European Liberal Democracies Facing Populism :
Reasons for Cautious Optimism

Stéphane Dion

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Stéphane Dion[1]

Résumé

Dans quelle mesure la montée actuelle du populisme dans les démocraties libérales y menace-t-elle les droits de la personne? Ma réponse à cette question concernera principalement l'Europe, un continent sur lequel se concentrent mes responsabilités actuelles. Je livre les raisons pour lesquelles je suis d'un optimisme prudent quant au fait que le populisme n'éviscérera pas la démocratie libérale en Europe. Mais celui-ci pose et continuera vraisemblablement de poser un défi aux piliers de la démocratie libérale, en particulier la règle de droit, les droits individuels et des minorités, de même que la tolérance sociale, politique et religieuse. Je définis d'abord le populisme et explique de quelle façon il constitue une menace pour les démocraties libérales. Deuxièmement, j'identifie les causes du populisme. Troisièmement, je me concentre sur les solutions et les antidotes contre les aspects préjudiciables du populisme. Quatrièmement, j'aborde la question du nationalisme et propose un moyen par lequel la fierté nationale peut devenir un atout pour la démocratie. Enfin, j'examine dans quelle mesure le populisme défie le projet européen.

Abstract

To which extent are human rights at risk because of the current rise of populism in liberal democracies? My answer to this question will primarily relate to Europe, a continent in which my current responsibilities are focused. I explain the reasons why I am cautiously optimistic that populism will not eviscerate liberal democracy in Europe, but it is, and will likely continue to challenge some of its key pillars, especially the rule of law, individual and minority rights, and social, political and religious tolerance. I first define populism and explain in which ways it constitutes a threat for liberal democracies. Second, I identify populism's causes. Third, I focus on the solutions, the antidotes against the damaging aspects of populism. Fourth, I address the issue of nationalism and propose a way by which national pride may become an asset for democracy. Fifth, I examine to which extent populism is a challenge to the European project.

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Introduction

Since the adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, humanity has made great leaps toward a more just and democratic world. But there is still a lot of work to do and nothing should be taken for granted. A step backwards is always possible.

Today, according to the Polity Project, there are 103 democratic states in the world, covering half of the world's population.[2] Of course, the degree to which these democracies are perfect varies greatly, but they have grown dramatically in number over time, given that there were only 31 democratic states in 1971.

Although the number of democracies continue to rise, for a few years now, internationally recognized indicators in the area of human rights and democracy, such as Freedom House, the Economist's Democracy Index and the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, have shown a deterioration of political rights and civil liberties.[3] These setbacks have dampened the inflated optimism that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of various Communist systems.

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[2] Robert Muggah and Steven Pinker, "Democracy isn't in as much trouble as you might think," World Economic Forum, April 2018, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/is-liberal-democracy-in-retreat.

[3] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, "The Global State of Democracy 2019," https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/global-state-of-democracy-2019 ; Freedom House, "Freedom in the World, 2019," https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf ; The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2018: Me Too? Political Participation, Protest and Democracy" http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy_Index_2018.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=Democracy2018 ; *World Justice Project, "Rule of Law Index 2019",* https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP-Insights-2019-Single%20Page%20View_0.pdf.

Francis Fukuyama's famous prediction that liberal democracy will prevail as a universal form of government may come true one day, but in the meantime, liberal democracy will have to seriously compete with other political systems.

Consider in particular the Chinese model of authoritarian capitalism, the persistence of theocratic regimes, particularly in certain Muslim countries, and dictators who continue to hold on to power by suppressing human rights. In some countries, including some of the former Communist bloc countries, democratic advances made at the end of the Cold War were fragile, emerging in the wake of a momentary disarray of authoritarian regimes. Since then, state authoritarianism has regained strength.[4]

Among the challenges that democracies are facing, there is the rise of populism within democratic states. To which extent are human rights at risk because of the current rise of populism in liberal democracies? My answer to this question will primarily relate to Europe, a continent in which my current responsibilities are focused, as Ambassador of Canada to Germany and Prime Minister Trudeau's Special Envoy to the European Union and Europe. I will share the reasons why I am cautiously optimistic that liberal democracies will not be eviscerated by the current populist wave.

