



# POPULISM IN EUROPE

**LATEST RESEARCH  
AND SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND**



## Content

Understanding the definition of populism through historical bibliography .....	3
Populism: The Origins .....	3
Populism: The Fundamental Traits .....	4
Current situation of Populism in Europe.....	7
Germany.....	7
Italy.....	13
Netherlands.....	18
Spain.....	21
Cyprus .....	27
Portugal.....	30
Poland .....	35
Imprint .....	41

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We-Europeans aims to strengthen advocacy for European citizenship and for a Europe, in which inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination prevail. This means to encourage standing-up for the European Union’s fundamental values: respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.

Populism and political alienation are threats for all democracies in Europe. And countering populism is a challenge for political and civil society actors, educational staff, journalists and others who are confronted with populism in their professional lives, but also for European citizens who face populism in their private lives. We-Europeans gives support to both target groups.

This document introduces the concept of populism and its origins, in addition to providing insights into the political context and current developments in the project countries.



# Understanding the definition of populism through historical bibliography

## Populism: The Origins

De Cleen (2017) defines populism as a:

Discourse which is “centred around the nodal points ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, in which the meaning of ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ is constructed through a down/up antagonism between ‘the people’ as a large powerless group and ‘the elite’ as a small and illegitimately powerful group (p. 5, see also Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

As further discussed in the following section, due to being a fast-spreading ideology which is built on the foundations of government mistrust through discrediting formal institutions and functions and excluding marginalised people, populism is increasingly becoming a political issue that is putting democratic ideals and conditions at risk (Grymala-Busse, et al., 2020).

Historically, populism was conceptualised as a political movement in the late 19th century Russia for fighting Tsarism, through developing trust among people, and through advocating the transformation of traditional agrarian communities (Canovan, 1982). Following the abolition of serfdom throughout the Russian Empire in 1861 - which emancipated feudal labourers who were until then, bound to the land and its landlords, and granted them the full rights of free citizens- (Gorshkov, 2000), the populist movement (“Narodnik”) was born out of the desire of engaging the working classes in actions which would result in overthrowing the Tsar’s government and consequently shift directly from a feudal to a socialist society. This populist movement believed that a society based on the traditional social structures of the Russian rural classes was possible.

Likewise, in the United States, the populist movement has its roots in two organizations: the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party. The former, which was comprised solely by white farmers was built around a claim of a purely economic nature. The Alliance attempted to solve the immense financial issues of Southern farmers through introducing a federal credit-system called the subtreasury plan (Hild, 2016). When the Alliance’s efforts failed, members of the Alliance played a key role in the creation of the Populist Party called the People’s Party in 1892 (Keyworth, 2014). According to Historian Lawrence Goodwyn (1991), this Populist political



programme aimed to guarantee everyone a minimum of autonomy so that all citizens can aspire to be full members of an advanced industrial society. The programme included, among other things, progressive taxes, the abandonment of the gold standard, the nationalization of the railway companies and the creation of a public postal bank. Latin American populists, whose most important representatives are Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954) in Brazil, and Juan Perón (1895-1974) in Argentina, are less critical of capitalism (Tejedor, 2021). They contest the foreign capital which they consider an obstacle to the country's independence, but defend national capitalism. Consequently, they nationalised many companies, especially those that were in foreign hands. Without jeopardizing the market economy, their governments reserved to the State a very interventionist role in the economy and development of their country. Its main objective was to improve the working and living conditions of individuals. To this end, they introduced rights for workers and unions, as well as women's suffrage.

## Populism: The Fundamental Traits

Populism is deemed to be one of the most controversial concepts in the social sciences. The great diversity and plasticity of the phenomenon to which we attribute the designation of populism makes it difficult to elaborate a precise and consensual definition of it. Following Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), Populism is defined as a thin ideology that separates society into two homogeneous and perfectly antagonistic camps: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite", and claims that politics can only be the expression of the general will of the people. Thus, the people systematically oppose the corrupt elite. Symmetrically with the conception of the people, where culture and tradition rest in all their diversity, the elite consists of a perfectly homogeneous, undifferentiated group, different in all aspects from the people that dominate and rule with oppression. The elite is therefore, organised in an oligarchy or tyrannical caste that has assumed the monopoly of political power, but also economic, cultural and media power to the detriment of the people. Its "thin ideology" explains that populism does not offer a global political identity program like other denser ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, or conservatism. Thus, the political programme associated with populist movements results from a hybridisation process with other ideologies. By analysing the various populist movements, we can clearly distinguish between the proper component of populism and the component that is grafted onto it. As a result of this, we can have left or right populist movements or parties depending on the ideological bent on which it rests.





Populism went through the 20th century creating tensions. In this respect Godin (2012) underlines the inherent change in populism over time saying that "it is not impossible that populism will be in the 21st century what totalitarianism was in the 20th century for democracy: the main danger" (p.11). Since the literary field in 1912, the concept of populism expanded, boosted movements, and went beyond the political field to the social and cultural field. However, its pejorative sense emerged in the 1980s (Godin 2012). In this sense, Rosanvallon's (2020) analysis is particularly interesting, stressing the need to reflect on populism before considering it a problem since "it should be understood as a proposed response to contemporary problems" (p.39) avoiding polarisation or oversimplifications.

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# Current situation of Populism in Europe

## Germany

### Current political context

For many decades after Germany's foundation in 1949, no populist party had a chance to enter the German parliament since they all failed to acquire the required 5% threshold. This changed in 1998 with the left-wing PDS (legal successor of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany SED, which ruled the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) as a state party), which came in just above 5%. But this dramatically changed in 2017, when the right-wing populist AfD entered the parliament over the course of the 'refugee crisis'. Looking at the territory of eastern Germany, a division of Germany becomes apparent, where the vote share of AfD was 21.9%, in comparison to 10.7% in the West German states.

Germany is politically characterised by a federal system with a strong responsibility of the federal states (Länder). This is an acknowledgement of the regional structure which has evolved through Germany's history but also a measure to avoid the centralisation of power like during the Nazi era. Another important aspect in relation to the socio-political framework forms German reunification, which was politically accomplished in 1990, but socially is a far longer process. These social differences are also reflected in the election results of the Länder at the state and federal level.

