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Growing inequality, shifting class relations and the rise of nationalist populism in Europe

Nico Wilterdink

In November last year throughout France, people with yellow vests appeared on roads and roundabouts to protest the high prices of diesel fuel and gasoline that had been raised by a new tax. The movement of the *gilets jaunes*, the Yellow Vests was born. It attracted a mass following in subsequent weeks, broadening its cause from a protest against high fuel prices for car drivers to an overall attack on the French government and, in particular the chosen president, Emmanuel Macron. People expressed their anger not only by blockading traffic roads, but also by breaking shop windows at the Champs Elysée in Paris, damaging parts of the Arc de Triomphe, ramming the doors of a government building, threatening the lives of politicians and entering into violent fights with the police. Initially receiving wide endorsement from a large majority of the French population (more than 80%, according to opinion polls), the movement lost much support during the following months, and gradually dwindled in the course of this year, though it continues until the present day.

This spontaneous outburst of popular anger was not organized by any political party, but it was supported by opposition parties on the flanks of the political spectrum: the *Rassemblement National* on the Right, *La France Insoumise* on the Left. Both parties define themselves as anti-establishment and claim to speak and act on behalf of the common people. Both parties and the movement they support represent what is called populism.

Populism, of which the French Yellow Vests are a clear if rather inarticulate manifestation, has come to the fore everywhere in Europe in the past twenty years in different kinds and degrees. What is this phenomenon, and how to explain its emergence and spread since the turn of the millennium?

First, what is populism? Like any 'ism', it is not easy to define, - the more so, in this case, since it is a term that is hardly used by those who are regarded as populists themselves; it is a label mainly used by others, often in a negative way, to classify certain political actions, viewpoints, groups and organizations.

Populism can be defined as referring to political viewpoints and actions that construct an opposition between 'the people' on the one hand and 'the elite' or 'the establishment' on the other. In this dichotomy, the elite is not only powerful and privileged, but also corrupt, devious, and self-interested, whereas the people are their innocent victims. Populist politicians claim to represent the people, defined as a homogeneous, consensual entity, and to act on their behalf against the corrupt and devious elite. In its stress on the unity and homogeneity of the people, populism tends to be anti-pluralistic and anti-liberal.

Originally, the term populism has been used to characterize left-wing, anti-capitalist parties and movements, such as the People's Party in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. Today, however, we associate populism more with right-wing parties and politicians. Left-wing and right-wing cannot always be distinguished clearly, and elements of both are often combined. The Yellow Vests movement is an example. Yet we can say that left-wing and right-wing populism are distinguishable by the way in which 'the elite' and 'the people' are contrasted. Left-wing populism defines this contrast primarily in economic terms: the elite are the wealthy, the capitalists, the big bankers and captains of industry, and, secondarily, politicians and officials who represent the interests of this economic elite. The people are the rest of the population, the large majority who are excluded from economic power and privileges.

Right-wing populism, on the other hand, identifies 'the people' with the nation, defined in cultural and ethnic, sometimes also religious or racial terms. This populism is, therefore, first and foremost nationalistic. The nation consists of the people who inhabit the country over many generations, have common ancestors and share a common language and common cultural traditions.

Excluded from the people-as-nation are immigrants and ethnic minorities. The negatively targeted elite is primarily defined not as an economic but as a political and cultural elite - politicians of established parties, officials and bureaucrats, as well as intellectuals, artists, so-called experts and journalists of established media. In the nationalist populist discourse, this elite disregards the interests and values of the national community by supporting immigration and immigrant groups, and proclaiming cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. National unity and autonomy are also undermined, in this view, by foreign powers and the transmission of authority from the national state to international or supranational institutions and organisations, such as the European Union. Parties with this ideology promise to 'give the country back to the people' by replacing the cosmopolitan elite by their own leaders who truly serve the national interests and voice the people's will.

In what follows I will deal with the emergence and spread of this latter branch of populism in Europe - more specifically, Western Europe - during the past few decades. In some European countries, like Hungary, Poland, and, in a somewhat different way, Italy, it has become the basis of government policy. In Austria, the right-wing populist FPÖ participates in a coalition cabinet with the Christian-Democratic Party. In the other European countries, such parties are in the opposition but have attracted many voters in recent years and have put a stamp on national politics. Well-known examples are the *Rassemblement National* (the former *Front National*) in France, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany, the UKIP in Britain (succeeded by the Brexit Party for the European elections this year), the Freedom Party in Netherlands, the Danish People's Party, the Sweden Democrats, the Finns Party and, most recently, the new nationalist party *Vox* in Spain. While there are many differences between these parties, they share the basic traits of nationalist populism. In the European context, this includes a highly critical stance towards the European Union.

