



Manuscript 1205

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Not Quite “The End of History”: An Examination of European Populism and Its Threat to the European Union

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Abstract

Populism has been a rising phenomenon, overtaking the entire international system with varying degrees of success. The characteristics of populism, deemed to be one of the most important political buzzwords of this age, is contested as it has been applied so broadly to both political actors and parties by each other and the media. While there are many ways to define this term, this paper defines it as a thin-centered ideology that can take different forms with varying political consequences. There is a specific type currently that is cropping up within different political regimes across the world. Alarming, this populism exists within democracy and takes advantage of the democratic framework in the name of the people to counter the so-called elites and push forward one actor’s or one party’s political agenda. In Europe, this is especially concerning because it is perverting the very institution on which Europe today was created: The European Union (EU). By examining the concept of today’s populism and the development of its European strain, the development of the EU, and the events that have been occurring throughout, it can be determined that this is a dangerous problem, especially in Europe, that threatens both the EU and democracy itself. By understanding the true nature of populism and what it entails, the political situation of Europe can be exposed for what it is, and steps can be taken to continue to uphold the stability and peace that the EU has ushered in since its inception.

Keywords: Populism, Europe, European Union, Democracy, Political Theory

Introduction

Europe has always had an important place in the international system, even when not considered a world power. Arguably, after World War II, the great powers of Europe ceased to exist and today are acknowledged as medium powers, dwarfed by the United States (US) and China. European influence in the world, however, spans beyond power dynamics in acknowledgement to its historical role and in recognition of its importance both sociologically, economically, and culturally. After being phased out of the multipolarity with the destruction of WWII, Europe rebuilt itself physically and figuratively to become a united front through the EU that was regarded as a stable bulwark of democracy and the most exemplary post-WWII institution for peace and international cooperation. This new concept of Europe was devised with an advocacy for European integration through the EU and characterized the years following the end of the war and the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is because of this that today's events are unprecedented and shocking; after Brexit, the prospect of full or partial disintegration of the European Union (EU) is no longer unimaginable (Krastev, "The Specter Haunting Europe" 88). Brexit, however, is only a glaring sign of the times as populism has already taken root in Europe. The problem, however, can be seen internationally. As of 2016, the year of Brexit and President Donald Trump's election, the populist moment rising around the world has become very real with a new possibility of the world entering a populist age where liberal democracy has started to be called into question (Mounk 2). The rise and spread of populism in Europe are concerning because it threatens the fundamental principles on which the EU stands; if left unchecked, populism will erode the EU, which will threaten the whole of the international system.

Populism and Other Political Phenomena

Populism has been a rising phenomenon in Europe, but it is not a new concept. Scholars of populism agree that it can be considered a modern phenomenon, emerging in the late nineteenth century in Russia and the United States and in the early twentieth century in France, where it was closely related to the spread of democracy as both an idea and a regime (Mudde and Kaltwasser 21). Today, populism's impact reaches across the international system and all political regimes, but it remains more prevalent in democracies in Europe and the Americas (Mudde and Kaltwasser 21). Scholars such as Yascha Mounk say that right now is a populist moment that could turn into a populist age while others such as Ivan Krastev say that now is the age of populism (Mounk 2; Krastev, "The age of populism" 15). Both descriptions should warrant pause, especially in light of ideas such as Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" that wagered the success and hegemony of liberal democracy for the rest of history after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Müller, *What is populism?* 15). Populism has been growing since 1989, evolving alongside liberal democracy; there are different forms and variations of populism, but this particular style is worrisome because of what it stands for (Krastev, "The Specter Haunting Europe" 88). Citizens all over the world have become disillusioned with politics, in some cases with democracy itself, generating frustrated and resentful voters that have only fueled the rage that populists exploit in their rhetoric (Müller, *What is Populism?* 1). Now, more than ever, Fukuyama's claims are being tested, but in such a way that no one anticipated. No one could have predicted that liberal democracy could be challenged in such a way, opposed even in the so-called "democratic heartlands of North America and Western Europe," but the writing was on the wall (Mounk 3). Populism has become widely known since Brexit within not only Europe, but the entire international system. Despite this awareness, it is still hardly understood.