Until 1983, three parties were represented in parliament in Germany: The Christian-democratic, conservative CDU/CSU, the social democratic party SPD and the economic liberal FDP. In 1983, the Green Party (Die Grünen) entered the parliament, in 1998 the left-wing PDS (today called Die Linke, the Left) and in 2017 the right-wing populist AfD (Alternative for Germany). Currently all six parties are represented in the German parliament. The government is formed by a coalition of SPD, Die Grüne (Green Party) and FDP.

In terms of the 2021 elections, Germany is divided. CDU dominated the south and south-west, SPD came out strongest in the rest of the country, except for some areas of the former East Germany which are marked by strong support for the AfD. In the East-German federal state of Saxony, the AfD has become by far the strongest party, with almost one in four voters voting for them.

Reasons for the rise of right-wing populism are seen by researchers in the four 'Ds' of distrust (in representative politics), destruction (of traditional understandings of national community), (socioeconomic) deprivation, and (partisan) dealignment (Goodwin and Eatwell, 2018). Societal aspects play another role, the annual report



of the German government on the state of German unity shows that 57% of east Germans felt like second-class citizens (Reuters, 2019), among AfD voters the percentage is far higher.

## Populist movements

**Alternative für Deutschland** (AfD, Alternative for Germany) was established in 2013 as a party focused on economic issues and matters of German fiscal sovereignty. AfD began as a free-market, Eurosceptic party, critical of the Euro and opposed to German-supported bailouts of Southern European countries. In 2015, along with a change in the leadership, AfD's focus changed from economics to immigration and refugees. In the September 2017 elections, the AfD entered the national parliament (12,6%). In the last parliamentary election in 2021 their vote share declined to 10,3%. But AfD is very strongly represented in East German Federal Parliaments, e.g. Saxony 27,5%, Thuringia 23,4%, Brandenburg 23,5% (all three 2019), Saxony-Anhalt 20,8% and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 16,7% (both 2020).

While AfD was initially founded as a liberal conservative party of the middle class with a tendency toward soft Euroscepticism, it underwent a continuous shift to the right the last years, connected with changes in leadership. Today, the party is mainly represented by moderate right-wing and national-conservative policies as well as by the right-wing, nationalist Flügel (the wing).

**Die Linke** (the Left Party) was founded in 2007 as the result of the merger of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and WASG (Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative). Through the PDS, the party is descendant of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), which ruled the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) as a state party until 1990. The Left is represented in ten of Germany's sixteen state legislatures, including all five of the eastern states, where it is partly also junior partner in the governments. The Left Party is also represented in the Federal Parliament but with a decreasing vote share (11,9% in 2009 in comparison to 4,9% in 2021, which is under the 5% clause but because of three so called direct mandates they are nevertheless represented in the parliament with 39 from 735 seats).

The Left has been characterised as left-wing populist by some researchers and also has some extremist sections, but they are in the minority.

**Pegida** (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident) is a far-right populist movement which was founded in October 2014 in Dresden (Saxony). They started with demonstrations or so called "evening stroll" which within three months attracted 25,000 people to participate. Pegida has spawned numerous off-shoots





across Germany but also in other countries. Some of them formulated in the Prague Declaration, a membership in the Fortress Europe coalition against the Islamisation of Europe. Since May 2021, the movement has been classified by the Saxon State Office for the Protection of the Constitution as a “proven extremist endeavour”. Criminal proceedings or convictions are pending against several Pegida organisers and speakers. At the “evening strolls”, the number of participants has declined rapidly, also because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Querdenker** ("lateral thinker") movement started in 2020 in Stuttgart but soon became a nationwide movement. It is a loose grouping of libertarians and conspiracy theorists that has staged protest rallies against pandemic restrictions and lockdowns. They state e.g. that one can no longer express the opinion without getting into trouble, that media and politics are in cahoots, and that the government is hiding the truth. With these statements they reach a wide audience.

As these rallies were partly prohibited by the pandemic distance regulations, particularly in small and medium-sized cities, protesters gathered for what they labelled as "strolls", especially in the Federal State of Saxony. Querdenker march alongside the far-right, and their protests often turn violent.

### Main characteristics of populism movements in this country

The AfD as a political party is closely connected with populist movements such as PEGIDA, Querdenken and the Identarian Movement. It builds on concerns and fears of people and reacts quickly and with aggressive rhetoric to crises.

In 2015/16 they took advantage in their strategy of the refugee crisis, they linked immigration with terror attacks, and built on concerns of people. Later, they opened for other social topics such as freedom, crime, rural area issues, green energy/environment, jobs, Covid-19, retirement, gender equality, and self-employment.

Their election campaigns are provocative and provided placative messages with slogans such as ‘Burkas? we prefer bikinis’ or ‘Islam? It doesn’t fit in with our cuisine’ (showing a picture of a pig) etc. Also, the behaviour of party representatives is often provocative, always critical towards the government. They claim to represent the opinion of ordinary citizens and dare to speak the truth. This leads to a certain visibility and attention.

AfD is politically isolated, no other party is willing to enter a coalition with them, but their great success, especially in the East, makes it difficult to form governments.



Pegida and Querdenker both use 'evening strolls' on Monday evenings. The Monday evening demonstration format plays a major role in East Germany as they were crucial to the developments leading to German reunification. Now this format is appropriated and re-purposed by the two populist and partly right-wing extremist groups.

### What has been done to counter these movements?

In 2016 the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth published the Federal Government's Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy. It is based on a systematic, strong networking of the various players at federal, regional, and local authority level and in civil society and their coordinated cooperation across the board. It consists of going nationwide to the locations that are crucial for the prevention of extremism and the promotion of democracy – into the local authorities and administrative districts, into the institutions, federations, and associations, into the schools and also many other places where people are committed to strengthening democracy and defending human rights and freedom. The strategy contains six fields of activity:

1. Political education, intercultural learning, and democracy work
2. Participation in civil society
3. Counselling, monitoring, and intervention
4. Media and internet
5. Research
6. International cooperation

There are further measures against right-wing extremism and racism. Over the period 2021 to 2024, the German government is to provide a total of over one billion euros to fight racism and right-wing extremism. The Cabinet Committee presented in 2020 a list of almost 90 specific measures to be taken in the fight against racism, right-wing extremism, and anti-Semitism.

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb) is a federal public authority providing citizenship, education, and information on political issues for all people in Germany. There are dossiers, charts, teaching materials, events, and debates on German, European, and international politics including information on populism. In addition, there are several initiatives from foundations and NGOs.

Amadeu Antonio Foundation aims to strengthen a democratic civil society that consistently opposes right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism with several activities and projects.



