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**Defining Populism: is it a threat or a necessary  
corrective to representative democracy?**

**Submitted by:**

Sina Krauss  
Student Number: F10027 (CZ), S2146258 (NL)  
Sina\_Krauss@web.de

**Supervised by:**

Daniel Topinka (d.topinka@volny.cz)  
Jaap den Hollander (j.c.den.hollander@rug.nl)

**Olomouc, 05.01.2012**

**Sina Krauss**



**MA Programme Euroculture  
Declaration**

I, Sina Krauss, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled "Defining Populism: is it a threat or a necessary corrective to representative democracy?", submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within it of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the List of References.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

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## Introduction

At the turn of the year 2011, the European Union is on the verge of opening a new chapter in its history. A change of the constitutional contracts, the re-organization of the member states and a stronger process of economic integration – many options are being discussed in the political sphere and the media is fueling the debate by a vast coverage of the issue.

The public on the other hand is to a large extent unable to follow this discourse.<sup>1</sup> Not only does this lead to a rise in the perception of the European Union as being an ‘elite project’, but it also increases the discontent in the population.

“People want a much more participatory, ‘hands on’ democracy. They [want to be] fully involved in setting goals, making policy and evaluating progress. And they are right.”<sup>2</sup>

This quote by Romano Prodi, former Head of the European Commission, summarizes the demands of a political phenomenon, namely populism, which is on the rise in Europe: it asks to bring the political power back to the people. And this is not a new development.

Populism has been present in political history long before its newest surge in the mid-1980s and it is a phenomenon that is not limited to Europe but has, until today more successfully, appeared in other parts of the world, such as the United States or Latin America. With the new rise of populism, particularly in Europe, it has become of increasing importance, both in the political sphere and the academic discourse. Cas Mudde even speaks of a ‘populist *Zeitgeist*’<sup>3</sup> which has come over Europe.

This new surge of populism is different from the movements that have existed, for example, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has thus given rise to a new discourse. No overall discussion of the ‘new’ populism has been given yet and it is therefore often unclear which parties are to be qualified as populist and which are not.

As has been stated above, populism demands to bring politics closer to the people and ask for a more participative democracy. The question arises therefore whether this is

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<sup>1</sup> Zóltan Tibor Pállinger, *Direct Democracy in Europe: Developments and Prospects* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2007), 127.

<sup>2</sup> Prodi Romano, “Shaping the New Europe. Speech to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, February 15, 2000, available at: <http://www.ecnais.org/html/pages/Bulletin/Prodi.htm> (accessed on December 1, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist *Zeitgeist*,” *Government and Opposition*, 39(4) (Autumn 2004), 541.

possible and, if yes, how this is to be achieved. The most commonly known European example of a democracy that is marked by a great degree of direct democracy is Switzerland, which is therefore often being used as a model to point out the need and successes of direct democracy. Yet almost all other European democracies are fully implemented representative democracies showing, if at all, only signs of direct mechanisms. Nevertheless, it is exactly in these democracies that populism is now (re-)appearing and winning ground in the political sphere and support in the population.

These considerations lead to the following research question which will be answered within the scope of this Thesis: What is the relationship between populism and representative democracy? And more precisely: What are the possible corrective functions and/or threats that populism poses to representative democracy?

To summarize, from a methodological aspect it is mainly discourse analysis that will be used to find out about the research that has been done by scholars in working in this field. A literary overview and analysis of a vast amount of publications on the subject, provided by the most important authors of this discipline, is meant to give a profound insight into the existing research.

In order to answer the research question, this paper will consist of three major parts:

A first part will be concerned with defining the key elements. An initial step will see the definition of democracy and its two main subdivisions: direct and representative democracy. In order to reach this definition, publications of well-known scholars, such as Manfred G. Schmidt, John Stuart Mill and Montesquieu, will be taken into consideration and synthesized into one definition.

A second step will be dedicated to the definition of populism. This is done by identifying the key elements of populism, based on an in-depth literary analysis of the major publications on this topic. The works of Paul Taggart, Paul Lucardie, Rene Cuperus and others are being critically analyzed in order to draw up a set of characteristics which can be used to identify parties as to the degree in which they are populist.

The second major part is concerned with investigating populism itself and the relationship it has with representative democracy. Therefore a five-fold explanation will be given to identify the reasons for the appearance of populist movements, based on

the major aspects that have been identified in the academic discourse.

This is followed by a look onto the relationship of populism and representative democracy. It will be studied, on the one hand, which opportunities populism might present to representative democracy, thus the extent to which it might serve as a corrective function. On the other hand it will be examined which threats populism might pose and in how far it can therefore be detrimental to representative democracy. Again, these conclusions are achieved by looking at a number of publications of this subject.

The third and final part will see the application of the definition of populism, which had been elaborated in the first part. The defining characteristics will be exemplarily applied to two European cases, one the on hand 'The Left' party in Germany and on the other hand the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) in the Netherlands. It can already be stated that, until today, populism in the Netherlands was much more successful than in Germany and the last part will therefore also be dedicated to finding an explanation for this, pointing out the more favorable environment in the Netherlands, as opposed to the hindering circumstances in Germany.

## **PART I: Definitions**



# 1. Democracy

## 1.1 Democracy: the rule of the people

Democracy is a collective term for political systems which are defined by the government of people. In a democracy the people are the highest sovereign and the highest legitimacy of political action. The system counts with universal suffrage applied in recurring elections to choose and to replace the government in free and fair elections.

The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will<sup>4,5</sup>.

Horizontal separation of powers limits the political exertion of power. This system of separation of powers has been first introduced by Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu<sup>6</sup>, who called for a distribution of the three powers.

In each state there are three sorts of powers: legislative power, executive power over the things depending on the right of nations, and executive power over the things depending on civil right.<sup>7</sup>

It guarantees the protection of human rights of all citizens and the principle that all laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

The exertion of political rule is being limited by the rule-of-law-principle, which guarantees the basic and human rights as well as the existence of organizations, the principle that all laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens and the distribution of political responsibilities, usually fixed in constitutions. These rights and rules are enforceable and are particularly important facing the federal powers. Democracy secures the freedom of individual decision and individual responsibility, guarantees

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<sup>4</sup> Original quote: „Die demokratische Methode ist diejenige Ordnung der Institutionen zur Erreichung politischer Entscheidungen, bei welcher einzelne die Entscheidungsbefugnis vermittels eines Konkurrenzkampfes um die Stimmen des Volkes erwerben.“

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Alois Schumpeter, „Kapitalismus, Sozialismus und Demokratie (Kapitel 22 und 23),“ available on: <http://evakreisky.at/2006/FOS/2-elite-demokratie.pdf> (accessed on December 8, 2011), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Montesquieu was a French writer, philosopher and political thinker.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Geuss and Quentin Skinner, *Cambridge texts in the history of political thought: Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Book XXI: Chapter 6.

individual equality in law and protects minorities and enables a variety of social assemblies.