Outside Europe, nationalist populism has been on the rise and even become hegemonic in such diverse countries as the United States (with the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016), Russia (where it has taken the form of a semi-dictatorship), Turkey (related to Islamic anti-secularism), India (related to Hindu nationalism), and Israel. The growing strength of nationalist populism, in which the nation is often identified with a particular religion, is a world-wide phenomenon. Nationalist movements in different countries influence and inspire one another, even if they embrace antagonistic creeds.

How to explain this phenomenon, particularly as it manifests in Western Europe? Three main explanations have been offered. First, the rise of nationalist populism has been interpreted as a backlash against vast cultural transformations in Western societies since the 1960s in the direction of secularization, individualism, permissiveness, gender equality, and the erosion of traditional family values. In connection to this cultural thesis, it has been argued that identity movements of women, gays, and ethnic, cultural or racial minorities that came up in the 1970s provoked a counter reaction in the form of a the stress on national group identity among the native majority population. According to a second, materialist or economic explanation, increasing material insecurity and stagnating or even declining incomes among large parts of the population in Western European countries have produced grievances which are translated into support for populist anti-establishment parties. A third explanation gives priority to a theme that nationalist parties themselves put forward as crucial: immigration and its consequences. National populism is, accordingly, an answer to the problems created by mass immigration into Western European nation-states.

Each of these explanations has a degree of plausibility and find some support in empirical data. Yet each of them is, at best, only partial. The cultural explanation falls short in that it cannot explain why national populist movements of the kind and size that we see today did not emerge already in the 1960s and subsequent decades, when the cultural transformations that populism is supposed to be a reaction against were particularly strong, at least in Western Europe. Moreover, not all nationalist-populist parties in Europe are culturally conservative in all respects, and not all

culturally conservative or traditionalist parties are populist. Thus, while the reigning nationalist-populist party in Poland, the PiS, defends traditional family values in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church prescriptions, the oppositional Freedom Party in the Netherlands stresses the national values of sexual freedom and gender equality to accentuate its rejection of Islamic traditionalism, intolerance and suppression of women. The second, economic thesis cannot explain immediately why and how economic grievances translate into negative feelings about immigration and multiculturalism, and why they do not lead to intensified class struggles and growing support for left-wing parties that claim to represent the interests of the economically underprivileged. The third explanation is problematic in so far as there is not a one-to-one correlation between the degree of immigration and ethnic-cultural plurality on the one hand and nationalist populism on the other. Thus, in Hungary and Poland, countries where a populist and nationalist party has acquired government power, immigration has been very limited. And when one compares areas within countries, support for nationalist populist parties appears to be often relatively strong in communities where the proportion of immigrants is small.

What I will outline here, is not a completely alternative explanation, but a broad framework in which various explanatory factors can be placed. The rise of nationalist populism in Europe has to be understood, I argue, in the framework of transformations of global capitalism since the 1970s which brought about changes in class relations and inequality structures, by which group alignments, identifications and orientations changed.

After a postwar period of rapid industrialisation and economic growth, diminishing income inequality and expanding welfare state provisions in Western Europe, in which the working and middle classes improved their economic position considerably (in terms of income and consumption levels, leisure time, and material security), a new period set in around 1975, when economic growth diminished, unemployment rose, and the trends of equalization in income and wealth stopped and started to reverse. Increasing economic inequality in Western countries since the 1980s is indicated by statistics on the functional distribution of income - the relative decline of labour income compared to capital income - and on the distribution of personal income and wealth. Clear manifestations of this trend are the explosive rise of top management incomes and the strong growth of the number of very rich people, contrasting with the stagnation or even decline of wage incomes and increasing material precariousness among large parts of the population, due to diminishing job and income security, flexibilisation of the labour market (comprising a shift to temporary work contracts and increasing self-employment), fluctuating employment chances and shrinking welfare state provisions.