Foundation against racism coordinates the annual UN weeks against racism in Germany and promotes model projects to overcome racism and the exclusion of minorities.

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Jugend und Bildung e. V. with Hessen - active for democracy and against extremism developed the app "Stand Up! - Arguing Against Populists". The app supports teenagers and young adults in recognising and dealing with populist statements. In simulated dialogues, they learn how to recognise such statements and respond to them appropriately.

In cooperation with representatives from German non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media professionals from broadcasting, TV, print and online media as well as blogs, the project "Countering Populism in Public Space" developed practical guidelines for a confident and conscious approach towards anti-democratic populism in public space.

Forum für Streitkultur (Forum for dispute culture) published "Seven strategies for successfully dealing with populists" and offers training.

All democratic party-related foundations do research and develop strategies as well as projects in relation to countering populism.

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## Italy

### Current political context

Italy is far from being a stable political system, both for cultural and for prominent party reasons. The bipolarisation forced onto the system during the 90's collapsed in 2013 with the affirmation at national level of two parties presenting populist traits – the Five Star Movement (M5s) (more than 25%) and the (new) Lega (4%), the first one merging both leftist and post-liberal traits, and the second far-right wing with nationalist and anti-migrant agenda. In the meanwhile, on the right side, a new party was going raise – Brothers of Italy (FdI). The presence of Draghi is a temporary panacea to the highly fragmented panorama in Italy. The pressing for job policies and a more balanced tax system and the insurgency of economic inequalities are currently leading toward a far-right wing nationalist government, and it confirms the high unreliable political cultural at the basis of the Italian system. From a steady-European ally, Italy could turn into a potential anti-European hegemonic country.

### Populist movements

If we adopt the perspective of populism as a thin-centred ideology (Mudde, 2004), identifying three main topics – the people, the leader and the enemies – as main traits of a political movement/party, we could then identify three major political forces as populist ones, or, better, which have started with populist traits and hold an ambiguous evolution mixing movement-based approaches and institution-oriented perspectives.

Namely, we could identify:

- MoVimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) (Five Star Movements)
- Lega (previously Lega Nord)
- Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy)

**M5S** was founded in 2009 by the charismatic founder Beppe Grillo who was the main character of several bold initiatives started via his blog in 2005 ([beppegrillo.it](http://beppegrillo.it)). In fact, he amassed support through the usage of the Internet and social media to denounce corruption and economic restrictions, asking for a change within the political system against the corrupted political elites. The five stars stand for: public water, environment, sustainable transport, development, and the Internet connectivity. The M5S was originally organised through the development of a proprietary platform called Rousseau, as a tool for internal digital direct democracy where activists had a prominent role, and the elected representatives were considered as 'speakers' of the majority. His voice together with such a proprietary





Internet-based meetup system were the basis and the first impulse which gave momentum to the 5SM in the years 2008-2012. In fact, the party had a rather fluid structure based on the so-called ‘meetups’, groups of activists which usually met online in the different areas of Italy to discuss topics. Its anti-party system was mainly reflected in two points – there could be only movement members which were not affiliates of any other party, and accept the rule of politics as a service, so that in case of elections, one person could only run activities for two mandates. The novelty of the movement, the topics and the rather unique mix between liberal-left and liberal-right agenda gave important consensus to the 5SM – between 2012-2016 the party reached the best results ever, reaching the concrete possibility of governing the country at national level. More recently, the delusion of the results at local level, the pressing international situation about migrants, the difficulty of governing the different souls of the movement, the complexity of European negotiations about the public debt and the limits of the liberal democracy have shifted the consensus toward nationalist and conservative movements, closer to Lega and Brothers of Italy. Nowadays, the initial wave of Meetups and Internet-based ideas crowdsourcing system has been limited to specific issues, showing the clear adoption of the institutional representative model rather than a movement-oriented one. Basically, the 5SM has withdrawn from its initial populist identity, and it is still undergoing a deep institutional transformation which might lead to a collapse of its Internet-based identity. The 2022 elections, Mario Draghi-led government crisis, the exit of relevant M5S members and the new leadership by Giuseppe Conte have put the basis for a more liberal left agenda.

**Lega** was founded in 1989 as a fusion between several micro-regional parties present in Northern Italy, in fact its name was Lega Nord and it was deeply rooted as a regional force. Its main agenda was focused on the autonomy of the Northern Regions of Italy, criticizing the laggardness of the South and opposing a post-ideological storytelling of a ‘productive North’ vs a ‘lazy South’. Only with Matteo Salvini, the conversion to Lega as a national catch-all party was possible through a new nationalist storytelling and ideology – the enemy was not anymore in the South, but it was about the liberal market supported by European Union and the migration streams coming from Asia and Africa. Lega assumed as a role the defender of the workers and the ‘good people from Italy’ to protect their jobs, the Italian products against globalisation and European rules, and the ‘real family values’.

**Brothers of Italy** (Fratelli d’Italia) is a classic charisma-oriented personalised party, featuring one leader and local structures at local level which are developed in accordance with national strategies. Brothers of Italy shares a similar structure with Lega, yet a different foundation evolution. In fact, Brothers of Italy (FdI) was born



from the secession of the nationalist right from the PdL (People of Freedom party whose leader was Silvio Berlusconi) as a distinct political project focused on an explicit anti-migrant, anti-European and anti-establishment agenda. Even sharing the same extreme rights roots as other extra-parliamentarian movements (like FN, Forza Nuova, or CasaPound), Giorgia Meloni, the current charismatic leader of the movement, and 2022 Prime Minister, has never either officially condemned fascism, either has ever adopted any explicit symbol of fascism (although, publicly accused of never having removed the three-coloured flame part of the post-fascist Social Italian Movement party). In this way, she has managed to keep together extreme right movements as well as the most institutional side of her own party. Her criticism toward Europe and the different governments that have changed in the last five years have made her gain the consensus as virtually the first party in Italy.

In all cases, one of the main controversies around populist-born parties regards the institutionalisation to be undergone once the parties move from the opposition to a government role. For example, Five Star Movement has moved from an anti-systemic position toward a leftist agenda, as Lega has moved from anti-European position toward a more conservative criticism on the European bureaucratic and monetary establishment. Equally, Brothers of Italy has maintained an ambiguous positioning around Europe and its founding structures thus, blaming the European structure and asking for less burden from Europe, but withdrew the rigid anti-European positions, and focused more on the anti-migrant vibes and pursuing the (ideological) defense of the national products and industry. The current projections on the possible leadership of Meloni as future Prime Minister raises questions on the institutionalisation and on the real implementation of some of the promises she has made in the last years (monetary independency, migration limitation, job reforms etc.)