In order to avoid the abuse of the power in a state, a division is made into Legislative, Executive and Judicative, leading to reciprocal dependency and control of the federal organs. The consequences of two, or all three, powers lying in the same hands are, according to Montesquieu, disastrous:

When legislative power is united with executive power in a single person or in a single body of the magistracy, there is no liberty, because one can fear that the same monarch or senate that makes tyrannical laws will execute them tyrannically. Nor is there liberty if the power of judging is not separate from legislative power and from executive power. If it were joined to legislative power, the power over the life and liberty of the citizens would be arbitrary, for the judge would be the legislator. If it were joined to executive power, the judge could have the force of an oppressor. All would be lost if the same man or the same body of principal men, either of nobles, or of the people, exercised these three powers: that of making the laws, that of executing public resolutions, and that of judging the crimes or the disputes of individuals.<sup>8</sup>

In short Montesquieu stated that: “so that one cannot abuse power, power must check power by the arrangement of things.”<sup>9</sup> This has been summarized by Alois Riklin<sup>10</sup> as follows:

Since a human that is given power tends to abuse it, if he is not confronted with boundaries, it is imperative that this power is being distributed onto several power holders, which reciprocally can prevent each other from abusing it<sup>11 12</sup>.

John Stuart Mill argued that the best form of a government would be the one that gives them the chance to participate in the finding of the political will and the chance to educate themselves and others in order to become competent citizens, by developing

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond Geuss and Quentin Skinner, *Cambridge texts in the history of political thought: Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws*, Book XXI: Chapter 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XXI: Chapter IV.

<sup>10</sup> Alois Riklin is a Swiss political scientist at the University of St. Gallen.

<sup>11</sup> Original quote: „Weil der Mensch, der Macht hat, zum Machtmissbrauch neigt, wenn er nicht auf Grenzen stößt, ist es zwingend, dass die Macht auf mehrere Machträger verteilt wird, die sich wechselseitig am Machtmissbrauch hindern.“

<sup>12</sup> Alois Riklin, *Machtteilung. Geschichte der Mischverfassung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 290.

their intelligence and social virtues.<sup>13</sup> Miller sees this foremost fulfilled in the system of democracy.

The basic requirement for every functioning democracy is the so-called social contract. In order to form a democracy, people will have to give up to the theoretical state of nature and sign this contract. In short, it is a fictional document regulating the relations between the people and the government whom they put in charge of ruling over them, in order to create a functioning society.

### 1.1.1 Social contract

Before the signing of the social contract, humanity found itself in the so-called 'state of nature'. According to John Locke<sup>14</sup>, the state of nature is a state of being in which the ideas of freedom and equality of humans are of great importance. Locke bases his theory on the assumption that by nature all humans are good and that everyone has unlimited power over oneself and his property. Every individual has natural rights which are life, liberty, and property. As humans are good, even in the state of nature, they are capable to act morally. They are in a state of absolute freedom, and they may use their possessions and themselves in any way that they think to be right, within the borders of the law of nature.

This "lex naturalis"<sup>15</sup> has as the highest objective the preservation of the nature that God has created. It forbids the infringement of the freedom, property or life of others. The state of nature could therefore be free, if single persons would not disrespect this natural law.

Yet there are individuals that disrespect and break this natural law, which will enable the harmed individual to be judge in his own case, as there are no other rules or legislative bodies. This will, according to Locke, lead humans from the state of nature into the state of war. This irregular and undefined use of power, self-judgment by anybody that feels to be harmed, makes humans seek shelter under one common government, seeking preservation and protection of their possessions, thus live, freedom

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<sup>13</sup> Manfred G. Schmidt, *Demokratietheorien. Eine Einführung*, 133.

<sup>14</sup> John Lock was an English philosopher and physicist.

<sup>15</sup> Law of Nature.

and property. But since all individuals are by nature free and equal, the establishment of a political authority can only be achieved if these humans agree with it.

Men being, as has been said, by nature all free, equal, and independent, No one can be put out of this estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent, which is done by agreeing with other men, to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living, one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, humans will eventually get together in a “common-wealth”<sup>17</sup> and sign a social contract. The individual subordinates the own pursue of maximizing the advantages to certain rules that will lead to advantages for everybody. This contract will be signed by all members of the society and will, once signed, hand over their individual power to a sovereign institution. This sovereign can in theory be either a person or an assembly and it would then possess unlimited power.

According to Locke, political authority is not legitimate if it only prevents conflicts amongst individuals. Individuals are only obliged to subordinate to this sovereign authority if it can also provide the protection of life, health, freedom and property, as the protection of these natural rights is the reason the individuals signed the social contract in the first place. The separation of power is the only way to prevent internal conflicts and the rise of an absolute and unjust power.

The final aim of the civil society is to avoid the inconveniences of the state of nature which follow from every man’s being judge in his own case. This is achieved by setting up a sovereign authority to which every individual of the society may appeal upon any injury received and which every member of the society has to obey.

Wherever any persons are who have not such an authority to appeal to, and decide any difference between them there, those persons are still in the state of Nature. And so is every absolute prince in respect of those who are under his dominion.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government (1689)* (available on: [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)), 146.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, *Leviathan or the matter, form & power of a common-wealth ecclesiastical and civil*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 143.

The sovereign authority, the legislative power, is also bound to respect the natural rights, thus the rights of life, freedom and property. And since absolute monarchy is not compatible with the civil society, Locke sees a right of resistance for every individual:

Wherever law ends, tyranny begins, if the law be transgressed to another's harm; and whosoever in authority exceeds the power given him by the law, and makes use of the force he has under his command to compass that upon the subject which the law allows not, ceases in that to be a magistrate, and acting without authority may be opposed, as any other man who by force invades the right of another.<sup>19</sup>

The power that every individual gave the society when he entered into it can never revert to the individuals again. As long as the community lasts, the power remains within it, because otherwise there cannot be a community at all, which would break the social contract. Because, having provided a legislative with power to continue forever, they have given up their political power to the legislative, and cannot resume it.

This social contract, which every human subscribes to by living in a modern democratic society, represents the basis of the democratic system.

## 1.2 Representative democracy

Already in his early publications, Montesquieu acknowledged the need of representation in a democratic regime. “The great advantage of representatives is that they are able to discuss public business. The people are not at all appropriate for such discussions; this forms one of the great drawbacks of democracy.”<sup>20</sup>

The idea behind democracy being the rule of the people does therefore not mean that the people enforce all the power. In modern mass-democracies political and social institutions, such as parliaments and parties, came into existence, which now limit the participation of the people to regulated moments of participation, such as for example elections. This is referred to as representative democracy, as opposed to a non-mediated direct democracy.

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<sup>19</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 193.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Geuss and Quentin Skinner, *Cambridge texts in the history of political thought: Montesquieu: The Spirit of the Laws*, Book XXI: Chapter 6.