This increase of socioeconomic inequality within Western nation-states is plausibly connected with processes of globalization: the growth of intertwined cross-border, transnational, long-distance flows of capital, goods, people, and information, and the concomitant extension and intensification of global networks of human interdependence. While globalization in the wide sense is a long-term development extending over centuries, it went into a new phase of acceleration in the 1970s when it became connected with a weakening of state regulation on the national level. It was marked by the collapse of the postwar Bretton Woods system of international payments in 1973, which induced an enormous growth of international speculative money flows and forced the deregulation of capital controls, making national economies more dependent on global finance. Another marking point was the drastic rise of oil prices by a cartel of oil producing and exporting countries (OPEC) in 1973, followed by a second 'oil crisis' in 1979, which brought Western economies into trouble and laid bare a shift of global interdependence relations in favour of non-Western countries. This shift was also manifested by the increasing competitive success of Asian, initially primarily Japanese, industrial companies, which put pressure on Western companies' sales and profits. Companies had to cope with rising production costs and increasing international competition. Under these critical conditions, they developed strategies of drastic cost reduction by flexibilisation and differentiation, relocation of parts of the production to low-wage countries, massive lay-offs and forcing workers to accept lower wages. They were able to do so as growing

unemployment and job insecurity weakened the position of labour unions. Corporations went global, spreading their production activities over different locations in the world. This is indicated by the enormous growth of foreign direct investments (FDI) since the 1970s. Labour-intensive production that required no special skills or schooling was relocated to low-wage countries. A new global division of labour emerged, which, in combination with ongoing mechanization and automation of production, implied de-industrialization in Western societies, a shift from manufacturing industries to services, from manual to non-manual work, and, as a consequence, a shrinking industrial working class. This whole development was highly facilitated by technological innovations in transport and communication, but also enhanced by political-institutional changes that implied the opening of national borders and the stronger integration of national states in the world market. Capitalist reforms in China since the 1970s, the fall of communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe around 1990, the lowering of trade tariffs by the WTO, and the elimination of border controls within the European Union are part of this overall movement of the widening and 'liberalization' of international markets.

With the transnationalization and the growing flexibility and mobility of industrial companies, members of the shrinking working classes in Western countries had to compete increasingly with workers in other countries on a global labour market. Their position in relation to mobile capital weakened. Labour unions lost bargaining power as their traditional base in the manufacturing industries became smaller and weaker. On the other hand, the power of owners and managers of mobile capital – concentrated in transnational corporations, banks, and investment funds – increased in relation to groups and organizations that remained much more tied to the national state: the majority of manual and non-manual workers and their organizations, and national governments. This power shift is manifested in increasing income and wealth inequality within national states. At the same time, globalization has brought some overall decrease of income gaps between rich and poor countries in the world.

In sum, transformations in global capitalism since the middle of the 1970s induced an increase of socioeconomic inequality within Western countries. One might have expected that this growing inequality would have led to the revival of class struggles, to a move to the Left of parties that traditionally claim to represent working-class interests, and a growing support for these parties. But this has not been the dominant tendency during the past decades. Rather the contrary. True, in recent years there have been waves of anti-capitalist protest against growing inequality (such as the Occupy movement that appeared in American and European cities in 2011-2012), and left-wing populist parties have come to the fore in a few countries, such as *Syriza* in Greece (the main government party since 2015), *Podemos* in Spain and, as mentioned, *La France Insoumise* in France. Yet the rise of right-wing nationalist populism has been, on the whole, much stronger. This went hand in hand with a diminishing attraction and weakening position of organisations on the traditional, working-class oriented Left. Labour unions lost members and bargaining power; communist parties, which had been strong in France and Italy, virtually disappeared; and social-democratic and similarly oriented parties tended to move to the middle, becoming less distinct from more conservative parties, and lost much support. Many voters went over to right-wing populist parties, and among these voters people in economically vulnerable positions and with lower educational qualifications were overrepresented.

So there seems to be a paradoxical conjunction of growing economic inequality and the emergence of right-wing nationalist movements. This conjunction is, arguably, more than a coincidence; it indicates a causal relation. The growth of inequality within European nation-states fueled grievances and resentment among, in particular, members of lower and lower-middle classes: industrial workers, farmers, small entrepreneurs, self-employed and white-collar workers with average or below-average incomes and lower or middle-level educational qualifications. Members of these strata underwent, we may say, a fourfold relative loss. First, their economic position worsened in comparison with capital owners and high-income groups. Second, with the strong expansion of formal education and the continuous upgrading of educational requirements they lost

ground – in terms of numbers, economic position and social status – with respect to the growing professional middle-class of people with high educational credentials and relatively well-paid jobs. Third, their position tended to weaken by increasing pressures 'from below' - in relation to immigrants and their offspring, and ethnic and racial minorities. And finally, as citizens of rich nations they lost somewhat of their privileged position with respect to the inhabitants of poorer, non-Western countries.

