

The Frames We Fall Into

Ne te quaesiveris extra, the golden rule of Ralph Waldo Emerson, seems to have recently backfired. Central Eastern European authorities have internalised it to such an extent that they rarely listen to any arguments coming from others. This tendency to “trust thyself” plays well into the hands of populists who have no problem with exploiting it to the fullest, reinforcing the prejudices and political convictions deeply rooted in people’s minds. All it takes is the right *frame*.

Although it may seem that populism, radicalisms and migration have very little in common, if we reflect on it for a moment they all boil down to one thing: *framing*. Henry David Thoreau once wrote that “It is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottomlessness of a pond without taking the trouble to sound it”. Thus it does not always take the greatest minds of the age to convince the majority to follow a particular way of thinking – very often it is quite the opposite. All that is required is the ability to adequately *frame* the matters at stake and to align them with what people may consider as their own beliefs. And thus it is often the laud, the controversial and the utterly cynical that rule people’s minds. Namely, the populists. Even when they frown upon being labeled as such, we shall not be afraid of seeking them out and pointing our fingers at them to make the public opinion realize with whom we are dealing. And this applies not only to political promises of ruling parties, but also, or even more importantly, to both, the issues we face on a daily basis (like radicalisation of societies, economy or policies) as well as those more extraordinary (for instance, the recent migration crisis).

Governments and political parties resort to populism when the alternative is emerging into a thorough discussion on those vital topics. Of course, there is a nice ring to it – after all, one way of defining populism is as “a political philosophy supporting the rights and power of the people in their struggle against the privileged elite” – and let’s be honest, this always sells well (“We, the defenders!”). However, already a different understanding of this term as “a political strategy based on a calculated appeal to the interests or prejudices of ordinary people” is somewhat more problematic, less “desirable” (“We, the puppet masters!”). And let us bear in mind, that the Latin “*populus*” means rather people in the sense of “folk”, “nation” – to what an increasing number of Central European parties refer to ever more frequently (Fidesz in Hungary, Law and Justice in Poland, among others). Troubling as it may be, as Nikolai Gogol wrote in *Dead Souls*: “However stupid a fool’s words may be, they are sometimes enough to confound an intelligent man”.

I can easily understand why it is so tempting to adopt populist rhetoric. It may be a real struggle to fight the urge to put the minds of the people into a *frame* and hang them on the walls of the offices – a modern political hunting trophy. Therefore, in the end, *vox populi* merely mirrors the prejudiced voice of the party, a politician, a government, et cetera. And in turn, those governing use the *frame* of *vox populi*, *vox Dei* – and who can argue with that, right?

The presented issue of the *4liberty.eu* Review is an attempt to connect the dots between the three seemingly unrelated topics, which are, in fact, very much linked: populism, radicalisms and migration and discussing them from a Central Eastern European perspective. The main objective is to present the issues that have been recently troubling the region in order to first, diagnose the current situation, and second, to offer solutions to the problems we face. As most frequently they all evolve around the common usage of populist techniques. To quote Leo Tolstoy, “One must be cunning and wicked in this world” – or maybe simply a *populist*?

Enjoy your reading,

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