Democracy is a synthesis of two principles: the sovereignty of the people and the constitutionality. The two principles are in a constant state of tension.<sup>21</sup> The ideal of democracy calls for a state that is governed by the will of the people, more specifically the majority of the people. The constitutionality is the response to the paradox that such a democracy could eliminate itself through a democratic process, if decided by the majority of the people.<sup>22</sup>

Due to their sheer size, democratic systems need representation to solve the problem of governance.<sup>23</sup> Sovereignty of the people thus does not mean that the people govern themselves but that they put people and groups in charge of doing this on their behalf.

This means in fact that, besides the rule of the many, the rule of the few is being established. In reality, a democracy without elected leaders, which take over the primary functions and have the respective power privileges, is not possible<sup>24, 25</sup>.

By combining popular sovereignty and representation, democracy is made possible, even though it might not fulfill all expectations that were put in the idealized model of democracy. Absolute power by the people has to find a compromise with the need to have a group of elites that is selected through competition.

This ambiguous mix has become part of the genetic code of democratic regimes and many elements which are not, strictly speaking, ‘democratic’ (such as the rule of law or the welfare system) have become essential parts of modern democratic systems.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of participation and empowerment of the people, democracy is the most inclusive form of government, as it brings politics to the people and gives them rights and influence. Therefore it is also the most complex form of government resulting in a situation where the majority of the citizens cannot fully understand the process. “The

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<sup>21</sup> Frank Decker, “Demokratischer Populismus und/oder populistische Demokratie,” in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (Floating Press, 2009), 55.

<sup>24</sup> Original quote: „Faktisch hat das zur Folge, dass neben die Herrschaft der Vielen die Herrschaft der Wenigen tritt. Realistisch betrachtet ist eine Demokratie ohne ausgewähltes Führungspersonal, das die Leitungsfunktionen übernimmt und über entsprechende Machtprivilegien verfügt, nicht vorstellbar.“

<sup>25</sup> Frank Decker, “Demokratischer Populismus und/oder populistische Demokratie“, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Yves Mény and Yves Surel, “The constitutive ambiguity of populism,” in *Democracies and the populist challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 8.

fundamental paradox of democracy is, in other words, that empowerment undermines transparency.”<sup>27</sup>

The basic traits of representative democracy can be summarized in four principles: First, it is concerned with the sovereignty of people which is expressed in the electoral appointment of the representatives. Secondly, this representation is to be a free mandate relation. Moreover, electoral mechanisms are to be set in place, to ensure some measure of responsiveness to the people by representatives who speak and act in their name. Finally, universal franchise is indispensable, grounding representation on an important element of political equality.<sup>28</sup>

In a representative democracy the people are, by the means of elections, selecting representatives to make decisions on their behalf via the electoral process. People thus give up their right to rule to elected representatives, who, for a certain period of time, make the political decisions on behalf of the people. This is coherent with the rules laid out in the social contract.

These representatives are assembled in the parliament, the participation of the people and the use of their democratic rights is limited to the elections and the participation in parties, unions and initiatives.

John Stuart Mill<sup>29</sup>, who initially had been supporting a system of maximization of political participation through direct democracy, later turned into a supporter of representative democracy, as the size of the voting system made it hard to involve all voters. He then supported the controlled enlargement of the representative system and a political order that should be capable of choosing qualified political representatives.

Mill formulated thirteen rules for representative government. Amongst these thirteen rules, he claimed that the assembly of the representatives should focus on the public debate and leave other tasks to be delegated to experts. This meant a combination of government of many with the capabilities of the “instructed few”<sup>30</sup> that are able and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>28</sup> Sonia Alonso et al., *The Future of Representative Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 23.

<sup>29</sup> John Stuart Mill was an English philosopher and economist.

<sup>30</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 179.

competent enough to govern and thus create a democracy with expert guidance in political affairs.

He furthermore differentiated between a 'false' and a 'true' democracy.<sup>31</sup> False democracy is found when a government system is marked by privileges that endanger the voting of minorities, mainly to be found in pure majority systems. A true democracy is therefore including the minority representation, on the basis of proportional representation. He furthermore advocated universal suffrage of man and women, yet not equal suffrage as it should be connected to the qualifications and competences of the voters, not according to possessions but to knowledge. He did not seem indirect elections as appropriate, as the choice of representatives by electoral delegates is seen as a way of cutting the power of the people.<sup>32</sup>

Representative democracy therefore, according to Mill, is the ideal way of implementing 'true' democracy.

The system of representative democracy, once it is implemented, offers different advantages, but also has some shortcomings.

Arend Lijphart<sup>33</sup> points out that such a system is better in representation, protection of minorities, involvement of the voters and the fight against economic problems. According to him parliamentary governments with moderate proportional representation within a system of a limited number of parties, are particularly good.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the process of decision making is in many ways faster than in direct democracy. Representatives can fully concentrate on their political work and thus professionalize the decision-making process. Expert knowledge can be used, which, as is assumed, the common citizen does not possess.

Finally, representative systems are less susceptible for short-term influence of demagogues or populists, which might create a swing in public opinion based on current events in a society, yet not with a long-term orientation.

On a more negative aspect, representative democracy leads to the concentration of power in hands of an oligarchy, the chosen representatives, which are susceptible for corruption and lobbyism.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 131 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>33</sup> Arend Lijphart is a political scientist specializing in comparative politics, elections and voting systems.

<sup>34</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Thinking about Democracy: Power Sharing and Majority Rule in Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 81.



Moreover, the people do not have the possibility to influence political decisions of their elected representatives. Most decisions are imposed on those affected without consulting them.<sup>35</sup> This may lead to promises made in electoral campaigns which are not held once in office. The need of the forming of coalitions limits the free mandate of the representatives, as compromises are necessary.

### 1.2.1 Concurrence Democracy

Concurrence democracy is a form of majority democracy, in which the majority in parliament is the decisive power for the term of office and thus has the concentrated executive power in its hands.<sup>36</sup> The system is “exclusive, competitive and adversarial.”<sup>37</sup> Usually two major parties are facing each other in the election and are competing for the votes, ending up either as the governing power or the opposition.<sup>38</sup> This is the why it is called a democracy of concurrence; two (or sometimes more) major parties competing for the overall win.

Especially in Anglo-American political sciences the opinion prevailed that the way of the English-spoken countries, in particular the US and Great Britain, was the right way to go. The concurrence democracy and the competition it induced between political parties for the government majority and the resulting, almost regular, connected change of government and opposition seemed to be the superior mode of democratic ruling.<sup>39</sup>

It was seen as a source of political stability, as it usually resulted in two-party systems, as opposed to the multi-party systems of Europe. A concurrence democracy usually creates stable governments with the probability of a change of power by elections, which brings political innovation.<sup>40</sup>

One party majority governments [concurrence democracies] typically produced by first-past-the-post elections are more united and decisive, and hence more effective policy makers.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 277.