Expressions of dissatisfaction with all these four developments can be found in nationalist populist discourses, but in different ways. While groups and individuals in the first category, the economically privileged, are sometimes criticized, this economic elite as a whole is not a focal target of criticism, as it is in left-wing populism.

A main target of criticism, by contrast, is the second category: high-educated professionals, or more specifically those who are counted as members of a cultural elite. Anti-intellectualism, distrust of established media, distrust of experts is a common characteristic of populism. It partly reflects, we may presume, the growth of the numbers of high-educated people, by which the social distance between higher- and lower-educated people tends to widen and social boundaries between them become stronger. Politicians of established parties are counted as part of, or directly related to, the cultural elite. The fact that almost all professional politicians are high-educated and speak the language of the high-educated fuels populism's anti-elitism. People feel sometimes downgraded by members of this political-cultural elite. A recurrent reproach is that they do not understand or downplay the real problems of the common people, such as the problems caused by immigrants and minority groups.

This third category, immigrants and minority groups (related to the fourth category: inhabitants of non-Western countries), is the most central target of negative sentiments among followers of nationalist populism. Members of immigrant and ethnic minority groups are often stereotyped as incompetent, lazy, uncivilized, sexually uncontrolled (in the case of young men), profiteers of the welfare state, disrespecting the national norms and values, closing themselves off from mainstream society, criminals, or even actual or potential terrorists.

These are just stereotypes, we may say; but as such they are part of social reality, 'real in their consequences', and connected with underlying social processes. Why and how did anti-immigrants sentiments emerge, and why and how did migration become such a central theme in the political debate? Mass immigration from poorer regions into Western European societies was part of the globalization processes that transformed these societies since the 1960s and 1970s. Most immigrants came to work in low-skilled and low-paid jobs in manufacturing industries, for which there was a shortage of native workers. While part of this migration was temporary, many 'guest workers' (as they were called in Germany and the Netherlands) came to live on a permanent basis in the new country since the 1970s and 1980s. This tendency coincided with the economic transformations in this period: accelerated globalization and resulting de-industrialization, which implied a shrinkage of employment in the manufacturing sector, by which migrant workers were particularly hit. Many of them became dependent on unemployment benefits and welfare provisions.

The permanent settlement of large numbers of migrant workers and their families in European cities created tensions with the native population, particularly with those who lived nearby and whose class position was similar to that of most migrants. Antagonism was reinforced by resistance to 'integration' among migrants, as most of them remained attached to their own culture and oriented to their country of origin. This tendency became even stronger when they settled in large numbers in particular neighbourhoods, where they could easily communicate with one another and develop and maintain their own associations, institutions and provisions (ranging from mosques to tea houses, from schools to *halal* butcheries). Attachment to one's own group culture was also facilitated by the increasing possibilities of maintaining intense contacts with people in the country of origin through cheap flights, satellite television, and long-distance communication by internet and smart phones. This intensification of long-distance relations is part of globalization processes, which have contributed to increasing ethnic-cultural plurality within

European nation-states.

Some migrants not just remained attached to their original culture, but developed, in response to experiences of cultural confusion and negative discrimination, antagonistic attitudes toward the society in which they lived, and cultivated anti-Western feelings. Versions of orthodox and militant Islam, in particular, served to articulate and legitimize such feelings, and their impact grew in the new millennium. Antagonism was expressed most extremely and dramatically in violent attacks in the name of Islam, which spread the message that a life-and-death struggle is going on between the Islam and the West. This same message is proclaimed by populists, who define Islam as inherently incompatible with, and antagonistic to, Western civilization and its Judeo-Christian tradition. Every attack on 'the West' in the name of Islam, whether violent or just verbal, gives substance to this definition and therefore contributes to nationalist populism's appeal.