I will first define populism and explain in which ways it constitutes a threat for liberal democracies. Second, I will identify populism's causes. Third, I will focus on the solutions, the antidotes against the damaging aspects of populism. Fourth, I will address the issue of nationalism and propose a way by which national pride may become an asset for democracy. Fifth, I will examine to which extent populism is a challenge to the European project.

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[4] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Myth of Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26, 1 (2015): pp. 45-58.

1. Populism as a threat to liberal democracies

Let us define populism. The populist ideology features a strong party or leader who presents himself as the savior of the people who are threatened by corrupt, self-serving and out of touch elites.

This ideology may come from the far left (radical socialism or anti capitalism) or the far right (defence of, or nostalgia for, a homogenous nation). In Europe, populist parties came to power in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Balkans, as well as recently in Italy. Elsewhere, they are often a junior partner within a coalition government or the main opposition party. Populism influences programs and the discourse of traditional political parties.[5]

Not everything is bleak in these populist movements, which claim to speak on behalf of the people against the elites. In some circumstances, such opposition to the "establishment" can lead to a much-needed reflection on the status quo and a political class that may be too self-satisfied, socially distant and unable to be self-critical.

However, in my view, populism carries three risks. First, the rejection of "elites" may also spread to the rejection of science and empirical fact, to instead generate enthusiasm for conspiracy theories or simplistic, short sighted solutions. This does not create a climate that is conducive to tolerance, mutual respect and the advancement of human rights.

Such rejection of science complicates collective action on many fronts, especially those pertaining to environmental policies and reforms, at a time where human kind is struggling to reconcile its development with the planet's ecological limits. Certain populist parties devalue the empirical evidence about environmental stresses and

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[5] Markus Wagner and Thomas M. Meyer, "Decades under the Influence. How Europe's Parties Have Been Shifting Right," *Foreign Affairs,* 4 April 2018.

manmade climate change as simply the whims of an elite, disconnected from the real concerns of actual people. Even though preoccupations about climate change consequences are becoming a growing priority for many voters, especially among the youth, concerns about energy costs are enhancing resistance against climate change policies. It was certainly one of the main triggers of the yellow vests movement in France. Similar backlashes were – along with the usual fear about immigration – behind the rise of populist parties in the 2019 elections held in the Netherlands with the Forum for Democracy (FvD), and in Finland with the Finns Party.[6]

Second, an inclination toward authoritarianism is a step back for liberal democracy and the rule of law when a populist leader, in the name of protecting people from the elites, centralizes power in his hands and weakens or politicizes liberal institutions serving as a barrier to this concentration of power: an independent judiciary, freedom of the press, Parliament, the integrity of electoral monitoring institutions, local and regional authorities, academic freedom, etc.[7]

The danger in this step back for democracy is particularly strong in countries where liberal democratic institutions are new, weakened by corruption and not solidly entrenched in the political culture. However, even in well-established democracies, populists can score points by denouncing how slowly institutions act or their lack of transparency and by inspiring people with ideas of a strongman whose resolve will overcome these challenges and make everything easier.

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[6] H. Sterling Burnett, "Climate Politics Abroad Are Turning Decidedly Skeptical", Climate Change Weekly #322, The Heartland Institute, May 3, 2019, https://www.heartland.org/news-opinion/news/climate-politics-abroad-are-turning-decidedly-skeptical.

[7] International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, "The Global State of Democracy 2019", pp. 30-31, https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/global-state-of-democracy-2019 ; Jordan Kyle and Limor Gultchin, "Populists in Power around the World", Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, November 7, 2018, https://institute.global/insight/renewing-centre/populists-power-around-world ; Saskia P. Ruth-Lovell, David Doyle and Kirl A. Hawkins, "Consequences of Populism," Memo for the Guardian's The New Populism Project, March 6, 2019, https://populism.byu.edu/App_Data/Publications/TP_Consequences_Memo.pdf.