What is Populism?

The scope of what is happening in Europe cannot be understood without a grasp of this concept and its various components. There are no key texts by populist actors, because they often do not claim the term, to read to determine what it is or its nature. Because the phenomenon is highly dependent on an individual state, there are no overarching significant, defining moments of populism and its icons' appeal is local and not universal (Kaltwasser 478). Populism, unlike most ideologies, does not have an exact definition; there is no coherent criteria for what determines a populist actor (Mounk 2). Its lack of definition is further emphasized by its usage as the term is used to describe all kinds of phenomena; it has even been called one of the most important political buzzwords of this century (Mudde and Kaltwasser 1). Populism, as mentioned, is used broadly by political actors talking about one another and by the media to the point that the meaning has been further muddled. Among the versions of the phenomenon, certain characteristics always manifest. These fundamental components of populism help distinguish actual iterations from false representations that are ascribed the name incorrectly.

According to Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, both reputable scholars of populism, there are several possibilities one could take when studying populism such as analyzing popular agency, using the Laclauan approach, examining the socioeconomic circumstances, viewing it as a political strategy, and regarding it as a kind of folkloric politics (Mudde and Kaltwasser 3-4). Each of these different approaches, though not how Mudde and Kaltwasser finally decide to define populism, all have populist facets that are important to comprehend for a comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon. Popular agency refers to viewing populism as a democratic way of life built through popular engagement in politics. This approach, common among historians in the US and the ideology of those from the

late nineteenth century Populist Party, considers populism to be a particularly positive force for the mobilization of the common people and for the development of a communitarian model of democracy. The Laclauan approach, developed by Ernesto Laclau and his wife Chantal Mouffe, considers populism to be the essence of politics and an emancipatory force. In this approach, liberal democracy is the problem and radical democracy is the solution for it. In contrast, the socioeconomic approach, dominant in Latin American populism, looks at populism as a type of “irresponsive” economic policy. Economists view this policy occurring when there is a first period of massive spending financed by foreign debt followed by a second period marked by hyperinflation and the implementation of harsh economic adjustments. A more recent approach to populism looks at it as a political strategy, employed by specific types of political leaders who seek to govern based on direct and unmediated support from their base. This type of populism, as a strategy and not a full-fledged theory as other concepts posit, emphasizes that populism implies the emergence of a strong, charismatic figure who concentrates power and maintains a direct connection with the masses. The presence and significance of a figure, however, presents a flaw in that populism would then not be able to persist over time because it is tied to the lifespan of the leader. Finally, there are scholars who see populism as a folkloric style of politics, which is employed by leaders and political parties to mobilize the masses. It could also be seen almost like a strategy, but within folkloric rhetoric. This conception, notably, is used in communication studies and favored by the media; the understanding in this way construes populism as amateurish and unprofessional political behavior that aims to maximize media and linguistic styles where populist actors are able to distinguish themselves as representatives who stand with the people in opposition to the political elite (Mudde and Kaltwasser 3-4). Each of these approaches covers an aspect of populism, but to encompass the whole phenomenon, an

ideational approach integrates many of the compatible aspects of these other analyses into one clear conception of populism that can accurately pinpoint the issues that are present today.

The ideational approach is supported by Mudde and Kaltwasser and used by other scholars of populism who follow their example. As mentioned, this approach consolidates many of the characteristics of the approaches discussed. Looking at populism in this way conceives it as a discourse, an ideology, or a worldview. The usage of this approach does not create a consensus, but it provides a basis for sharing core concepts of the definition. The general agreement on populism is that it always has some kind of appeal to “the people” and a denunciation of “the elite.” By this token, populism includes an adulation of the common people and a critique of the establishment (Mudde and Kaltwasser 5). These commonalities are incorporated into this ideology, which is the crux of the ideational approach.