### Main characteristics of populism movements in this country

The Five Stars Movement is currently undergoing a delicate change from a 'click-based movement' toward a more mature party where digital democracy, representative democracy and technocracy are in equilibrium as one of the most classical parties. Currently, it is still based on local Meetups (online and offline territory-based groups of activists) which choose candidates at local, regional, and national level. The main consensus engine of the M5S is the social media, while the local structures have been deeply weakened after the crisis ignited in the local administrative elections of 2020 – M5S literally disappeared as a governing force in most of the regions.



Brothers of Italy is a classic charisma-oriented personalised party, featuring one leader and local structures at local level. Its party is distributed at national level, and it has also emerged thanks to the votes and the channeling of extreme right-wing extra-parliamentarian forces such as FN or Casapound. Its structure is progressively expanding throughout the Italian territory and catching the ones leaving Lega and PdL parties. The main communication strategy revolves around the figure of Giorgia Meloni and her communication strategy.

Lega was originated as a fusion between several micro-regional parties present in Northern Italy, deeply rooted as a regional force. Its conversion to a national party was possible through the dominant leadership of Matteo Salvini and his strategic usage of social media – a specialised team of 30 young social media professionals which carefully planned his entire tour, public image, messages, social media tone, TV presence etc. The unique mix of never-ending political tour in all the Italian territories, the incessant social media presence and the continuous presence in TV have made the fortune – yet fragile – of Matteo Salvini.

### What has been done to counter these movements?

Italy has a very fragmented system, and the same populist movements still undergo changes which are ignited by the opposition between institutional requirements and movement-oriented consensus. The current growth of right-wing populist movements resides in the reaction to globalism and above all as a general rejection to the promises done by the spread of neoliberalism. The reforming power by social-democratic has been somehow limited, and the main progress in liberal and civil rights has been acquired through the action of the Constitutional Court – still, gaps have to be filled through a responsive legislative action.

Differently, the nonprofit sector is the one which has been forerunner of concrete actions to create a committed space of discussion. Plus, examples as Il Riformista or Open.Online have become opinion leaders in terms of convincing and enriching journalism against fake news and populist positions, debunking controversial positions and statements by the major leaders of the mentioned parties.

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## Netherlands

### Current political context

In recent decades, the cultural and economic fabric of Dutch 'consensus-democracy' has been unravelling under populist rhetoric that eroded trust in traditional institutions and authorities. Once known for its progressivism and social tolerance, the Netherlands long seemed 'immune' to far-right tendencies. However, since the turn of the 21st century, the country has witnessed the rise of several influential right-wing populist parties, including the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), Geert Wilders's Freedom Party (PVV) and, most recently, the Forum for Democracy (FvD), led by flamboyant far-right newcomer Thierry Baudet.

The right-wing populists are preferred by roughly every fifth Dutch voter, which is a relatively high level of support in Western European comparison, positioning the Netherlands with higher levels of right-wing populism than any other country in the region apart from France, Finland, Sweden and the Flemish region of Belgium. However, the Netherlands is also special in that it is the only country where the right-wing populist scene is divided into two large players of roughly the same size. Thus far, the race between the two distinct brand-names of right-wing populism is open.

The populist breakthrough to highlight happened on the occasion of the municipal election in April 2019 even with the downturn of the European Parliament (EP) election results. It was a clear warning to traditional politics that when it comes to domestic issues, the proportion of Dutch voters who are willing to give right-wing populist parties a chance has increased.

### Populist movements

While Dutch populist parties never achieved much electoral success in the decades after the Second World War, this changed in more recent years. Two populist parties in particular obtained a considerable share of the vote: the List Pim Fortuyn (Lijst Pim Fortuyn, LPF) in 2002, and the Freedom Party (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV) from 2006 onward. In 2016 the Forum of Democracy was established.

**List Pim Fortuyn** (Lijst Pim Fortuyn, **LPF**) was a political party in the Netherlands named after its eponymous founder Pim Fortuyn, a former university professor and political columnist. The party was considered populist, right-wing-populist and nationalist as well as adhering to its own distinct ideology of Fotuynism according to some commentators. LPF supported tougher measures against crime and immigration, great political reform, multiculturalism, reduction of bureaucracy and





Euroscepticism but in a different way from other European right-wing or nationalist parties. LPF formed part of a coalition government together with the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the People's Party of Freedom and Democracy (VVD) as part of the first Balkenende cabinet. However, internal conflicts led to the coalition's break-up and new elections after a few months. The party was not viable with its original leader and went into decline until it was finally dissolved in 2008.

**Party for Freedom** (Partij voor de Vrijheid, **PVV**) is a nationalist, right-wing populist political party in the Netherlands. PVV calls for items like administrative detention and a strong assimilationist stance on the integration of immigrants into Dutch society, differing from the established centre-right parties. Founded in 2006 as the successor to Geert Wilders' one-man faction in the House of Representatives, PVV won nine seats in the 2006 general election making it the fifth-largest party in parliament. In 2019 general elections it raised to 24 seats, making it the third-largest party. After a small decline in 2012 Dutch general elections (15 seats) the party returned to the opposition and in the 2017 election, PVV won 24 seats, making it the second-largest party in Parliament. Came third in the 2014 European Parliament election while winning 4 out of 26 seats. Party for Freedom is an association with Geert Wilders as its sole member; thus, the party is ineligible for Dutch government funding, and relies on donations.

**Forum of Democracy** (Forum voor Democratie, **FvD**) is a conservative and right-wing populist Eurosceptic political party in the Netherlands that was founded as a think tank by Thierry Baudet and Henk Otten in 2016. FvD has been described as ideologically national conservative, conservative liberal, Eurosceptic and right-wing populist. Declares itself to be a movement rather than a party with a focus on protecting Dutch sovereignty, identity, and cultural and intellectual property. It also opposed to the integration of the European Union which it claims will lead to eventual Eurofederalism and supports a referendum on Dutch membership of EU. In 2022 FvD regained representation in the European Parliament.

