

# Editorial Note

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This special issue is based on the continued collaboration of the International Institute of Political Science of Masaryk University (publisher of the *Czech Journal of Political Research*) and the Institute of International Studies at Charles University. The articles published in this issue were presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Prague Populism Conference that took place in May 2017. The event was organized by the Institute of International Studies, Charles University together with Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung and Goethe Institut Prag. The main topic of the conference was the relationship between populism and the media, but the conference covered a wide variety of issues, including theoretical approaches to populism, the effects of populism on the quality of democracy and explaining the electoral support of populist political parties in Europe. This special edition builds upon the breadth of the conference and offers a fresh perspective in the study of populism.

Hanspeter Kriesi's opening article makes an important contribution to the debate on the conceptualization of populism and touches upon several crucial topics in the contemporary study of populism. First, Kriesi discusses the concept of populism and argues that populism refers to an ideology related to the preferred functioning of democracy (see the recent discussion about the ideational nature of populism). Furthermore, Kriesi stresses the element of political crisis as the most important factor behind the rise of populism and doubts the primacy of the economic motives behind the success of different populist political parties. Last but not least, he analyzes the impact of populism on the quality of democracy, and makes a very important point about how different regimes are susceptible to the populist threat.

The effects of populism on democracy is discussed in the two following articles by Wolfgang Merkel and Felix Scholl, and Attila Ágh. While Merkel and Scholl's contribution is focused on the radical right-wing populist parties in Europe in general, Ágh concentrates on the two most prominent cases of the recent surge of populist illiberalism in Central Europe: Poland and Hungary. The basic idea of Merkel and Scholl's article is not completely new, but it follows the stream of literature that stresses the division between authoritarian, traditionalist politics on one hand and multiculturalist and libertarian issues on the other hand or, in other words, the integration – demarcation cleavage. The article does go beyond this argument, however, and discusses the political polarization tied to the rise of the radical right. Moreover, it (implicitly) rejects the idea of the one-sided negative effect of the radical right on political systems and shows that the radical right can in some cases induce political participation. In fact, democracy is more endangered in less consolidated environment.

Similarly to Merkel and Scholl, Ágh also discusses identity politics and new populist parties, but he tries to put the issue into a broader context of the development of the European Union and the alienation of the core and the periphery of the EU. The special emphasis is then placed on the Polish and Hungarian cases.

Marius Guderjan and Adrian Wilding analyse the Brexit campaign through the lens of the concept of populism. They distinguish between the 'thin' and 'thick' versions of populism that have been occasionally used in the study of populist communication. The article shows that the Brexit campaign has been dominated by exclusive, right-wing populist ideas. Moreover, the authors analyse factors that have led to support for anti-European and anti-immigration politics, finding that it is best to talk about a mixture of economic, political and cultural issues. They argue that the rhetoric used before the referendum can be interpreted as a (problematic) attempt to overcome disenfranchisement.

We believe the present special issue of the Czech Journal of Political Science shows the importance of current populism in different parts of Europe. While all four articles suggest that populism can take many forms (right-wing populism in the United Kingdom or illiberalism in Central Europe), the common denominator of populist parties is that they undermine the principles of liberal democratic regimes in Europe. It seems that populist parties and actors will continue to influence European politics in the future, thus providing us further material to study. The editors of this special issue would like to thank the organizers of the Prague Populism Conference, the panelists and the authors of the articles for the ongoing and stimulating debate over the populist phenomenon in Europe.