Third, by describing the "real people" as a homogenous entity, a nation set in stone and under assault from foreign influences, some expressions of populism are a direct threat to human rights and more particularly, to the rights of minorities. Not all so-called populist parties engage in national identity politics that could lead to xenophobic tendencies. There are reasons to be uncomfortable with a concept that groups together parties that capitalize on xenophobia, with those that condemn it. It seems to me that the differences between for example, La France Insoumise and Le Front National (now called Rassemblement national) in France, or Podemos and Vox in Spain, far outweigh their similarities. Populism is a concept that must be handled with precaution.[8]

2. Causes of populism

It is fundamental to make the distinction between the two kinds of populism, to properly apprehend these phenomena. Indeed, the main causes being given to explain the rise of populism vary depending on whether we are speaking about the left-wing form or the right-wing form.

The most likely explanations about far left populism are related to economic insecurity. In countries where the youth unemployment rate reached 50%, we may have anticipated the rise of parties like Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, La France Insoumise in France and Movimento Cinque Stelle in Italy.

However, this socio-economic explanation does not perform very well when applied to the most widespread form of populism in Europe: the far right one. Its main factor appears to be ethno cultural insecurity related to the fear of immigration, racial diversity and religious pluralism, and, in particular, the fear of uncontrolled borders. As Inglehart and Norris concluded: *"The main common theme of populist*

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[8] Roger Cohen, "It's Time to Depopularize 'Populist'," *New York Times*, 13 July 2018.

authoritarian parties on both sides of the Atlantic is a reaction against immigration and cultural change. Economic factors such as income and unemployment rates are surprisingly weak predictors of the populist vote." Similarly, Eric Kaufmann's comprehensive review of the empirical evidence shows that *"immigration, not straitened economic circumstances, best explains the populist right vote in Western Europe".* Yotam Margalit comes to the same conclusion when reviewing the empirical data, including survey experiments: *"the explanatory significance of economic insecurity for the rise of populism is modest".*[9]

These populist parties describe immigration (and Islam in particular) as an existential threat to their national culture and Western civilization. They get their support from aging white, Christian populations, concerned about the future of their way of life.

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[9] Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse," *American Political Science Association*, 2 (June 2017); Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities*, Penguin, 2018, p. 247. Yotam Margalit, "Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33(4), Fall 2019, p. 159. See also: Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu, "It's Time to Bust the Myth: Most Trump Voters Were not Working Class*," Washington Post*, 5 June 2017; El País, "Las razones de los votantes de Vox: la inmigración y la unidad de España," *El País*, 9 december 2018; Roger Harding, "Key Findings: A Kind-Hearted but not Soft-Hearted Country," *The National Centre for Social Research's British Social Attitudes 34*, 201; M. Goodwin, H. Clarke & P. Whiteley, "Yes, Immigration Really was to Blame for Brexit", *CapX*. 2 May 2017; Holger Lengfeld and Clara Dilger, "Cultural and Economic Threats: A Causal Analysis of the Party Identification with the "Alternative for Germany" (AFD) using the German Socio-Economic Panel 2016," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, August 2018 edition; German Lopez, "Polls Show Many—Even Most—Trump Supporters Really are Deeply Hostile to Muslims and Nonwhites," 12 September 2016; Rose Meleady, Charles R. Seger and Marieke Vermue, "Examining the Role of Positive and Negative Intergroup Contact and Anti-immigration Prejudice in Brexit," *The British Psychological Society*, 2017; Diana C. Mutz, "Status Threat, not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 26 March 2018; Bo Rothstein and Sven Steinmo, "'Us Too!'—The Rise of Middle-Class Populism in Sweden and Beyond," *Social Europe*, 3 December 2018; Jonathan T. Rothwell and Pablo Diego-Rosell, "Explaining Nationalist Political Views: The Case of Donald Trump" (2 November, 2016); Nate Silver*, "*The Mythology of Trump's 'Working Class' Support: His Voters are Better off Economically Compared with Most Americans," *FiveThirtyEight*, 3 May 2016.