### Main characteristics of populism movements in this country

Everyone can mention and agree that the electoral success of the Dutch populist parties has been facilitated by the availability of the Dutch electorate, which became increasingly detached from traditional political parties. By the turn of the 21st century neither of the mainstream parties sufficiently responded to the electorate's concerns related to immigration and cultural integration of, most notably, the Muslim minority population. This provided a favorable opportunity structure for the Dutch populist anti-establishment parties that focused on these issues. Secondly, the credibility of the populist parties themselves has proven to be crucial to their



breakthrough and electoral persistence. This relates to the skill of the populist party leadership and the ability to build up a party organization after the initial breakthrough.

### What has been done to counter these movements?

The formation of a cross-party coalition is an integral part of the political process in the Netherlands, and as such it deviates from a winner-takes-all system, such as is the case with US Presidential election process and was also the case in the Brexit referendum. Parties having almost the same ideologic are emerging targeting having as a main target the good of the people. Great example can be considered the elections that took place in the Netherlands after Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. The elections were considered by some to be a predictor for the forthcoming elections in France and Germany. The fact that Geert Wilders' PVV did not become the largest political party was widely considered as a blow for the rise of populism across Europe and in the US. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, whose party VVD emerged as the largest party out of the elections, was praised by many for the result. Rutte himself proclaimed that 'the Netherlands has halted the wrong kind of populism'.

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## Spain

### Current political context

Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. The current legislative term is halfway through in 2022. The government has until December 10, 2023, to hold general elections after PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and Unidas Podemos (United We Can) succeeded in forming the first coalition government in Spain's democratic history in early 2020 following the November 10, 2019, general elections. Pedro Sánchez became Prime Minister, first through a motion of censure of the government of Mariano Rajoy (PP - Popular Party), then through the elections of April and November 2019. The year 2021 ended with the 'Christmas Eve Pact', in which the Minister of Labour and third Vice President, Yolanda Díaz, lifted the blockade on labour reform – which aims to reduce precariousness and temporary employment. It was one of the most repeated promises by both parties in the Executive Branch, namely the lifting of the previous one (from almost 10 years ago) and one of the biggest obstacles to continue receiving European funds. The year 2022 has begun with the severity of the sixth wave of the pandemic and the Omicron variant, which is driving up the cumulative incidence across the country. Despite the success of the vaccination campaign, uncertainty persists, also in a political level. Beyond the pandemic and economic recovery, the new year also presents several political challenges.

For the first time in 42 years of democracy, a declared far-right party, with a fascist ideology based on a combination of nationalism, xenophobia, and an authoritarian vision of society, was configured as the third political force in Spain, putting an end to the "tetrapartism" formed by the parties PSOE, PP, Podemos and Ciudadanos. The party's position in terms of migration and economic crisis is also considerable. VOX tries to associate immigration from Muslim countries with terrorism, assuming that mass immigration generates violence. In their speech, most of the elements that form it, allude to populism, using a fully ideological discourse almost radically. Expressions as "La España Viva", or "Los Españoles", suppose to build an ideology that holds "that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native elements, both people and ideas, are fundamentally a threat to a homogeneous nation-state" (Muddle, 2007, p.19).

The weakening of Ciudadanos (Citizens), the rise of Vox and the resilience of Unidas Podemos, while Díaz herself seeks to capitalise on a new united left candidacy, will shape 2022.



## Populist movements

The word 'populism' is in vogue among Spanish political parties and is constantly used by them as a weapon. The prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, explained for the Spanish version of the digital magazine HuffPost his vision of populism, which he interprets as a series of proposals that discredit the arguments of others without offering solutions.

Some of the movements are:

The so called “MENAS” in Spain, are children and adolescents under the age of 18 who come to Spain without the help or care of an adult. This term, which appears as a neutral term in the legal field, has been widely used in the media and in political representation in a negative way. The Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia (Oberaxe) has noted an increase in hate messages against them on social media, accounting for 22 percent of all such content. Right-wing parties claim that money is wasted on these people. In particular, VOX blames immigrant minors (MENAS) for the insecurity and chaos in Spain. The far-right party carries out a construct of political, economic, and migratory crisis that aims to create an atmosphere of tension and polarization between society with their hate speech which they instrumentalise in order to dehumanise MENAS so that people see them as inconveniences and not as children looking for a better life.

15M is one of the most impactful social movements, which originated on 15th May 2011. It consisted of a series of protests throughout all the country. Citizens showed their discontent with the economic crisis of 2008 and with the cuts in social and public aid. They demanded changes in the Electoral Law, the guarantee of compliance with the basic rights of the Constitution, a tax reform favorable to lower incomes, the condemnation of corruption or the recovery of historical memory, among other aspects. The 15M Movement remains active through assemblies that are convened in the squares of each neighborhood, of each Spanish city.

The term feminazi is often used in international antifeminism to criticise feminist activists for allegedly defending a fanatical and totalitarian ideology close to Nazism. In Spain, it became a populist movement after the March 8, 2020, demonstration. It was a mass demonstration that took place just before the start of the state of alert.

The rise of populism in Spain has given a boost to climate and science deniers in general. Deniers have embraced various conspiracy theories, authentic fake news with no scientific basis, that know no bounds about both the origin of the coronavirus and the intentions of governments, supranational institutions such as



the World Health Organisation, or corporations, to restrict freedoms and control citizens.

Vox's discourse on the environment has evolved in recent years. It has gone from being denialist to what they call 'conservative'. They have strengthened their environmental strategy in collaboration with their partners in the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) in the European Parliament. The growing importance of climate change for European society probably explains why the issue has quickly moved to the top of their common agenda.

Historically, right-wing populist parties have been reluctant to work together, partly because of their opposing nationalist agendas. Instead, in the last decade they have worked together to broaden and deepen their cooperation in a number of areas. Their strategy of cooperation stems from the fact that citizens increasingly perceive that some key traditional right-wing populist issues (e.g. immigration or terrorism) require action at the international level.

A recent study on populist cooperation at the EU level shows that many parties blend international and transnational populism by presenting themselves as the saviours not only of their country, but also of Europe itself. Their aim is to create a free-market alternative to current EU climate policies, which the group condemns as an unnecessary and costly obstacle to business.

### Main characteristics of populism movements in this country

Populist antagonism is often reflected in the use of hyperbolic and simplistic rhetoric against the 'other'. The use of bad manners and aggressiveness in an unrestrained manner is also part of the usual style of populists. These traits can be observed in the discourses of Spanish populist parties. For example, Pablo Iglesias (the former Second Deputy Prime Minister of Spain) opened the founding assembly of Podemos in 2014 with the slogan "The sky is not taken by consensus, it is taken by attack." He announced his candidacy for the presidency of the Community of Madrid, calling to "confront the criminal right" and declaring that "we must have courage in politics, courage to fight the battles we must fight" and that "May 4 will decide whether the ultra-right completes its attack on Madrid or whether we stop it".