While some groups in the native population of Western European societies were confronted directly with everyday problems as a consequence of immigration, for example when they found that they could not get along well with neighbours who did not speak their language, 'the migration problem' in the national populist discourse has been largely abstracted from such experiences. National populism expresses and reinforces general fears about the threats of 'Islamization', the demographic displacement of natives by foreigners, waves of refugees who are a burden for state finance, masses of poor Africans who threaten to overrun Europe. Such themes are repeated again and again in media stories and on the internet. Alarming messages generate and strengthen fears among people who have hardly any direct contact with migrants, which may explain why there is not a clear correlation on the local level between votes for nationalist populist parties on the one hand and degrees of immigration and ethnic diversity on the other.

Migration provides part, but only a part, of the explanation of the rise of right-wing populism in Europe. The question still is, why did the electoral appeal of traditional left-wing parties decrease rather than increase in a time of growing inequality, diminishing expectations and increasing economic insecurity? Why could social-democratic parties no longer, or much less, appeal to voters who were disadvantaged by these developments? Why were these parties not successful in making class inequality an effective issue in the competition for votes?

A first answer is that it is precisely the shrinking and weakening of the industrial working classes and the growing power of 'capital' with respect to 'labour' that have undermined class actions and class solidarity. When labour unions lost bargaining power and became less effective, their membership decreased, which in turn contributed to their decline. Growing class inequalities, as measured by income, wealth and work conditions, went hand in hand with the blurring of class lines and the weakening of class identities. De-industrialization meant a shift from manual to non-manual work, and from manufacturing industries to services, which range from highly specialized and well-paid to low-paid routine work. The flexibilization of the labour market, moreover, means that more and more work is only temporary, which hinders the development of occupational identities and organization on that basis. In connection with these economic changes, an ethos of meritocratic individualism has become increasingly dominant, which stresses the necessity and possibility of individual self-improvement for everyone, and legitimates economic inequality as the outcome of fair competition on the basis of individual merits.

Socialism had been successful in earlier stages of economic development in Europe: since the second half of the nineteenth century, when the industrial working classes grew in size and power with large-scale industrialization and urbanization within the framework of strong, competing nation-states. In the course of the twentieth century, in spite of devastating wars and deep economic crises, long-term economic growth went hand in hand with a tendency of equalization in the distribution of income and wealth. It was in particular in the first three decades after the Second World War that members of the working and middle classes in Western Europe enjoyed strong absolute and relative improvements in their economic position - rising income and consumption levels, more leisure time, more security through pensions, social insurances and other

welfare state provisions. Labour unions and social-democratic parties could claim to contribute successfully to these developments. Their goal was a 'mixed economy' that combined private enterprise and market trade with strong state regulation, progressive taxation, and extended welfare arrangements, with which unjust class inequalities would gradually diminish, equality of opportunity would increase, and material security would be guaranteed for everyone. As long as actual developments went in this direction, labour unions proved to be effective and social-democratic or socialist parties related to the unions could attract large parts of the electorate. They combined moderate class antagonism and careful reformism with a strong practical orientation to the national state, even if international solidarity was proclaimed and European integration was supported. The welfare state they helped to build was a *national* welfare state, defined by the borders of the nation-state and confined to its citizens.

All this started to change in the 1970s, when, as pointed out, a new phase of globalization set in. National governments increasingly felt the pressure, for the sake of overall economic growth and employment, to create a good 'investment climate' for international capital by lowering tax rates on corporate profits, helping to reduce labour costs by cutting on social expenditures, privatization of state companies, and deregulation of markets. In this way, governments contributed to growing income and wealth inequality. These reforms were legitimated by the ideology of neo-liberalism, as it came to be called, which stated that bureaucratic state regulation has a detrimental effect on the economy, and that, instead, free and minimally regulated markets guarantee the optimal allocation of goods to the benefit of everyone. The example was set by the new conservative governments in Britain (from 1979) and the USA (from 1980).

Social-democratic parties moved a good deal in this direction since the 1980s. They attempted to broaden their electoral base by severing the ties with labour unions and appealing to high-educated professionals with liberal leanings. Given the shrinking and weakening of the industrial working class, the blurring of class lines and the strong expansion of the professional middle-class, this was an understandable strategy, which seemed to be successful for some time. When entrusted with governmental responsibility, social-democrats, too, initiated reforms that could be seen as adaptations to hegemonic global capitalism: privatization of state industries, deregulation of markets, lowering taxes on capital incomes, cut-backs in certain welfare state expenditures. Such policies were undertaken by the 'New Labour' government under Tony Blair (1997-2007), the German social-democratic government under chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005), and the Dutch 'purple' coalition cabinets led by Labour prime minister Wim Kok (1994-2002). This reorientation, again, was understandable for pragmatic reasons: national states that did not bring such reforms into force risked to lag behind in investments, production, and income and job growth. The European Union administration, moreover, forced its member states to break down state monopolies and to eliminate state subsidies for private companies in order to bring about fair and free cross-border competition within the EU territory.