Campaigns to restrict immigration attract them by offering them hope that the world they know will be protected.[10]

The rise of identity politics is linked to a significant and relatively recent demographic change toward more ethnic and religious diversity. Between 2000 and 2016, the immigrant population grew by 37 percent in OECD countries; more and more are coming from non-OECD countries, and this trend is ongoing.[11] The British white population is expected to decrease from 82% in 2015 to 59% in 2050. The phenomenon is even more striking in the United States, where the white non-Hispanic population formed 81% of the US population in 1971, 62% in 2015 and could be in minority in 2050.[12] In 2016, Germany's population was 6.1 percent Muslim; it will be 10.8 percent in 2050, according the medium migration scenario of the Pew Research Center.[13] In France, Muslim share of the population is expected to grow from 8.8 percent (2016), to 17.4 percent (2050). In Sweden, Muslim share of the population was 4.6 percent in 2010, 8.1 percent in 2016 and in 2050 (medium scenario) 20.5 percent.[14]

Insecurity about growing immigration and ethno cultural diversity is fuelled by three factors. When a fourth factor is added, the conditions are ripe for a push toward right-wing anti-immigration populism. A first factor relates to concerns about competition: the feeling that newcomers steal jobs, bring down salaries, clog up public services and abuse social transfers. Studies show that such concerns about the alleged negative

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[10] Philip Auerswald and Joon Yun, "As Population Growth Slows, Populism Surges," *The New York Times*, 22 May 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/opinion/populist-populism-fertility-rates.html.

[11] OECD, " Migration Data Brief," No.4, June 2019, https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/Migration-data-brief-4-EN.pdf.

[12] Charles Gaudreault, "The impact of immigration on local ethnic groups' demographic representativeness: The case study of ethnic French Canadians in Quebec," Nations and Nationalism, October 22 2019, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/nana.12568.

[13] Pew Research Center, "Europe's Growing Muslin Population," November 29, 2017, https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/.

[14] *Ibid.*

economic consequences of immigration are *"almost entirely in terms of its impact on broader society, not on one's pocketbook. (…) economic concerns… rarely have to do with people's personal economic interests and mostly concern the way immigration affects society as a whole"*.[15] The second factor is cultural in nature: the feeling that newcomers and ethnic diversity in general will upset traditional values and identities. More than economic considerations, these cultural concerns *"are far stronger predictors of attitudes on immigration."[16]*

The third factor relates to security issues, ranging from delinquency to terrorism, and in particular, targets Muslims, who are unjustly linked to violent extremism.[17]

However, when added to the others, it is the fourth factor that considerably propels the conditions for a rise in populism. It is the feeling of invasion and the belief that migration flow is out of control, like a tidal wave that may crash at any time. There is a general sense that authorities are overwhelmed by what is happening. It is difficult to encourage the population to remain welcoming when they no longer believe in the integrity of the immigration system or the security of borders.[18] Borders are seen as a sieve for the queue jumpers and this alone severely damaged the legitimacy and confidence toward the integrity of the immigration system.[19] One might almost say "it's NOT the economy, stupid", being that so many voters are inclined to let their

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[15] Yotam Margalit, "Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33(4), Fall 2019, 162-163, https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.33.4.152.

[16] *Ibid, 163.*

[17] Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes and Katie Simmons, "Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs," *Pew Research Center*, 11 July 2016.

[18] Dietrich Thränhardt, "From Welcome Culture to Welcome Realism. Refugee Integration in Germany" in *Refugees and the Media in Germany*, eds. Giovanna dell'Orto and Irmgard Wetzstein (Austria and Greece, 2017). https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/ifpol/thr__nhardt__dietrich_-_from_welcome_culture_to_welcome_realism._refugee_integration_in_germany.pdf.

[19] Andrew Stark, "Oh Canada," *The New York Review of Books*, July 19, 2018, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/07/19/oh-canada/.

voting preferences be guided by their cultural and identity concerns over economic interests. For them, "it's the migration, stupid."

This creates an especially difficult political arena for center-left parties, who are struggling to campaign and build their credibility with voters on issues like "identity" and cultural security. With the political spectrum polarizing, it becomes harder to build consensus, and to assemble the coalitions that so many European electoral systems require for effective, stable governance.

