that one of criterion which should be taken into consideration is national legislation and legislative process.

Legislation creates the framework of common authorized rules for everybody in the state. Can it be populist one? Yes, it can be in its *content*. We can estimate any law as populist if its regulation can not be implemented in practice or if there is a gap between the form of the statute

and real life. (For example, in Ukraine a lot of draft laws registered in the parliament contain populist preambles about social unfairness or appeals to prevent oligarchical control). But the *form* of any legislation (or its nature) rejects populism. In stable political systems laws are not temporary but urgent and actual for a long period of time. That is why the depending of them on today's political situation and changeable balance of powers can have harmful effects.

In this case, the most productive kind of activity for public sector is monitoring of legislative initiatives. The problem of Ukrainian legislative process is connected with the lack of responsibility of deputy corps representatives. That is why there are a lot of initiatives with low or zero chances to come into force because of their inconsistent quality or populist content. So, the aim of NGOs which work with political and legal questions should be connected with attempts to detect those entities of legislative initiatives whose work is considered to be unsatisfactory.

Summarizing everything, it is obvious that populism is multidimensional phenomenon. Its characteristics and manifestation depend on the peculiarities of national political systems. Being regarded as a specific kind of ideology or a style of political communication, populism can be installed in any political process as its integral part. Presuming that, preventive role of public organizations should be connected with the sphere of control. And one of the objects of control functions can be legislative process and initiatives.