<sup>36</sup> Klaus Schubert and Martina Klein, *Das Politiklexikon*, (Bonn: Dietz, 2006), 167.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> Klaus Schubert and Martina Klein, *Das Politiklexikon*, 168.

<sup>39</sup> Gerhard Lehbruch, *Verhandlungsdemokratie: Beiträge zur vergleichenden Regierungslehre* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2003), 7.

<sup>40</sup> Manfred G. Schmidt, *Demokratiethorien. Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2008), 316.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 110.

The distributions of powers in a system of concurrence democracy are easily to relate to by the voters.

It leads to a clear, logical and efficient translation of individual preferences into collective decisions and to a distribution of power, responsibility and accountability that is open and thus easily accessible for the voters<sup>42 43</sup>.

Having the concentration of power at its disposal gives the majority great powers between the elections and opens the chance of possible abuse. In such a democracy, the interests of the losers are not integrated, neither are those of minorities. Concurrence democracy therefore has great problems keeping diverse societies together, where the population is very heterogeneous in social classes, confessions and ethnic composition. It also struggles in including, due to its majority rule, the interests of minorities.<sup>44</sup>

The system that is usually put opposite to concurrence democracy is consociational democracy, which puts the emphasis not on concurrence but on consent.

### 1.2.2 Consociational Democracy

In short, “consociational democracy means government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy.”<sup>45</sup> It refers to a form of government in which (social and) political conflicts are not solved primarily by political majorities but by negotiations, compromises and the broadest agreement possible.

Several terms have been used to describe this form of democracy: Proporz-, consociational- and negotiation democracy. All of them define the opposite of a concurrence democracy and, in a broader sense, the opposite of a majority democracy. *Proporzdemokratie*<sup>46</sup> is the oldest term, which had been developed by Gerhard Lehbruch<sup>47</sup> in 1967, yet he himself replaced it later by the term *Konkordanzdemokratie*, which has found its way into English literature as

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<sup>42</sup> Original quote: „Überdies sorgt sie für die eindeutige, übersichtliche und effiziente Übersetzung von Individualpräferenzen in Kollektiventscheidungen sowie für offene und für die Wähler gut nachprüfbare Machtverteilung, Zuständigkeit und Rechenschaftspflichtigkeit.“

<sup>43</sup> Manfred G. Schmidt, *Demokratiethorien. Eine Einführung*, 316.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>45</sup> Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy.” *World Politics*, 21(2) (January 1969), 216.

<sup>46</sup> Gerhard Lehbruch, *Proporzdemokratie. Politisches System und politische Kultur in der Schweiz und in Österreich* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967).

<sup>47</sup> Gerhard Lehbruch is a German political scientist at the University of Konstanz.

consociational democracy. More recently he also used the term of *Verhandlungsdemokratie*<sup>48,49</sup>.

Consociational democracy is the term used to describe is a political system in which

important decision-making processes on the level of the central government are being dominated by the maxim of mutual consent by formal or informal procedures of communication outside of parliament<sup>50,51</sup>.

There are several requirements to make consociational democracy successful. First, the elites of the respective population groups, i.e. subcultures, need to be able to accommodate the different and sometimes divergent interests of their subculture. Secondly, the elites of each subculture need to be able to transcend the cleavage between the cultures in order to join forces and work together with the other elites. Furthermore, these elites, while working together, have to be committed to maintain the system and work on the improvement of its cohesion and stability.<sup>52</sup> Finally, on a more global level, it is necessary that the elites understand the danger of political fragmentation.

Three factors are decisive to the establishment and the success of cooperation between the elites in such a fragmented system. First of all, the existence of an external threat to the country will create the need of these elites to come and work together, in order to face the outside danger. Most cartels of elites have been established during or after periods of crises, such as the first and the Second World War.

It argued that in these countries, the destabilizing effects of subcultural segmentation are neutralized at the elite level by embracing non-majoritarian mechanisms for conflict resolution.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, a multiple balance of power among the subcultures is needed. This means, that there cannot be either a dual balance of power, with two equally strong elite cartels,

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<sup>48</sup> Democracy of Negotiation.

<sup>49</sup> Gerhard Lehbruch, *Verhandlungsdemokratie: Beiträge zur vergleichenden Regierungslehre*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Original quote: „[...] wichtige Entscheidungsprozesse auf der Ebene der Zentralregierung formal oder durch informelle Prozeduren außerparlamentarischer Verständigung von der Maxime des gütlichen Einvernehmens beherrscht sind.“

<sup>51</sup> Gerhard Lehbruch, „Konkordanzdemokratie“ in *Die westlichen Länder*, edited by Manfred G. Schmidt (München: C.H.Beck, 1992), 208.

<sup>52</sup> Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy”, 216.

<sup>53</sup> Rudy B. Andeweg, “Consociational Democracy,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3 (June 2000), 509.

nor can there be hegemony of one subculture amongst several. The resulting fights for power amongst the elites would cause the system of consociational democracy to fail.<sup>54</sup> Finally there is the factor of the total load that is put on the decision-making apparatus. Fragmented societies with many subcultures have a tendency to become immobilized, something which consociational democracy is designed to avoid. Yet, since there needs to be a decision-making process that entails all subcultures, there is the threat of the consociational democracy becoming immobilized. Therefore a relatively low load on the decision making apparatus is favorable for the success of a consociational democracy.<sup>55</sup>

Arend Lijphart also uses the term of “distinct lines of cleavage” to refer to the fact that consociational countries have clear boundaries between their subcultures. Later on in this paper this phenomenon will be explained as the process of “verzuiling”, thus pillarization.<sup>56</sup> These cleavage lines are in fact supporting the consociational democracy, as subcultures with widely divergent interest can still coexist next to each other, provided they avoid intense contact. “In order to safeguard political stability, the volume and intensity of contacts must not exceed the commensurate degree of homogeneity.”<sup>57</sup>

These distinct lines of cleavage are likely to create a high degree of internal cohesion within the different subcultures. In order to work efficiently together with their counterparts, the elites of each subculture need to ensure the support and loyalty of their “zuil”, i.e. pillar, which is facilitated by the existence of cohesive political blocs. By forming subcultures divided by cleavage lines, the respective parties come to be organized representatives of the subcultures and will be able to adequately articulate the interest of the subculture.

Finally, there needs to be widespread approval of the principle of government by elite cartel, in order to avoid having cooperation fail over discussions of the best principle of government.

One of the biggest advantages of consociational democracy is its protection of minorities and their interests. Its potential to bundle the interests of many groups is

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 510.

<sup>55</sup> Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy”, 218.

<sup>56</sup> For more details see Chapter 5.1.

<sup>57</sup> Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy”, 220.

different from the concurrence democracy, where the interests of the majority are usually given more importance. Furthermore, its integrative powers manage to bring together the most different groups and enable them to reach a consensus.

In his publications, Lijphart strongly focuses on the Netherlands as an example of a consociational country. This categorization of the country was true in the time that his publications were made, as the elites were of such great importance whereas the population had limited influence onto the consents found amongst these elites. This system has therefore also been referred to as *Konkordanzoligarchie*<sup>58 59</sup>.