When looking at the definition of populism that Mudde conceives through the ideational approach, it is important to first understand Michael Freeden’s morphological framework, which forms the basis of the definition (Kaltwasser, “The Response of Populism” 478). Freeden, a leading scholar on ideology, sought to study the internal structure of ideological belief systems, which can be classified into two groups: thick-centered, or macro, ideologies and thin-centered, or micro, ideologies. Thick-centered ideologies are overarching networks of ideas that offer solutions to all the important political issues a society could encounter while thin-centered ideologies are world views constrained in their ambition and scope because of their reliance on a stricter morphology that may answer some, but not all, political questions that societies generate (Kaltwasser, “The Responses of Populism” 478). Mudde defines populism as “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an

expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 6). By defining populism as thin-centered and not clearly defining the three core concepts that he lists, Mudde allows for the true nature of populism to be revealed. It is thin-centered because it does not have the scope to be a full-fledged thick-centered ideology. Instead populism must exist with another ideology. It rarely, if ever, appears in isolation. Thus, populism is combined with other ideologies, so-called host ideologies; each populist actor emerges because of a particular set of social grievances, which influences their choice of host ideology, and then affects how the actor defines the people and the elite (Mudde and Kaltwasser 21). Particularly, populism attaches or assimilates into these hosts, which provides other ideological elements outside of its own framework that it cannot generate due to its thinness. These other ideological elements that it is attached to help promote political projects that are appealing to the broader public. The thinness also creates its flexibility and its chameleonic capabilities in taking different forms, which in turn are dependent upon the host to construct interpretive frames that appeal at varying levels to different societies. Populism can be seen as a method for understanding a political reality as it does not have so much of a coherent ideological tradition as a set of ideas that appears in combination with different, sometimes opposing, ideologies (Mudde and Kaltwasser 6). Even though ideational definitions of populism are seemingly more comprehensive, they have also been accused of being too broad and that they could potentially apply to all populist actors, movements, and parties. To combat this critique, definitions of populism must have an antithesis for them to make sense; in other words, exclusion must be able to be derived from the definition to separate phenomena. The direct opposites of populism are elitism and pluralism, which are clearly excluded once the core components of populism have been examined. In addition to the ideational basis, Mudde also provides core components of populism: the “pure people,” the

“corrupt elite,” and the *volonté générale*. Because of this ideational foundation, the definitions of these concepts are just as flexible as the rest of the ideology. The idea of the “the people” is a construct that is heavily subjected to interpretation and simplifications of reality. “The people” acts as an empty signifier that makes populism politically powerful. In this way, it can be used to frame “the people” in a way that appeals to various constituencies and articulates their demands. This then generates a shared identity between shared groups and facilitates support for a common cause, all of which helps the populist actor to claim they represent the people counter to the elite who are not a part of the people. By conceptualizing the people as a construction, it allows for the flexibility to show how “the people” can simultaneously be the sovereign, the common people, and the nation and how it can be used in combination with secondary features: political power, socioeconomic status, and nationality. This view of “the people” is derived from modern democratic tenets that define the people as the ultimate source of political power and, thus, the rulers (Mudde and Kaltwasser 9). Populists employ these ideas of the people, again, to appeal to their base. In addition to defining the people, the elite are also defined in a way so it can be employed by the populists. A crucial relationship between “the people” and “the elite” is characterized by morality, creating the pureness of the people and the corruptness of the elite. The elite are never clearly defined, but they are identified with broad criteria by a populist actor. The elite are defined on the basis of power, which indicates most people who hold leading positions, while also excluding populists themselves and their supporters. Populists typically defend a post-class world, arguing that class divisions are artificially created to undermine the people and keep the elite in power. By creating a link between the political elite and the sociological elite, it is easy to further link the elite with economic power. Conceptualizing the elite in this way is useful for populists in power for generating the rhetoric and explanations that