The other party, Vox, has frequently referred to as the "Reconquista" (Reconquest). The party's official Twitter account has called for "Back to principles with Vox: #EspiritOfCovadonga" and "We do not want to and must not forget that today marks the 527th anniversary of the liberation of Granada by the Spanish troops of the Catholic Monarchs, ending eight long centuries of the Reconquista against the Muslim invaders." Abascal also declares "political war" on a "Popular Front"





government, alluding to the last government of the Second Republic that was defeated in the Civil War. Meanwhile, the independence movement has also used a confrontational narrative. For example, in its programme for the 2017 regional elections, the ERC mentioned the word "repression" 15 times and used other terms such as "attack," "intimidation," "threat," and "aggression" to describe a campaign by the Spanish government against Catalonia. In addition, secessionist groups have justified violence as a means to make the conflict in Catalonia visible, invited some of the most far-reaching groups to lobby, and mythologised violent actions such as the 'Battle of Urquinaona'. Part of this narrative is also the description of the National Police and the Civil Guard as "occupying forces". In the case of the Basque Country, it is notorious how EH Bildu leaders and militants have participated in and justified the "ongi etorri," the tributes to released ETA terrorists, even though they no longer officially support the armed struggle.

### What has been done to counter these movements?

Populists have always existed in Spain (Jesús Gil, Mario Conde and José María Ruiz Mateos, etc.). Experts on Spanish politics say that there are traits of populism in many political formations, but no leader has all the characteristics of a great populist.

Xavier Casals, Doctor of Contemporary History, claims that all newly formed formations have a populist component because their discourses are essentially anti-establishment and the new labels are "inclusive and transversal" (Ciudadanos, Foro Asturias Ciudadano), with "values" (Unión Progreso y Democracia, Compromís) or with imperatives (Podemos, Ganemos), so "the statement is the programme."

Juan Carlos Cuevas of the Complutense University in Madrid, on the other hand, affirms that the leftist parties "have moved closer to the direct demands of the citizens, but their answers, their proposals, are based on common sense." Xavier Casals predicts that "since the system is not able to regenerate itself," populism is destined to move "to the centre" of the political scene.

Currently, there are no parties in Spain trying to combat populism, or at least none that have gained sufficient prominence.

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## Cyprus

### Current political context

The right political party has formed Cyprus' government since 2013. Since then, the island has faced two major economic crises. In 2013, following a request by the Republic of Cyprus, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund agreed to an Economic Assistance Program which led to the provision of a financial package of 10 billion to the Republic of Cyprus. Since then, banks in Cyprus have been restructured and recapitalised, becoming about half the size they were before the crisis (EURYDICE, 2022). At the moment, Cyprus is facing the economic consequences of the global covid-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war, which led to an overall increase of all necessities' value. In addition to the economic situation that currently occurs in Cyprus, the Cypriot government is also facing major issues regarding the uncontrollable inflow of immigrants into the country. Lack of space, limited personnel and funds create more obstacles for both the government and immigrants.

### Populist movements

Regarding populism movements, Cyprus has currently one political party that supports a populist ideology. The ELAM party was formed in 2008 but was only legally recognised as a political party in 2011 (Katsourides, 2013). The party itself existed before 2008 as a vigilante group (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018, pp. 452-453) under the name "Golden Dawn Cyprus Branch" (Katsourides, 2013, p. 573). The party was originally identified as the Cypriot branch of "Golden Dawn", Greece's neo-Nazi party. Both parties are "inspired by a nationalist vision premised on the struggles of an imagined ethnic community" (Charalambous and Christoforou, 2018, p. 41), centred around the ideology of a pure Greek "race", of which the Greek-Cypriot population is an integral part (Aktar et al., 2010).

During the Parliamentary elections of 2011, ELAM gained a mere 1% of the overall votes (Parliament Elections, 2011). ELAM's thesis focus on the promotion of anti-establishment, anti-immigration and racist discourse. Since then, ELAM, has been progressively growing and the migration crisis is potentially used to their advantage. In the Parliamentary Elections of 2021, ELAM gained 6,78% of the overall votes and received three chairs in the Cypriot Parliament.

### Main characteristics of populism movements in this country

ELAM focuses on passing their ideology through the younger generation. Due to this they tend to target vulnerable groups that can be easily 'manipulated'. They



established smaller branches-offices across the country with more focus on areas that are facing issues with immigrants, so that they can use the issue on their advantage. More and more young boys and girls between the age of 15-20 are drawn by ELAM, and express their 'beliefs' in an extremely aggressive way. In addition, since they tend to recruit youngsters, students in secondary schools or high schools are used as mediators for ELAM. The party has created an official website and has its own newspaper where they publish articles and deliver their own point of views in all sociopolitical issues the country is currently facing.

### What has been done to counter these movements?

Over the past years, Cyprus has done several movements to counter the issue of populism. Many of them have been organized by the Association for historical dialogue and research which is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that aims to promote values and ideals of understanding and accepting one another. This NGO is currently doing several projects in the Home of Cooperation, a place where Greek-Cypriots, immigrants and Turkish-Cypriots can gather around, exchange ideas and work together. In addition to this, an increasing number of schools, private and public organisations, are participating in European Erasmus+ projects, and focus on promoting diversity and acceptance of people with different cultural backgrounds.

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## Portugal

### Current political context

On the 27th of October of 2021, the Portuguese Parliament rejected the minority socialist government's proposed budget for 2022, triggering the dissolution of parliament and prompting a snap election. For the first time since the transition to democracy, Portuguese state budget draft was rejected in parliament, with 117 votes against 108, and with five abstentions.

The electoral campaign was characterised by the salience of Chega (a national conservative, right-wing populist political party) across media. Up to 2019, Portugal was remarked as an exception in the European context, highlighting the impenetrability of (right-wing) populism. The 2022 elections reinforced the openness of the party system to populism, embodied by Chega (CH). The CH presented itself as an anti-system party, following a populist line against all "installed interests" on behalf of the "Portuguese people". The Party campaigned around the path to a "new democratic regime" anchored in "God, Fatherland, Family and Work", as recorded in the opening of its electoral program. The Socialist Party won these elections, with considerable gains: an increase of five percentage points, from 36% in 2019 to 41% in 2020. This increase allowed the party to accumulate 11 additional seats for the PS, leaving it with 119 seats, thus obtaining a parliamentary majority. This is the second time that the Socialist Party has achieved an absolute majority despite the electoral system of proportional representation. The electoral gains were significant in the case of Chega, which managed to strengthen its parliamentary group, assuming itself as the third-party force in parliament, with 12 deputies.