But, looking at the Netherlands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in fact already after 1967, the picture has changed. The Dutch system of political parties has recently been marked by a high degree of instability, as the confessional and social cleavage lines are being erased and the pillars are losing importance. “The traditional social milieus (pillars) have almost completely vanished.”<sup>60</sup> This will be explained in detail in chapter 5.1.

### 1.3 Direct Democracy

In a direct democracy the people themselves are the governing body without a superior authority above them. The oldest form of direct democracy, dating back at least to ancient Athens, were the town meetings, in which citizens assembled and made public decisions by openly discussing whatever had to be decided upon on the city.<sup>61</sup> Yet, due to organizational aspects, these town meetings were only feasible with a limited number of citizens.

Direct democracy on the scale of a whole state is thus almost impossible and does basically not exist in the present day world.<sup>62</sup> The most commonly used form of direct democracy today is as part of a representative democracy, presenting itself for example in special during which citizens vote for specific issues, such as laws. The means used to do so, the mechanisms of direct democracy, differ, depending on how they come to

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<sup>58</sup> Consociational Oligarchy.

<sup>59</sup> Oskar Niedermayer, *Die Parteiensysteme Westeuropas* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 332.

<sup>60</sup> Wolfgang Ismayr, *Die politischen Systeme Westeuropas* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2008), 427.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 276.

<sup>62</sup> Gerhard Lehbruch, *Verhandlungsdemokratie: Beiträge zur vergleichenden Regierungslehre*, 12.

be implemented and whether they propose a new law or want to change or abolish an old law.

### 1.3.1 Mechanisms of direct democracy

The mechanisms of direct democracy can be classified along four lines of differentiation. They can be mandatory or facultative, meaning that they are either regulated by law or not. Secondly they can be binding or consultative, depending on whether the result of such a mechanism is a binding decision or is just used as a mean to get the opinion of the people. Thirdly they can be proactive or reactive. Finally, they can be introduced from top-down, thus by the government, or bottom-up, meaning from the citizens.<sup>63</sup>

The most common forms of mechanisms of direct democracy are referendum and initiatives. In an initiative parliamentarians or citizens bring an initiative, for example the proposal of a new law, into the elected representation for them to decide upon it. The voting on this happens inside the representation, the citizens themselves do not vote. Another mechanism of direct democracy are referenda, amongst the most common ones are the following:

A confirmative referendum is a vote on a decision that had already been approved by the legislative, and which, either upon the presentation of a predetermined number of signatures or by decision of the parliament, goes into the voting of citizens.

An obligatory referendum is set in the constitution of the country and usually does not need to be initiated but is triggered automatically.

The facultative referendum is a voluntary voting on an already decided matter, which can be initiated by the citizens upon a certain amount of collected signatures.

Finally, the consultative referendum does not have any binding power and is just used to consult the public.<sup>64</sup>

Direct democracy, if realized, even if only partially within a representative system, offers a variety of advantages over representative democracy. First of all, it guarantees a constant involvement of the voters in the political life, not only on a basis of election

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<sup>63</sup> David Altman, *Direct Democracy Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 8ff.

<sup>64</sup> David Altman, *Direct Democracy Worldwide*, 8ff.

every four or five years. It thus takes the democratic idea of 'government by people' very seriously.

Secondly, upon decisions in a direct democracy, they need to be explained in greater detail to the people, which leads to a higher satisfaction and more participation.

The use of bribes and the abuse of personal relations is said to have little effect in direct democracy, as the people can undo any decision that is seen as implausible. The same is true for lobbying, which is harder in direct democracy, as it is easier to convince only a few politicians, for example by the use of bribes, than trying to convince a big part of the population to support a certain cause.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, due to new technology, referendums can be undertaken easily and cheaply over the internet.

On the other hand, direct democracy does come with disadvantages as well. As has been stated, pure direct democracy is basically impossible to handle in a state with great population. Moreover, the government processes become slower and more expensive in finding decisions, as the people can veto draft laws and thus create an extra step in legislation.<sup>66</sup>

Direct democratic mechanisms, such as referendums, can easily be influenced by forces such as the media and can be used by demagogues to gain support for their cause.<sup>67</sup>

Connected to this, Manfred G. Schmidt speaks of the

fixation of a certain point in time that is inherent to the majority principle, pointing out that decisions taken by direct democracy often represent momentary attitudes and atmospheres of the society, which are not long-term oriented.<sup>68</sup>

It is often criticized that the population lacks the knowledge and the emotional distance to remain neutral and to decide objectively on complex problems. It can also be doubted that citizens have well established preferences.

One point of criticism is to be found in the nature of the direct democracy itself, as, in order to initiate mechanisms such as a referendum, a group of people is needed to organize discussions and to represent the claims against the legislative and executive.

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<sup>65</sup> Manfred G. Schmidt, *Demokratiethorien. Eine Einführung*, 352.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 277.

<sup>67</sup> Manfred G. Schmidt, *Demokratiethorien. Eine Einführung*, 352.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

This leads to the creation of some kind of representation, bringing indirect representation into direct democracy.

Even though there is the positive aspect of strengthening the role of the people, it would mean the weakening of the parliament. Furthermore, knowing that they will have the power to decide within the mechanisms of direct democracy, voters might not necessarily vote for the party they would otherwise favor and the overall interest in party participation declines

Finally, one of the major points of criticism is the fact that direct democracy can endanger the protection of minorities, by taking away the proportional representation, which has always been ensuring the presence of minority interests.

#### 1.4 Audience Democracy

In his publication of 1997, “Principles of representative government”, Bernard Manin<sup>69</sup> develops the theory of audience democracy. In this he sees the latest step of development of the political sphere. When looking at the term itself, audience democracy, or in German ‘Zuschauerdemokratie’, there seems to be a contradiction, as democracy asks for active participation of citizens, yet being a spectator or part of the audience would have no value in an idealized democracy. Yet Manin offers with his audience democracy a model where the citizen is indeed the audience, but he nevertheless has a say in political arena.

When entering the political market, voters do not have a fixed decision yet on whom to choose as a representative.

Voters seem to *respond* (to particular terms offered at each election), rather than just *express* (their social or cultural identities). Thus, the electorate appears, above all, as an audience which responds to the terms that have been presented on the political stage once the ‘performance’ is over. Hence, this form of representative government is called [...] “audience democracy”.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Bernard Manin is a French political scientist and Professor of Politics at New York University, specializing on theories of democracy and political representation.

<sup>70</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 222.



This view of citizens being turned into audience is shared by Frans Becker<sup>71</sup> and René Cuperus<sup>72</sup> who say that “citizens keenly watch their every move, as if the political leaders were lead actors in a play.”<sup>73</sup> As a result they, like Manin, see the rise of an audience democracy, and the shift in politics from political representation to politics as a theatre.