they give their base (Mudde and Kaltwasser 13). Finally, the *volonté générale* is a notion of the political and is linked with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The idea of general will is that there is a common interest derived from the people of a community. Rousseau and his notion of the general will critiqued representative government and thought that self-government was the best way to govern. To follow this trend, populists will support the implementation of direct democratic mechanisms; actors argue that an elective affinity exists between populism and direct democracy that are helpful in developing a direct relationship between the populist leader and their constituencies (Mudde and Kaltwasser 17). Populists, however, twist the logic that Rousseau introduces with the concept of general will. Instead of basing general will on a rational process built by the public sphere, populists base the notion on common sense. When it is framed in this way, it is useful for aggregating different demands and identifying a common enemy. By appealing to the general will, populism enacts a specific logic which enables the formation of a popular subject with a strong identity of “the people,” which is able to challenge the status quo “elite.” It is within this concept that Mudde acknowledges that populism can have dark side; he says that the monist core of populism, no matter its manifestation, in combination with its notion of general will may lead to the support of authoritarian tendencies (Mudde and Kaltwasser 18). These three features of populism are found consistently throughout each iteration, which makes understanding these key characteristics important to the comprehension of the phenomenon and its nature.

Mudde provides a definition and universal conclusions that are widely accepted by his peers, but he is not the only authority on populism. The tendency of reducing populism to only a single set of universal elements and not acknowledging the many nuances of the concept does not properly analyze or comprehend the scope of the phenomenon. This why Mudde’s

conception of populism as a thin-centered ideology, which allows for flexibility, works. Jan-Werner Müller has also studied populism and, based in some part on Mudde's thin-centered definition, provides further insight on the phenomenon. Müller finds that populism has an inner logic that shows it cannot function as a corrective for or an emancipatory force of democracy. This inner logic threatens democracy by undermining pluralism; as a consequence of the populist belief that the populist actor is the sole representative of the people. This stance creates an "us" and "them" dichotomy that populists use to condemn their opponents as "enemies of the people." Additionally, anyone who does not support the populists are no longer a part of "the people," adding to the effects of the dichotomy. For Müller, it is important to note that while populism is always anti-elitist, it must also be anti-pluralist in order to be populism. In particular, this anti-pluralism is moralized in the belief that the populist actor is serving the "pure people." The moral component lends to the populist appeal externally, but internally it starts to create an illusion that it actually exists. The other part of this inner logic is that there is a coherent will of the people that has not manifested and, consequently, democracy is not truly serving the people (Müller, *What is Populism?* 10). The idea that a single, homogenous, authentic people with a singular will exists is a fantasy, and a dangerous one at that (Müller, *What is Populism?* 4). Believing that there is a singular will of the people is a betrayal of pluralism and democracy, which is supposed to be representative of many groups and not just the majority (Müller, "The Wrong Way to Think about Populism" 4). Letting populist actors explain citizens' worries and issues represents a misunderstanding of how democratic representation works. Not everything that populists claim is fictitious but allowing them to say that they alone understand what is truly happening and that they are the only representatives of the people is problematic. Müller also notes that most of what populists say is a simplified view; a large part of populist rhetoric is an oversimplification

of reality to further implicate the elite in their claims. By following what some populists say, it is easy to fall into the narrative that they weave and miss that their descriptions of political developments are not neutral and are filled with populist language. Making assumptions about populists is dangerous because it skews the significance of what they are saying (Müller, "The Wrong Way to Think about Populism" 4). While some scholars will note that populism can be a positive force, many scholars, like Müller, overwhelmingly point out how it is a peril and has effectively put the world's most stable democracies into crisis.

Bojan Bugarcic, a scholar of law and democracy, also finds that populism comes in differing forms, describing it as Janus-faced. Each of these different forms has profoundly different political consequences, resulting in the manifestation of two faces of populism: the authoritarian and the emancipatory faces (Bugarcic 391). The current populist moment, however, is characterized by a dominance of authoritarianism over democracy. The duality of this current manifestation of populism's nature is subject to debate, however. In discussions of the definition of populism, the true essence of populism has been brought up as an intrinsic part of the definition. Bugarcic notes that populism, by its own definition, relies heavily on how it manifests – it can be authoritarian or emancipatory – which references his ascription of it being Janus-faced. Other scholars have said that it only has one tendency or the other. For example, Müller characterizes populism as a permanent shadow of representative politics and that it cannot be a corrective of democracy as some have claimed it to be. He says that populists need to be criticized for what they are and the danger that populism poses to democracy, not just liberalism, needs to be acknowledged. He concludes that increased participation and reassertion of popular sovereignty does not have any correlation with any potential populist impact despite populist actors' claims. The reason why populism can so insidiously hide within democracy itself is