It is not necessarily the contact with immigrants that make voters more likely to support right-wing anti-immigration populist parties. The fear of the unknown and a desire for things to remain as they are, are also at play. In Germany for example, voters that support the anti-immigration party – Alternative für Deutchland (AfD) – know very few migrants from non-EU countries, according a study done by the Mercator Institute.[20] Only where the number of foreigners rises sharply in a community, is there a correlation between the number of migrants in a town or municipality and an increasing support for the AfD.[21]

Central, Eastern and Balkan European post-communist countries are the only regions where populists routinely beat mainstream parties in elections. These countries are new democracies and have had little recent experience with immigration, especially with non-Christian immigration, and look at it with much apprehension.[22] A sense of demographic displacement is also at play. Many of these countries feel threatened by the prospect of immigration, especially when it is juxtaposed with the economic

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[20] Maik Herold, "Ostdeutschland zwischen Ost- und Westeuropa (East Germany between Eastern and Western Europe)," AufRuhr/Stiftung Mercator, 28 November 2019, https://www.aufruhr-magazin.de/europa/gehoert-ostdeutschland-zu-osteuropa/ .

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Jacques Rupnik, « *La crise du libéralisme en Europe centrale* », Commentaire no. 160, (2017), https://www.commentaire.fr/boutique/achat-d-articles/la-crise-du-liberalisme-en-europe-centrale-12426 ; Slawomir Sierakowski, "*How Eastern European Populism is Different*", Project Syndicate, (5 February 2018), https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/populism-stronger-in-eastern-europe-by-slawomir-sierakowski-2018-01?barrier=accesspaylog .

emigration of their own populations, which is resulting in a massive brain drain and a collective societal loss.

In these post-communist European countries, some of which have almost disappeared over the two last centuries, or at a minimum have been dominated by various imperial powers, an aging non-renewing population is all the more vulnerable to nativist populist rhetoric. The existential fear of disappearing continues to be part of their collective memory. Now that they are finally able to enjoy their own sovereignty, parts of their population desire an ethnically homogeneous state, as a safety net.

3. Antidotes to populism

The question now is: what can democracies do to stay healthy and strong in face of the populist wave? Considering the left-wing populism, since the sources of this phenomenon is mainly driven by growing inequalities and loss of social mobility attributed to economic globalisation, technological displacement and neo-liberal ideologies, then we would have an additional reason to champion inclusive growth and to make:

- more sound financial regulations, progressive fiscal reforms, redistribution transfers, education and training programs, housing, health services, day care, public transport;
- more grassroots and transparent political party and electoral financing;
- more trade agreements that are truly progressive, which includes protections for the environment, labour rights, food safety, and that guarantees the rights of parliaments to legislate and governments to regulate for the common good. All of these, I would argue, CETA offers (the trade agreement between the European Union and Canada). We need to convince people that they do not

have to choose between trade and social progress – these two objectives must be pursued together.

Economically, we need to find a path to growth that is inclusive and benefits everyone, not just the wealthiest 1 percent or the .01 percent. This is why the Government of Canada has, among other social measures, increased taxes on the richest and cut taxes for the middle class, in addition to significantly increasing assistance to families, granting them almost the equivalent of a guaranteed minimum income, which has reduced childhood poverty by more than one third.

How can we make people feel they are truly included when the financing of political parties depends on major billionaire donors and clandestine foreign sources, and when one needs to be well-off to engage in politics? We need to take a serious look at political party and electoral financing; make it more grassroots and transparent.

However, as valid as these policies are, they will not keep us immune from the main surge of populism in Europe, the right-wing one, because this phenomenon is much more driven by ethno cultural insecurity than by economic insecurity. As we have seen, this kind of populism is a phenomenon driven more by value than class. It is the triumph of ethnic-based notion of identity politics, putting at the forefront: fears of migration, of racial diversity and of religious pluralism, and especially fear of uncontrolled borders.