Just as the actors are assessed after the show – a standing ovation, a demure round of applause, or boos – the electorate today shares a retrospective opinion on the performance of governments.<sup>74</sup>

In support of the idea behind Manin’s model, Jeffrey Edward Green<sup>75</sup> developed the model of ocular democracy, which centers on the citizen-spectator. In this he confirms the idea that collective citizenry in contemporary mass democracy has come to take on characteristics of a spectating audience.<sup>76</sup>

Until recently, democracy has always been seen as the empowerment of people by the use of their voice. Green brings up the idea that is rather the ‘eyes’ of the people that can fulfill this task. He justifies this by saying that the vast majority of the participation and experience in politics, as well as the time spent on political life, is not invested in action or decision making processes but in “watching and listening to others who are themselves actively engaged.”<sup>77</sup> According to Green this audience does not engage in decision making, and its voice should be “effectively silenced, bypassed, or rendered vague and inarticulate”<sup>78</sup>

The role of the citizen is thus being transferred from an active participant into that of a spectator and decisions are no longer made according to party programs that are offered for the future, but have strong retrospective focus. The performance of a politician in the past is decisive for his re-election, or not, in the future. Manin does not say that all

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<sup>71</sup> Frans Becker is Deputy Director at Wiardi Beckman *Foundation*.

<sup>72</sup> René Cuperus is Director for International Relations and Senior Research Fellow at the Wiardi Beckman Foundation.

<sup>73</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 222.

<sup>74</sup> Frans Becker and René Cuperus, “The Party Paradox. Political parties between irrelevance and omnipotence,” *IPPR - Institute for Public Policy Research*, available on: <http://ippr.nvisage.uk.com/ecomm/files/The%20Party%20Paradox.pdf> (accessed on November 18, 2011), 16.

<sup>75</sup> Green is assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania Political Science Department and has taught previously at Harvard University and at Gothenburg University in Sweden.

<sup>76</sup> Jeffrey Edward Green, *The eyes of the people. Democracy in an age of spectatorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 110.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 111.

decisions are taken on the basis of these retrospective considerations but that “by voting in a retrospective manner that voters are most likely to influence the decisions of those who govern”<sup>79</sup>. Furthermore, the outcome of an election and the resulting politics cannot be completely foreseen by the political programs that are offered. Citizens think about the future when they go to vote, yet “they know that electoral pledges are not binding and that those who are elected often fail to keep them.”<sup>80</sup> In this, making decisions derived from a retrospective perspective does offer better ways of predicting the future than the offered programs and promises might do.

The idea of citizens voting in retrospective has been contested. Green criticizes that “retrospective voting cannot fully compensate for the limited, binary, and occasional nature of electoral decision making.”<sup>81</sup>

Johannes Bjerling<sup>82</sup> on the other hand agrees with Manin’s idea of citizens voting in retrospective, saying that nowadays it seems to be more important for the voters to look onto political decisions of the past to make their judgment, as well as the individual performance of the politicians. In this Bjerling sees a replacement of the prospective focus with the stress on retrospective decisions and the focus on parties being shifted towards single persons. He explains this stressing of personalities by the increased need in today’s politics for personal mandates, which, as also Manin confirms, are directed more towards the person’s capability to react to arising situations rather than on a fixed political program.<sup>83</sup> This need for a personal mandate comes hand in hand with the promotion of the personality of the respective candidate

This shift in voter behavior is being triggered by the emergence of audience democracy. Manin suggests that historically there are three phases of representative government: Parliamentarism, party democracy and audience democracy. The transformation from one type to the other happened after a crisis of representative government had arisen and was calling for a new kind of representation. This crisis is identified by two main

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<sup>79</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 179.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey Edward Green, *The eyes of the people. Democracy in an age of spectatorship*, 111.

<sup>82</sup> PhD student at the University of Gothenburg, working on the doctoral project of ‘Personification of politics’.

<sup>83</sup> Johannes Bjerling, *Three Dimensions of Personalization: Why They Are Necessary and How They Could Be Use*, available on: [www.ecprnet.eu/MyECPR/proposals/reykjavik/uploads/papers/337.pdf](http://www.ecprnet.eu/MyECPR/proposals/reykjavik/uploads/papers/337.pdf) (accessed on November 19, 2011), 8.

criteria: the decline in the rate of electoral participation and the relative disrepute affecting political officials.<sup>84</sup>

Representative government was originally introduced in the form of Parliamentaryism which for a long time dominated politics. The change from property based voting rights to the universal suffrage, along with the rise of mass parties, opened the stage for party democracy.

It was definitely accepted as an advance toward democracy, not only because of the expanded electorate but also because of the new ways in which representatives were linked to the electorate.<sup>85</sup>

Faced with rising volatility of votes in Western elections and the great losses suffered by the, once dominant, mass parties, one should maybe not speak of a crisis of political representation as such, but rather of a “a crisis of a particular form of representation, namely the one established in the wake of mass parties.”<sup>86</sup>

As of today, Manin is suggesting that many Western countries have, roughly since the 1970s, entered the stage of audience democracy, a system which in the following will be explained.

In order to investigate the change from Parliamentaryism over party democracy to audience democracy, Manin looks at the ongoing changes by using four principles: The election of representatives at regular intervals, the partial independence of representatives, the freedom of public opinion, and the making of decisions after trial by discussion.

#### 1.4.1 Election of representatives

The election of the representative in audience democracy is greatly marked by electoral volatility which comes hand in hand with the great decline in support of mass parties. The support of individual candidates, which had become almost unimportant during party democracy, is now increasingly significant.

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<sup>84</sup> Bernard Manin and Nadia Urbinati (2007), *Is representative democracy really democratic?*, Interview with Hélène Landemore, (New York, April 10, 2007), available on: [www.booksandideas.net/IMG/pdf/20080327\\_manin\\_en.pdf](http://www.booksandideas.net/IMG/pdf/20080327_manin_en.pdf) (accessed on October 3, 2011), 10.

<sup>85</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 195.

<sup>86</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 196.

In this, elitism plays a crucial role, according to Manin. The term elite is not confined to mean only “rich” or “from a higher class”; to Manin it is a term to characterize citizens with extraordinary capabilities.

Voters choose the distinctive qualities that they want to see in their representatives. These qualities may consist in a variety of things, including uncommon ability to articulate and promote a given political opinion. Even in that case we are still dealing with elites in that people who are exceptionally able to defend an opinion possess a talent that most people sharing that opinion do not possess. This is what I mean by elites.<sup>87</sup>

These politicians form a new type of elite, they are no longer successful political activists but they are overall capable of handling new media to address and inform their voters. “Audience democracy therefore is the rule of the media expert”.<sup>88</sup>

#### 1.4.2 Partial autonomy of representatives

The process of election of representatives is connected to the new independence of these politicians, who are now elected on basis of their image, both the image of the person and the image of the party he belongs to. These images are usually highly simplified yet useful regarding the large number of voters, amongst which a great percentage is not “sufficiently competent to grasp the technical details of the proposed measures and the reasons that justify them.”<sup>89</sup> The new representatives need to be able to confront a great variety of problems that can arise and they therefore are no longer bound to party programs.