because populists are not against the principle of political representation. Instead, they just insist that they are the only legitimate representatives of the people; once they are given the power to represent constituents, they begin to declare their political opponents as illegitimate and any others who oppose are not a part of “the people” (Müller, *What is Populism?* 101-102). Krastev, by the same token, notes that liberal democratic regimes specifically are facing an internal crisis. This crisis is alarming and, according to him, it should very well be. The rhetoric behind populism directly opposes democratic structures, which makes it dangerous. For example, separation of powers, according to populists, is an example of elite dishonesty and a devious mechanism for distorting responsibilities and passing the buck (Krastev, “The Specter Haunting Europe” 95). Although some scholars argue that the nature of populism can be positive, most scholars of European populism see it as a dangerous phenomenon that needs to be carefully monitored because of its effects on European democracies.

European populism

Although the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Soviet Union helped usher in a new era of peace, unshrouded with the end of the Cold War, Europe’s problems have continued to persist and arguably define much of the European populist moment. The post-1989 era has made Europe wary. After WWII, Europeans were already cautious in restricting popular and parliamentary sovereignty as lack of restraint helped the rise of fascism. With the emergence of the EU, individual states were further inhibited by their commitments to the supranational entity, which was demonstrated with the push for German integration into the EU after its reunification (Steinmetz-Jenkins 188). After the EU had come into force, the vision and hopes for Europe finally seemed to be coming true. In the vision of Fukuyama, democracy should become prevalent in these former communist states and the West and East would finally come together.

The rise of populism, however, has put into question the efforts of the post-communist era and the European project itself. Knowing the scope of populism now allows one to see how it is beginning to permeate the entire international system, especially in Europe. Over the past few years, populism has only strengthened its foothold, closely coming to resemble the nationalistic views of regimes best left in the annals of history. European populism, in particular, is worrisome. As mentioned, populism can take many different forms. The particular manifestation in Europe has more authoritarian tendencies than democratic and has started degrading the democracies present within Europe in such a way that many are concerned. The fact that this is happening in Europe is unprecedented and worrisome. Even throughout Europe, the form populism takes is different. In most of Eastern and Central Europe, populism has taken on increasingly authoritarian tendencies in combination with the ethnonationalist inclinations present throughout most of Western Europe (Bugaric and Kuhelj). Populism in Europe is typically far-right on the political spectrum, which is why it can never represent a positive force or a corrective of the existing democratic structures in Europe. With the added dimension of the EU, right-wing populism could be detrimental to Europe's current way of life, as it is threatening the very existence of the union, and it could reverberate throughout the rest of the international system.

It is early in the stages of the phenomenon and it is still playing out across the European political stage. Yet, populism is already creating two distinct harms: threatening to harm the rights of minorities in the realm of policy and threatening to undermine the long-term stability of democracies throughout Europe in the realm of institutions. The changes that have already been made are signs that there are more to come. The fear within Europe is the detriment to institutions; many populist parties advocate for the weakening or abolition of international or

supranational institutions. In the context of Europe, this could mean the EU (Eiermann, Mounk, and Gultchin 18). Unraveling is at work and after Brexit, the prospect of full or even partial disintegration of the EU is no longer unimaginable (Krastev, “The Specter Haunting Europe” 88). The possibility of the dissolution of the EU is a sign of the degradation of democracy; the EU was regarded as a bulwark of democratic principles and human rights with its very foundations driven by democracy. The reality of European populism is far past wondering about the nature of the phenomenon they face. The dangers that right-wing populism in Europe presents, while only affecting Europe at the moment, can have far-reaching consequences that will drastically alter the international system if left unchecked.

Crises of Europe: Writing on the wall?

Since its inception, Europe has had to contend with problem after problem challenging the legitimacy and strength of its union. After finally coming together after the Soviet Union’s collapse, the EU had seemingly completed the vision of the WWII leaders who saw all of Europe cooperating together for peace and prosperity of the continent. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the next problem that Europeans had to tackle was German reunification and its implications while also helping former Soviet states transition to democracy. Once it had overcome the hurdles of its development, it was immediately plunged into the deep end of crisis.

The Eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis came back to back, pitting EU member states against one another and truly testing the bounds of their commitment to the EU over the individual national interests of the state. The Eurozone, or European debt, crisis happened when all of the states within the Eurozone – countries that used the Euro – found themselves in a multi-year debt crisis that first started in 2009. It first started with Greece and their debt, starting a storm of speculation about whether Greece would have to leave the EU. A year later, concern

mounted for other countries – Portugal, Ireland, and Spain – in a similar situation to Greece. After failing to remedy the problem with austerity measures, Greece was bailed out by the other Eurozone members and the IMF. As more bailouts became necessary, a permanent bailout fund, called the European Stability Mechanism, was established by the Eurozone finance ministers (“Timeline: The unfolding eurozone crisis”). Throughout the crisis, the value of the euro was called into question and the economy of those countries was in severe peril. Despite the obvious pitfalls, the EU held together and weathered the crisis as best they could. For many, there were moments when the existence of the EU was truly challenged.

Immediately following the debt crisis, the refugee crisis took over Europe. This crisis ushered in a whole new set of problems for Europe. The influx of refugees from the Middle East seeking asylum first only hit countries that bordered those areas; Italy and Greece, for example, were hit hard once refugees began pouring in. To offset the inundation of immigrants, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that she would ignore the Dublin regulation that says a person seeking asylum must do so in the country that they land in and allow refugees to come to Germany (Smyth, “Migration and ‘Dublin regulation’ concerns continue to simmer”). The arrival of refugees in Europe started a wave of xenophobia and nationalism and many Europeans began to claim they were anti-immigrant. Migration, for Europeans, is associated with terrorism, Islamization of their societies, and overburdening of the welfare state. Some say that the division on how to handle migration has led to the popularity of right-wing populism, the victory of Brexit, and the growing division between the East and West within the EU that is casting doubt on the idea of irreversible integration. Migration is also a point of contention because it comprises majorities that feel threatened. Additionally, it is a clash of different solidarities – national, ethnic, and religious – against obligations as human beings that has created some of the

debate over migration (Krastev, “The Specter Haunting Europe” 91-92). The effects of the refugee crisis are far-reaching and long-lasting. Even though the number of refugees entering Europe is significantly less than it was at its peak, immigration is still an important topic that is discussed that will continue to impact European politics. Both of these crises tested Europe and the EU has still remained relatively together. Yet, the sentiments expressed by populists have drawn on the crises and issues within the EU that reveal not all is well within Europe.

What Does This Mean?

Populism has been a rising phenomenon and not acknowledging the impact that it has had on the international system would ignore much of today’s events. Brexit was not the beginning and it is also not the end. Although some scholars would like to say that populism does not pose a threat to democracy and that it is in fact a corrective, populism has begun to show its insidiousness with every passing moment. The populist age that the world has found itself is beginning to degrade the force that was supposed to be the end of history from within. Democracy has been challenged before, but never by a force that so closely resembles it. The populism that has risen today is deeply democratic in some ways, yet it is also horrifically illiberal. The rhetoric today is appealing; it is a menace disguised as a panacea, promising to give a voice back to the people and to fight for them against a disconnected establishment. At the same time, populists are defining who is considered a member of the people while denouncing anyone who does not fit in, including those who do not support them. Even though they claim to be democratic, they clearly are not as they try to realize a dangerous fantasy of a single, homogenous society. Today’s populism is more than a problem and pretending or assuming that it is helpful and emancipatory is dangerous. Democracy is deteriorating and, even though populist actors have started losing momentum, populism and its effects are not going away. This

populist moment, no matter how short some scholars claim it is, has irrevocably changed democracy and the international system today.