This same reorientation, however, made social-democratic parties less distinct from more conservative parties, particularly for those who traditionally are the core of its followers: the working class, or, more broadly, the classes of the relatively underprivileged. In their perception, these different parties became more or less interchangeable, being part of the same ruling establishment. Social-democratic and similar parties came to define their distinctiveness more in other ways: by their solidarity with 'identity movements' of women, homosexuals, and ethnic minorities, their insistence on minority rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, their pleas for open borders, their support of multiculturalism. This accords with the progressive socialist tradition of egalitarianism, which was refocused from class inequalities, economic conditions and labour rights to the emancipation of ethnic, cultural and sexual minorities. This new egalitarianism had a strong base at universities and was particularly appealing for high-educated people. In this way, it only contributed to a growing distance between social-democratic parties and members of the working classes. In a remarkable switch, left-wing progressivism came to be associated with arrogant elitism.

When social-democratic parties seemed to become less able to articulate and represent the wishes, expectations and grievances of non-minority members of lower and middle strata, they

created a vacuum that could be filled by right-wing populist politicians, who focused on problems that were allegedly denied or neglected by the Left: above all, the problems created by immigration. Immigrant groups could become a target of grievances and hostile feelings, as they were defined as the outsiders, the non-natives, who take 'our' jobs and 'our' homes, occupy 'our' neighbourhoods, profit from 'our' welfare state, threaten the sexual integrity of 'our' women and the physical safety of 'our' men, and undermine 'our' cultural traditions and cherished ways of living. In this definition, strong symbolic boundaries are drawn between the national in-group and the out-group of aliens and ethnic, cultural, religious and/or racial minorities. Nationalist-populist politicians give a voice to such feelings and definitions, and articulate grievances by connecting the alleged problems created by immigrants and other minority groups with an elite who denies these problems, favours members of minorities, and thereby places itself outside the national community.

This elite is also accused of betraying the national interests by supporting European integration, the extension of the authority and regulations of the European Union ('Brussels') at the cost of national autonomy and democracy. Indeed, the more dependent member states are on decisions on the European level, the less they conform to the model of the autonomous and democratic nation-state. In the national populist view, it is only by resisting or ignoring EU regulations that a true democracy can be realized in which the national government's decisions reflect the people's will. Whether this means that the country should leave the EU is an issue about which national populists on the European continent are divided, and often uncertain and unclear. While the rhetoric is strongly anti-EU, populist stance on specific issues is often different, reflecting ambivalence. Even among populist politicians there is an awareness that leaving the European Union is risky and harmful for the nation. But their anti-European rhetoric and anti-cooperative attitudes undermine the functioning of the European Union in several respects.

I come now to a conclusion. I have argued here that the rise of nationalist populism in Europe is causally connected to vast social transformations since the 1970s: processes of globalization and de-industrialization which brought about a power shift in the relationship between 'capital' and 'labour', and, as a consequence, increasing socioeconomic inequality. Political parties that originally had their power-base in the working classes changed their orientation and lost appeal. The vacuum that they created was filled by populist anti-immigration parties which focus on issues that are allegedly neglected by establishment parties, including the traditional parties on the Left.

Nationalist populism can be regarded as a revolt against processes of globalization by which power seeps away from the nation-state, and ethnic-cultural plurality within the nation-state tends to increase. It is a revolt in the name of the model of the politically autonomous and culturally homogeneous nation - a powerful image, which refers to an idealized past but never existed in reality.

Nationalist populism is also a revolt, but more implicit and subdued, against growing inequality. It is a flawed revolt, in my view, since it rests on illusions of national autonomy and homogeneity, since it does not primarily address the main driving forces and central actors of rising inequality, and since, if successful, it will not reverse but rather reinforce tendencies of de-democratization, most directly by limiting minority rights.

However, the current popularity of nationalist populism throughout Europe points to serious problems, for which no easy solutions are available. It challenges us to think about these problems and possible ways of solving them.