In Audience democracy the capability of confronting these diverse challenges can no longer be provided by party programs. In order to be able to react quickly to them, politicians tend to not bind their hands by commitments to detailed programs. More trust is put in their personal skills and they thus receive partial independence in their mandate.

If a certain form of discretionary power is required by present circumstances, it is rational for candidates to put forth their personal

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<sup>87</sup> Bernard Manin and Nadia Urbinati, *Is representative democracy really democratic?*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 220.

<sup>89</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 227.

qualities and aptitude for making good decisions rather than to tie their hands by specific promises.<sup>90</sup>

#### 1.4.3 Public opinion

Public opinion had, in Parliamentarism, been expressed by giving the vote to a specific person, without knowing what decisions he would make in parliamentary session. The electorate's vote in Parliamentarism was a pure an expression of trust, but not an expression of political preferences.

In party democracy the casted vote was more of a political statement than it was in Parliamentarism, yet it was, especially in the beginnings of the mass parties, predominantly an indication of social belonging. It was the party itself that organized the expression of public opinion, mostly by organizing demonstrations or petitions and press campaigns. This led to the development of the so-called partisan press, media that was associated with a certain party.

In the stage of audience democracy this attachment to party loyalty is declining and the overall public now receives the same information, which had not been filtered by party communication channels. Public opinion therefore splits anew over every issue in question, while these dividing lines do not necessarily reflect the electoral cleavages anymore. Public opinion might split the public opinion over one issue in one way, while other issues will do so in another. Therefore, "the electoral and non-electoral expressions of the people on the issues of the day may not coincide."<sup>91</sup>

#### 1.4.4 Trial by discussion

In Parliamentarism, all political decisions were taken inside of parliamentary sessions. As the representatives were only bound to follow their own best judgment, they could come together with other members of parliament and discuss. By bringing in their own opinions and interacting with the ideas of other representatives, these exchanges

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 230.

resulted in consent of the majority. Decisions were therefore made only once assembled in parliament and not upfront.

In a democracy of parties on the other hand the representatives enter the discussion platform with decisions that had already been made outside parliament, within the party. “Elections do not determine what policy is to be pursued; they determine the relative forces of the various parties, each with its own platform.”<sup>92</sup>

Finally, in audience democracy, it is floating voters that are the key in reaching decisions and in determining the political agenda. Floating voters are the result of the loss of party loyalty; they are voters that need to be convinced to give their voice to a specific party within every electoral period. This is what Manin refers to as ‘trial by discussion’.

Discussion of specific issues is no longer confined to Parliament (as in parliamentarianism), or to consultation committees between parties (as in party democracy); it takes place within the public. Thus, the form of representative government that is emerging today is characterized by a new protagonist of public discussion, the floating voter, and a new forum, the communication media.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>93</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 232.

## 2. Definition of Populism

Populism is not a recent phenomenon that has appeared in the course of the twenty-first century. On the contrary, it already existed in the nineteenth century, with its two big representations in the *Narodnik*<sup>94</sup> in Russia, which was the title that had been used to describe the radical intellectuals of the nineteenth century “who idealised the Russian peasantry, and who went ‘to the people’ in the 1870s in the vain hope of setting off revolution at the grassroots”.<sup>95</sup> Later on, there was the populism of US-American farmers which started in 1891 with the founding of the Populist Party.

In post-war Europe various populist phenomena were born, such as the Italian Common Man’s Front of Guglielmo Giannini in the 1940s or the French Union for the Defence of Merchants and Artisan of Pierre Poujade in the late 1950s.<sup>96</sup>

Today the term populism generally refers to a third kind of political phenomenon, common in Latin America, and, in a different form, in Asia and Africa. It refers to political parties that are not socialist but which are nevertheless based on the support of the common people and are hostile to the dominant classes.<sup>97</sup> But this exists in Europe as well, where since the mid-1980 a new group of populist parties has risen, out of which today’s modern populism has evolved.<sup>98</sup>

It is important that a clear division of populist and non-populist parties is, in reality, almost impossible, since the differences are gradual and the individual classification depends on the focus of the analysis and the used criteria.<sup>99 100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Russian term which roughly translates as ‘Peopleism’.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 674.

<sup>96</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition*, 39 (4) (Autumn 2004), 548.

<sup>97</sup> Jiri Pehe, *Populism in Central Europe* (Prague: Association for International Affairs), 59.

<sup>98</sup> Frank Decker, *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 9.

<sup>99</sup> Original quote: „Wichtig ist, dass eine klare Trennung zwischen populistischen und nicht populistischen Parteien in der Realität kaum möglich erscheint, da Unterschiede vielmehr graduell sind und die jeweilige Bewertung stark von Analyseschwerpunkten und den verwendeten Bewertungskriterien abhängt.“

<sup>100</sup> Markus Wilp, “Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien,” in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 132.

## 2.1 Defining characters of Populism

Many definitions of what a populist party is and which features it needs to present, in order to be classified as ‘populist’, have been written. It has been most often seen as a phenomenon of the right side of the political spectrum, yet this idea is changing.

Populism is better understood and operationalized as a “thin” rhetorical style that can be applied to political actors from across the political spectrum. Populism simply does not possess the intellectual nuances of liberalism, socialism, or conservatism. Populists can subsequently be found in the Left, the Right, in the center and, indeed, in just about any other part of the party system.<sup>101</sup>

Yet this makes the process of defining populism even more complicated and so far there is no overall accepted definition of populist parties and movements. The fields of application for the term ‘populist’ are widely spread out and it is often used without further explication of its meaning. “[It] is being used to describe parties, movements and leader figures, programmatic claims and measures, rhetoric means and forms of communication.”<sup>102</sup>

When being used by the general population, populism usually is being attributed with two meanings. Firstly, it is used to describe a “highly emotional and simplistic discourse that is directed at the ‘gut feelings’ of the people.”<sup>103</sup> Secondly, it can also refer to doing politics in a way that is merely responsive, which means that populists opportunistically take up topics that are of great interest to the population and offer policies, aiming at quickly gaining voter support, rather than providing a real solution. Yet these are not the true meanings of populism, as Cas Mudde<sup>104</sup> points out. He claims that both of these phenomena are better described by using the terms of demagogy and opportunism.<sup>105</sup>

Dan Hough<sup>106</sup> and Michael Koß<sup>107</sup> also criticize that populism has been “frequently used as nothing more than a term of abuse, [and] succinct definitions indeed are noticeable by their absence”.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Dan Hough and Michael Koß, “Populism personified or reinvigorated reformers?” *German Politics and Society*, 91(27) (Summer 2009), 79.

<sup>102</sup> Tim Spier, *Modernisierungsverlierer? Die Wählerschaft rechtspopulistischer Parteien in Westeuropa* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2010), 20.