Beyond the political scenario, the social and economic dimensions should also be highlighted. Portugal is still dealing with the effects of the pandemic on public debt, despite the stronger-than-expected economic recovery – that was negatively impacted by the uncertain political situation in Europe (and Ukraine). As per government estimates, the forecast for 2022 highlighted a reduction of public debt to 122.8% in 2022. According to the Budget proposal, the government also aimed to narrow the budget deficit to 3.2% of gross domestic product in 2022 (being slightly more optimistic than the European Commission forecasts in the Autumn 2021) and a growth outlook of 4.9 percent (Gross domestic product) according to the Portuguese Bank's projections for the Portuguese economy in March 2022. The state budget is expected to increase public investment by 30% - that tends to be historically low - with a strong focus on a stimulus to the growth of private investment, particularly anchored on the EU Recovery and Resilience Plan.





Despite this positive outlook, Portuguese growth has failed to deliver a similar convergence with the European Living standards. This is particularly true when considering levels of poverty and lack of opportunities that are more pervasive in some groups of the population – particularly immigrants. Non-EU immigrants face a poverty rate of 25% compared to the 10% for EU origins and 17% for nationals, which signal the difficulties for these minorities in the labour market. The different phases of the pandemic have also exposed the country’s social inequalities, with the virus disproportionately affecting the most fragile groups, particularly those living in socioeconomically vulnerable municipalities. These economic and social effects are also likely to fuel populist narratives.

### Populist movements

**CHEGA** is a political party that came from a breakaway from the Social-Democratic Party. Formalised in April 2019, CHEGA was very much the personal project of André Ventura. Previously a relatively unknown figure, Ventura shot to relative fame during the 2017 local election campaign, when he made charged comments that were not usual in the country’s main parties, claiming that Portugal was “too tolerant towards some minorities, particularly the Roma people, and that while “gypsies live almost exclusively from State handouts” (words spoken by CHEGA’s leader in an interview for the Portuguese media) they would fail to abide by the rule of law. These statements drew accusations of racism and led the Centro Democrático Social - Partido Popular (CDS-PP) to withdraw from the joint list with the Partido Social Democrata (PSD) in Loures, though the PSD kept Ventura in the race, which he lost, albeit improving on the party’s showing in the preceding 2013 local election (Soares, 2017).

In September 2018 he again gained some political notoriety when he began collecting signatures for an early PSD congress to remove Rui Rio from the party leadership. However, in early October Ventura left the PSD, claiming he had been “betrayed and stabbed in the back”, and began forming his own party (Jalali, Moniz and Silva, 2020).

As depicted earlier, CH has grown in parliamentary seats and vote share. While in 2019, its popular vote was marginal (1.3%) – though it allowed the party to put an end to Portuguese exceptionalism regarding the absence of right-wing populist movements in parliament – CH has grown exponentially, reaching 7,38% of the vote share in 2022. Its growth is also visible in terms of financing. When running for the first legislative elections, CH entered this election with a generous budget. At



150,000 euros, this was the second largest outside of the main five parties (Jalali, Moniz & Silva, 2020)

### Main characteristics of populism movements in this country

CHEGA can be seen as populist party, following Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2017, p. 6) definition of populism as a "thin-centred ideology" that divides society into two opposing groups, "the pure people" versus 'the corrupt elite'" and views politics as "an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people". As Ventura put it in an interview with *El País*, in 2019, "we are an anti-system party", "a party of the common people, not of elites, of people who suffer with the current system" (Transcript of the interview in Petinga, 2019) The party presented a strong emphasis on law-and-order issues (e.g. advocating in its programme the chemical castration of sexual aggressors, the introduction of life imprisonment) and nativism (e.g. decrying the "globalist ideology", "political correctness" and "cultural Marxism"), consistent with the radical-right populist type defined by Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017).

CHEGA's campaigns – both the presidential elections of 2021 and the national elections of 2022 - tends to focus on attacks on political elites, criticizing the current constitutional regime, the invocation of the people and the attack on ethnic or racial minorities, with an aim to "capture the greatest number of disaffected people across the political spectrum and from abstention" (Serrano, 2020, p. 230). Ventura has surely taken advantage of the intense of media attention surrounding him and his party.

### What has been done to counter these movements?

There have been very few attempts to curve the growth of CH. In early 2021, the former presidential candidate and EP member, Ana Gomes, claimed that the legalization of the party violated the Constitutional Law. She asked the Attorney General's Office (PGR) to reconsider the legalisation of CHEGA as a political force and to investigate the source of its financing.

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## Poland

### Current political context

For several years, the word populism is often used in Poland. Of course, this did not happen in a day, it was a process. Even in 2004, when Poland joined the European Union, some people argued that this was a populist decision. But looking from nowadays perspective, the most important indication of populism in Poland, were the 2015 elections, which were won by the Polish populist and right-wing party PiS. Their main slogans were very typical for populists: take power from bribed elites and give it to “normal” people, help all, who are poor and ridiculed, protect all polish people etc.

Nonetheless, reality proved to be not so wonderful. PiS has started giving money by many social plans, but also took control of many democratic institutions (for example: court of justice, Supreme Court and universities) and started to create a social aversion to racial, sexuality and ethnic minorities (including LGBTQA+ and refugees). Moreover, European Union (especially Germany) has started being presented by PiS as an enemy too.

For several years the polish society has been divided almost equally in two worldview camps. However, the democratic opposition is too diverse to create one strong political party. This is why in 2019 PiS has won again in parliamentary election. Of course, many artists, actors, journalists, writers or just normal citizens are against this party and they are underlining how strongly populist this party is (Rigamonti, 2020). Despite this, PiS is still leading in most political surveys.