The previous section has shown how much factually erroneous is the often-heard belief that cultural grievances and the sense of demographic threat are but a by-product of adverse economic changes, and that the rise of ethnic-based identity politics is essentially the result of economic inequities. Now, I want to add that is also a politically dangerous belief, because it is difficult to find the right cure with the wrong diagnosis. The main issue being a cultural fear in reaction to growing diversity, we should not believe that the proper socio-political reforms toward social equity and

transparent governance will be enough to address it, although it is true that more equality helps for more solidarity.

Our challenge here is to build mutual ethno-cultural confidence and avoid our societies being hampered by mistrust and xenophobia. Will the problem be solved by itself, will populations learn to cohabit over time? There is some evidence in support of an optimistic theory, which suggests that the more people of different cultural backgrounds interact, the more they appreciate themselves.[23] However, this contact theory supposes that there be contacts… and not the withdrawal into segregated neighborhoods, cut off from one another. It is difficult to build mutual trust in a diverse city shaped by closed ethnic areas, because in such a context of residential segregation, interrelationships will be too intermittent.[24] For multiculturalism to work, it should not become an addition of closed ghettos, but a smooth process of gradual integration, which preserve the unity of the society while allowing it to be enriched by the universal aspects of different cultures.

This ideal is not easy to implement. There is a well-documented risk of inverse relationship between diversity and solidarity.[25] However, we are facing a risk, a

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[23] Meleady, Rose, Charles R. Seger and Marieke Vermue, "Examining the Role of Positive and Negative Intergroup Contact and Anti-Immigrant Prejudice in Brexit," *The British Psychological Society*, 56(4), June 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317742027_Examining_the_role_of_positive_and_negative_intergroup_contact_and_anti-immigrant_prejudice_in_Brexit.

[24] Eric Kaufman and Matthew J. Goodwin, "The diversity Wave: A meta-analysis of the native-born white response to ethnic diversity," *Social Science Research*, 76, November 2018, 120-131, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X17305902 ; Eric Kaufmann and Gareth Harris, "*"White Flight" or Positive Contact? Local Diversity and Attitudes to Immigration in Britain*," Comparative Political Studies 48 (12): 1563-1590., https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0010414015581684

[25] Paul Collier, "Exodus: How Migration is Changing Our World," Oxford University Press, 2013; Eric Kaufmann, "Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities," Penguin, 2018, 418-28.

challenge, and not a certainty of failure.[26] Inclusion may succeed to build more cohesive societies if handle with appropriate philosophy and policies.[27] Any alternatives would create far more difficulties. The starting point is that in order to make inclusiveness a success, we need to have our facts right, instead of sticking to the reassuring theory that the rise of identity politics is only apparently linked to the anxiety about demographic change and is rather merely the symptom of social inequality and dissatisfaction with the economy.

Therefore, democratic countries need to find a way to strengthen trust in inclusion as a country's asset for success within the context of cultural pluralism and globalization. They must take the necessary measures to reassure their populations about border controls and safeguard the rights of refugee claimants. They must identify and share best practices for integrating immigrants.

In this respect, Canada, a country of immigration, is willing to share its experiences while recognizing that its situation differs from the one in Europe. Prime Minister Trudeau has made it a political priority, both at home and abroad, to focus on the inclusion of all communities, including the Muslim communities that are too often unjustly associated with violent Islamism, when in fact they are the main victims of it.

Together, we must also learn to give more effective assistance to countries affected by conflict, poverty and, more and more, climate change. Otherwise, migration flows will only get worse. On this front, Canada has recently adopted a feminist international assistance policy, as it has been shown that promoting women and girls is a powerful lever for development and democratization.

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[26] Tom Barlett, "Harvard Sociologist Says His Research Was 'Twisted'," The Chronicle of Highest Education, August 12, 2012, https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/percolator/robert-putnam-says-his-research-was-twisted/30357.

[27] Keith Banting, Will Kymlicka, Allison Harell, and Rebecca Wallace, "Beyond National Identity: Liberal Nationalism, Shared Membership and Solidarity," Gina Gustavsson and David Miller (eds), in *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics: Normative and Empirical Questions*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

4. Making national pride an asset for democracy

Right-wing populism is intrinsically linked to a kind of nationalism, an ethno-political vision, which paints a nation-state of native-born citizens threatened by foreign influence and intrusion.