Even though the definition of populism is broad, it can be narrowed down once the form of populism has taken shape. Today's populism exists within democracy, its chosen host, and employs other thin ideologies like nationalism to appeal to its base. The goal of populists today is to gain power electorally, appearing as right-wing candidates, and to effect change once they have gained power. The populists today throughout the world have, marginal or not, gained more power. The changes that they have made within the democratic framework and the norms that they have discarded is only part of the peril that populism poses. It has also drastically changed the public's conception of democracy. Illiberal democracies should not exist; their existence is contradictory when put into the context of the definition of democracy post-1989. Yet, people everywhere are accepting illiberal policies and rhetoric as democratic. This development alone is an indication of the start of the degradation of democracy and, as it continues with more and more illiberal manifestations, it is only going to continue to deteriorate. Some world leaders have already started to acknowledge this problem and are starting to try and combat it. For the future of democracy and to prevent a new ending of history, the entire international system will have to work together to identify the populists and then fix the flaws that allowed them to flourish.

The effects of European populism: Is it a danger?

The significance of European populism and the effect it is having on the EU is monumental. The mounting support of populist parties has started to win populist actors seats within their respective governments and the EU itself. The worry about European populism is that it directly opposes the EU with the Euroskeptic attitude that is a part of the anti-elitist rhetoric that populists use and is starting to have bigger effects than Euroskepticism ever has

before. As mentioned, Brexit has shown that the EU can be broken and the presence of populism in Eastern Europe in contrast to Western Europe only shows that there are endemic problems within how the EU has developed. The fact that this particular kind of populism has grown within the democratic framework is worrying for the EU because that is the foundation of their principles and organization. Hungary and Poland, before Brexit, were signs that the legitimacy of the EU was being threatened; as they are allowed to continue as they are, the EU's strength is diminishing.

More specifically, European populism is bad for the international system because of its effects on the EU. The EU's importance in the international system is both historical and physical. With the creation of this union, it joined together forces that had previously been such bitter rivals to the point that wars had been fought constantly up until the end of WWII. The era of peace that the EU has helped to usher in and sustain is now in danger because of its degeneration. Even though other organizations such as the UN exists, the EU specifically kept that region together. By removing European integration, a whole host of states with their own individual interests will rise on the world, disrupting all spheres of the international system. Even though the states within the EU are medium-sized powers, the disruption of this organization would alter the balance of power and the structure of the world order that has been in place since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The EU has stood as a bulwark of democracy, peace, and international cooperation. Its degeneration and its potential of dissolution is a problem that needs to be addressed before it detrimentally changes the international system.

Conclusion

Democracy was supposed to be "the end of history," yet today's events show a much more different picture than what was optimistically envisioned in 1989. While Fukuyama had

anticipated opposition to democracy, he and the rest of the international community had never expected this democratic crisis that has overtaken the world. Democracies, especially established and stable ones, should not be in peril of imploding, but reality tells a different story.

Conceptualizations of this presumed liberal democratic age did not take into account the insidiousness of populism and its political consequences. Although populism has many forms, a right-wing, sometimes authoritarian, iteration has manifested, and it is degrading democracy. While some forms can stand as a corrective for democracy, the populism that is seen today in Europe and in other places around the world is not changing political systems and institutions for the better. Rather, this phenomenon is disintegrating the world order as it is currently known by employing democratic principles that it hides behind while it festers into illiberal semi-authoritarianism. The EU, in particular, has suffered – an organization founded and driven by democratic principles is falling apart in front of the entire world. European populism, however, was in a way inevitable; the development of the EU and Central and Eastern European transition to democracy were riddled with flaws that sowed the seeds for the populist age that is developing today. The fears behind European integration, seen at every stage of the EU's development, and the flaws in unifying the East and the West have given a voice to the populists. While the EU will not collapse overnight, the dangers that populism poses need to be addressed. After Brexit, it was impossible for the rest of Western Europe, who had only just started to experience populism, to ignore the growing populist problem that had already taken root in the East. The EU, having acknowledged that populism is a threat, must fix the problems that it had previously glossed over; the division between the East and the West must be remedied for the EU to properly move forward as a truly united Europe. The populist moment is far from over, but the world cannot let it be the defining moment of an era that has been marked by peace and democracy. The

acknowledgement of this problem is the first step to fixing it and moving forward to a better, peaceful future for the entire international community.

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