### Populist movements

**PiS** is a Polish political party founded in 2001. The full name of this party is Law and Justice, and is a populist right-wing and conservative party. PiS had won election in 2005, but they were leading the government only for two years. In 2015 they won again and till today PiS is the ruling party in Poland. PiS was mainly voted by people from rural areas (e.g. smaller towns or villages) who had enough of the previous ruling government(s). According to them, the previous government did not pay enough attention to the problems of poorer people. Additionally, PiS has promised more social benefits for them. But even without social support, conservative values have been popular in rural areas for a long time. Moreover, the current Polish president Andrzej Duda who is a former member of PiS is strongly connected with this party, and thus, is also using the same populist arguments in his speeches. In addition, PiS is very strongly supported by the Polish Christian Church, which still holds a strong position and influence in Poland (even though this is starting to



change since Polish younger generations have completely different opinion about religion than their parents or grandparents) (Zawadka, 2021). Regardless, the majority of Polish population is religious, so it remains an important factor.

Poland had a national party for decades. Before Poland's elections took place in 2019, Poland's national party changed its name and became registered as a political party under the name **Konfederacja**. Representatives of this organisation are describing their grouping as "union-sceptive", which aims to emphasise the sceptical approach to the European Union (EU). Specifically, they are in favour of dismantling the EU. According to its creators, the party's idea is to gather groups declaring libertarian, national, conservative and pro-civic views, but in fact they are a nationalist, xenophobic and at the same time very chauvinist party. For years this party still has the support of around 5% in opinions polls (Holownia, 2022).

The **march of Independence** is a demonstration/protest in the form of a march through the streets of Warsaw, held each year on the 11th of November (Independence Day in Poland). It was initiated by nationalist political organizations. Initially it wasn't a popular event, only several hundred of members of nationalistic organisations were taking part in that march. But shortly, the march of Independence became very popular: last year about 150 thousand people took part in this march. So now it is definitely the biggest, regularly organised, manifestation in Poland, but it still very questionable.

### Main characteristics of populism movements in this country

PiS is the biggest political party in Poland, so they are keeping control of many public organisations, connected with art, education, environment, law etc. PiS is an organised party with hundreds of faithful members. Since they won the elections in 2015, they managed to become more united. In recent years there were unaccountable political affairs and scandals connected with members of PiS: corruption, nepotism, waste of public money... but PiS was always able to find a solution, which makes it possible to blame somebody else, so no matter what is happening, they still acquire about 35% - 50% of votes in opinions polls (Holownia, 2022).

Since the 2015 elections, they are still using the same forms to reach the population: they are directing their message mainly to people from small villages, poor people and seniors. They are saying that PiS is the only party, who is taking care of "true polish people" and that they know, what is best for them. Of course, there is always someone to blame: refugees, LGBTQA+ people, elites from big cities.... They also include Polish history in their narrative, and argue that Polish people were always



victimised and should be proud of their soldiers/warriors from the past. For many people this is enough to vote for PiS, despite that the ideas of this party are clearly populist.

Konfederacja is a nationalist party which existed in Poland for many years, but under different names. But it is still comprised by mainly the same group members. In contrast to PiS, they are not even trying to hide their xenophobic and homophobic opinions. Konfederacja's point of view is very straightforward since they argue that: being an LGBTQA+ is a sickness, Poland should leave European Union, immigrants are not welcome, coronavirus is fake, and that every form of social support is very bad. Lately they are also trying to discourage Ukrainian immigrants to join the Polish society by saying that they stealing Polish peoples' jobs, money and "polish identity". Konfederacja attempts to reach the Polish population by organising protests and taking part in every election (at the moment, they are the smallest party that managed to get to parliament). Moreover, Konfederacja members are also very active in social media. Specifically, they search and attract potential members and voters mainly through the internet. Interestingly, a portion of Konfederacja's supporters, argue that they are voting for them merely for economic reasons.

The march of Independence mentioned in the previous section, is a complicated form of a populist organisation. Although every year this march is being organised by nationalist organisations, many people with completely different worldview(s) are taking part in it due to wanting to show respect to Polish soldiers, be part of history and show their bond with Poland. Populists are using this fact as manipulation: they are showing photos of smiling families with polish flag and trying to convince, that nothing else is happening on the March of Independence (Newsweek, 2017). But in fact, year after year, during the marches in addition to polish flags, many xenophobic and homophobic banners and symbols (examples: "Poland only for polish people", "man and girl = normal family", "Death to all enemies of our homeland etc.) are also utilised. Also, during those marches there is an occurrence of various terrible incidents such as burning rainbow LGBTQA+ flags, destroying shops, cars and streets, and brawling with police officers. Moreover, nationalist individuals from other countries (especially Hungary and Italy) are also participating in the Polish March of Independence. Luckily, during the last two to three years, the marches of Independence are calmer. Nonetheless, they are still far from being a democratic and peaceful form of showing respect in the Independence Day.

Foremost, in the last five years, almost every event connected with an important date in Polish history is organised by nationalists. Thereby, although officially those events are organised to honour polish heroes from the past, in reality they are being used by populists to preach xenophobic and homophobic slogans (Mikołajewska,





2020). This can become very confusing especially for younger individuals due to reinforcing ideologies that prompt them to think that in order to be considered a patriot, one needs to join a nationalist organisation or at least share a similar point of view.

### What has been done to counter these movements?

There are several non-governmental organisations in Poland, that are trying to publicise every situation, when PiS is breaking law and Polish constitution. These organisations had also filed many complains (concerning the condition of democracy in Poland) to European Institutions, including the European Court of Justice. Additionally, within the last year there were many demonstrations which had a pro-democracy message.

One of the most well-known anti-populist organisation in Poland in the last years is OMZRiK. OMZRiK is tracking examples of racists and xenophobic behaviours in Poland. Specifically, every year they are leading about 500 cases of hate-crimes which took place in Poland. OMZRiK is trying not only to publicise and report these crimes to the police, but also help victims of these crimes. OMZRiK played a significant role in the publicisation of many of these incidences in Poland and without its actions many of them would not be even mentioned at all.

In 2021, local authorities of Warsaw made attempts to forbid the March of Independence from happening (Sulowski. 2021). However, nationalists are being unofficially supported by the PiS government, which plays a decisive role in decisions about public events. Due to this, democratic politics and judges were in fact not able to do anything.

Lastly, for the past two years, Platforma Obywatelska which is the second biggest political party in Poland is organising a camp for young people (Mikołajewska, 2022). They are inviting many scientists, public figures, journalists, people of culture etc. During these camps, discussions about democracy, work-life balance, ecology, science discoveries and many others things are taking place. Participants can take part in many lectures and are prompted to ask questions to the other guests. Policy is also an important topic in these camps since, organisers are trying to teach and circulate youth democratic values and explain, why PiS is populist party.

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