In many countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Balkans, populists are using nationalism as a way to consolidate their power. They are portraying liberal democracy and human rights as a foreign agenda, a Western agenda that some arrogant cosmopolitan elites want to impose on nations against their soul and their traditions.

You have skilled elected leaders boosting these nationalist reactions in order to firm their grip on their people, and increase their capacity to weaken the liberal institutions that keep the rulers under watch: a pluralist parliament, an independent judiciary, an independent electoral commission and other strong check and balance mechanisms, a free press, free unions, and so on.

In the name of nationalism, democracy and its pillars are being eroded: the rule of law; the basic freedoms of expression, association, and religion; the truly free, fair, open, and competitive elections; the opportunities beyond elections for citizens to participate; the government transparency and accountability; a market economy that is free of corruption; and a democratic culture of tolerance, civility, and non-violence.

It is not easy to cope with this problem so much as nationalism is a powerful ideology. Sometimes, indeed, by our interventions we may inadvertently give these skilled politicians the pretext they need to fuel a nationalist backlash against democratic benchmarks that may challenge their power.

Yet, it would be a terrible mistake for liberal democrats to abandon the arena of national identities and so, leave it to be monopolized by populists. *"Nationhood is too powerful a force to be ignored, and too dangerous a force to be left in the hands of*

populists."[28] If we portray democracy as something evanescent, an abstract ideology detached from the people, incompatible with patriotism, we will weaken the fight for the cause of democracy. To the contrary, we should say: as a people, we are proud of who we are and we will use this pride to show to the world that yes, we may build an exemplary democracy, respectful of human rights and offer our own contribution for such universal aspiration. Some may call it "Liberal Nationalism," but I prefer to speak about liberal national pride, as the word "nationalism" is too lauded, darkened, and stifled by history.[29]

When I was a child, I remember it being said that democracy was not for Latin people. As a French Canadian that was very difficult to accept. But then, a new generation of Quebeckers said: "really? We cannot be as democratic as others? Let us see." And then Quebeckers became an asset within the Canadian federation in the never-ending quest for a better democracy. We called it the Quiet Revolution.

Let's dream for a Quiet Revolution for the Western Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe. Let's make national pride an asset for democracy in all countries. Refuse closed populist rhetoric and embrace plural identities: that is another way to move forward toward liberal democracy.

How do we deal with countries whose leaders engage in actions to weaken liberal democratic institutions? Prime Minister Trudeau's approach is to criticize, to oppose, but without shutting the door; in maintaining a difficult but necessary dialogue. And I

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[28] Will Kymlicka, "Defending Diversity in an Era of Populism: Multiculturalism and Interculturalism Compared,", Nasar Meer, Tariq Modood and Ricard Zapata-Barrero (eds), in *Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: Debating the Dividing Lines*, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, 173.

[29] Yael Tamir, "Liberal Nationalism," Princeton University Press,1993; Yael Tamir, "Why Nationalism," Princeton University Press, 2019. Asle Toje, "Herder vs. Fichte, Nationalism is not always the enemy of Liberalism", The American Interest, December 5, 2019. https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/12/05/nationalism-is-not-always-the-enemy-of-liberalism/?utm-access=newsletter&utm_source=TAI+Today&utm_campaign=af7bd0ba0a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_26_05_56_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6322a81c35-af7bd0ba0a-178785523&mc_cid=af7bd0ba0a&mc_eid=2ed18075f7

would add that we should not only criticize bad practices, but we must also acknowledge and support governments that are making the right choices on the democratic front.

5. The European Union facing populism

Acting against populist setbacks to liberal democracy are the European Union, its Commission, its Court of Justice, as well as the Council of Europe and its Venice Commission.

The EU requires – from its member states and from any European country seeking joining it – standards of liberal democracy and good governance. These so-called Copenhagen criteria include the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, electoral fairness, human rights and respect and protection of minorities. Until recently, it was more or less taken for granted that these criteria were being respected by member states; this is no longer the case. There are frequent tensions between Brussels and populist governments.

The European Union is in populism's line of sight. Its structure, philosophy, and policies all echo populism's targets of choice: cosmopolitism, technocracy, supranational compromises, trade agreements, restrictive budgetary rules, and, above all, open borders within the EU.

The EU relies on a constant need of compromises between member states and Brussels. Populism erodes shared values and the capacity to reach such compromises, making it, for example, more difficult to reach a common ground between the Macron plan for a more extensive banking union and more generous mechanisms of solidarity, and Merkel's preoccupations for more fiscal discipline and member state accountability.

But there is optimism to be shared. The fact is that opinion polls continue to show considerable support for democratic and accountable governance and that a clear majority of Europeans cherish the view of themselves as tolerant, open, and diverse. Most Europeans continue to see the European Union with pride, as a grand achievement of and for humankind, a unique fabric of peace and democracy.

No other country followed the United Kingdom in its bitter attempt to exit the European Union. In fact, far from having created a domino effect, the sad spectacle of the Brexit saga is likely to have strengthened Europeans' support for their union. In polls, the EU's image is the most positive it has been since 2009, surpassing that of national governments and parliaments, including in Hungary and Poland.[30] Meanwhile, Turkey and non-EU Balkan and East European countries want to join this union.

The EU borderless area, called the Schengen zone, allowing the free mobility of 420 million people, covering 26 countries, 4.3 million square kilometers, is certainly a difficult entity to manage, but it is also quite an accomplishment, appreciated every day, in airports, ports, train stations and highways by its citizens. Despite all the controversies about the Eurozone, there is no popular support to leave the common currency. The most Eurosceptic countries remain closer to a reformist approach rather than a rejectionist one.

Despite dire media forecasts of a populist wave, the May 2019 European elections did not result in a Eurosceptic parliament. Overall, anti-EU parties won less than a quarter of the seats, and saw losses or stagnation in a number of countries, including

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[30] "Spring 2019 Standard Eurobarometer: "Europeans upbeat about the state of the European Union – best results in five years" Positive image of the EU prevails ahead of the European elections," *European Commission*, Brussels, August 5, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_4969 . Also Zsolt Boda et al., "Societal change and trust in institutions," *Eurofound*, December 12, 2018, https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/fr/publications/report/2018/societal-change-and-trust-in-institutions.

Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. The popular support for these populist parties seems to have reached a plateau, as the migration flow has considerably diminished.

Conclusion

I am confident that populism will not eviscerate liberal democracy in Europe, but it is, and will likely continue to challenge some of its key pillars, especially the rule of law, individual and minority rights, and social, political and religious tolerance.

Canada has been able to resist the populist wave so far, but is not immune against the wave of xenophobia that we see in far too many areas of the world. Canada's current level of religious and ethnic diversity is more recent then one may think: in 2016, 22.3 percent of the Canadian population was part of a visible minority group; in 1981 it was only 4.7 percent and in 1970, but 2 percent. As in other countries, the emergence of religion as a basis for multicultural claims really started only in the nineties.[31] Canada's future depends on its ability to build an inclusive society. So does Europe's future, in order to become less vulnerable to populist drifts and better equipped to build justice, harmony, security and universal human rights on solid liberal democracies.

As Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt concluded in their bestseller, *How Democracies Die*, *"few societies in history have managed to be both multiracial and genuinely democratic. This is our challenge. It is also our opportunity."*[32]

In order to seize this opportunity, Canada, as a country of immigration and a multicultural liberal democracy, is willing to contribute by comparing best practices,

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[31] Will Kymlicka, "the Three Lives of Multiculturalism," Shibao Guo and Lloyd Wong (eds), in *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada: Theories, Policies and Debates,* Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, 2015, 17-35.

[32] Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, Crown, New York, 2018, p. 231.

learning from other countries and working together accordingly. Increasingly, cultural diversity will become a fact and inclusion must be the choice: the right choice.

As we get closer to this goal, we will become better at avoiding the most dangerous populist extremes and promoting universal human rights around the world.

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