<sup>103</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, 542.

<sup>104</sup> Cas Mudde is, as of 2010, a visiting associate professor at the political science department DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, and serves on the editorial boards of several academic journals.

<sup>105</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, 543.

<sup>106</sup> Dan Hough is teaching Politics and Contemporary European Studies in the Sussex European Institute.



Nevertheless, the fact that no definition has been globally set does not mean that there has not been a great investment of work and research in this field. Already in 1981, Margaret Conovan published on this phenomenon, with her book 'Populism', in which she approached populism by introducing a sevenfold differentiation, within the two categories of agrarian and political populism. On the side of agrarian populism she speaks of three different types: the commodity farmer movement, such as the US People's Party; the subsistence peasant movements which followed World War I and the movement of intellectuals that built radical agrarian movements in Russia.<sup>109</sup>

Within the scope of this thesis, it is nevertheless the other side of her definition that is of greater importance, which is her idea of political populism. She subdivides this political populism into the populist democracy, the politician's populism, the reactionary populism and the populist dictatorship.

More recently, these four types of political populism also appear in the publications of Paul Taggart<sup>110</sup>, one of the most cited scholars when it comes to populism. Taggart defines populism as a feature of representative politics. It is a political power which often lacks defined values and which adapts itself to any current political atmosphere. At the same time, Taggart sees them as something episodic, meaning that "they emerge and grow quickly but find it difficult to sustain the momentum and therefore will usually fade fast"<sup>111</sup>.

In his 2004 publication he offers a global definition of populism, in which he outlines six features of populism<sup>112</sup>: first, populism is hostile towards representative politics. Secondly, it pursues the so-called 'politics of the heartland'. Furthermore, it lacks core values and, fourth, only comes about when there is an extreme sense of crisis. Fifth, it is marked by the existence of some self-limiting qualities and sixth, and finally, populism is marked by a highly chameleonic nature, meaning that populism is neither limited to

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Koß is research associate at the University of Potsdam, focusing on Parliamentarism, party and policy research.

<sup>108</sup> Dan Hough and Michael Koß, "Populism personified or reinvigorated reformers", 4.

<sup>109</sup> Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1981), 138.

<sup>110</sup> Paul Taggart is Professor of Politics in the Sussex European Institute, Head of Department for Politics and Contemporary European Studies.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Taggart, "Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(3) (October 2004), 270.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

the left nor the right. Within the scope of this paper some of Taggart's features will be used as the defining dimensions of populism.

This importance of key individuals, which will be in the following referred to as the concept of 'charismatic leadership', as well as others of Taggart's defining features, are also key elements of Florian Hartleb's<sup>113</sup> definition of populism, which is constructed around four dimensions: the technical dimension, the content dimension, the personal dimension and the media dimension.<sup>114</sup>

The technical dimension refers to the division that populists want to point out, which exists between the common people and the elites. On a content level, Hartleb defines that populism is a form of "Anti-ism"<sup>115</sup>, focused on the most common topics of Islam, globalization and/or capitalism. The personal dimension refers to the existence of a charismatic leader, who fights in the name of the people against the establishment. Finally, the media dimension underlines the importance of media, in particular the tabloid press, which is more than welcoming to populist parties, as they generate frequent headlines.

Cas Mudde, instead of working with dimensions, gives an elaborate definition of populism by calling it

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, '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.<sup>116</sup>

Here again the opposition between the people and the elites is being stressed. He therefore defines two opposites of populism: elitism and pluralism.<sup>117</sup>

Elitism is populism's mirror-image: it shares its Manichean worldview, but wants politics to be an expression of the views of the moral elite, instead of the amoral people. Pluralism, on the other hand, rejects the homogeneity of both populism and elitism, seeing society as a heterogeneous collection of

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<sup>113</sup> Florian Hartleb is a German political scientist, teaching political communication and management at the Business School Potsdam.

<sup>114</sup> Florian Hartleb, *Nach ihrer Etablierung – Rechtspopulistische Parteien in Europa* (Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011), 19-20.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>116</sup> Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist", 543.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 543.

groups and individuals with often fundamentally different views and wishes.<sup>118</sup>

The German political scientist Frank Decker focuses in his publication on the right-wing of the populist movements, while admitting that there is also a left-populist movement on the rise. He uses four categories along which populists movements need to be studied: The first category is concerned with the causes and the history of the development of populism. It needs to be asked who the voters of populist parties are and why they vote the way they do. Secondly, there is the category of ideology, in which the degree of extremism and the thematic focus need to be determined. As a third category, it is appearance and organization of populism that is important, as it gives insight into the self-definition of populism as a movement. The appearance of a charismatic leading figure is also involved in this. Finally, the last aspect is the outcome of populist activities and whether they have a short- or long-term effect and whether the outcome is of direct or indirect nature.

Decker notes that the problem of defining populism lies within the fact that the term populism has been applied, historically and more recently, to the most diverse groups, persons, ideologies, attitudes and ways of expression, which turned it into a blurry term that seemed to be marked by the arbitrariness of its contents.<sup>119</sup>

When looking at the points all these applications of the term populism have in common, Decker concludes that the central points of populism are its appeal to the common people and its criticism towards the establishment.

Ronald H. Linden comes to the same conclusion, by saying that

populism, at its essence, sees society as divided into two antagonistic groups: the people, invoked in an idealized “pure” form, and the elites, who are seen as corrupt in both practices and values.<sup>120</sup>

The same is true for Daniele Albertazzi<sup>121</sup> and Duncan McDonnell<sup>122</sup> who claim that

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<sup>118</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, 544.

<sup>119</sup> Frank Decker, *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, 12.

<sup>120</sup> Ronald H. Linden, “The New Populism in Central and Southeastern Europe,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55(3) (May-June 2008), 3.

<sup>121</sup> Daniele Albertazzi is Lecturer in European media at the University of Birmingham, focusing on identity and representations, nationalism and cultural identities.

<sup>122</sup> Duncan McDonnell is a political scientist at the University of Turin. Focusing on political science and research on political parties.

populism sets up a confrontation between: a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous “others” who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice.<sup>123</sup>

Jens Rydgren<sup>124</sup> argues that there are two dimensions to populism: the populist ideology and the populist strategy. The ideology comprises the four following elements: a view of democracy<sup>125</sup>; the notion of people; populist political economy<sup>126</sup> and finally anti-intellectualism. The populist strategy on the other hand focuses on the way in which populist parties present themselves.

An effective way for a populist party to distance itself from the mainstream political parties is to deny the plurality of political persuasions that the different parties represent by claiming that in reality they constitute one single, relatively homogeneous political class. Populists often maintain, for instance, that the differences between the government and the established opposition are just irrelevant superficialities, and that the rivalry shown by these parties is nothing more than a sham.<sup>127</sup>

When summarizing all definitions that have been given of populism, some features are dominant in (almost) all publications on populism and will be therefore used to define populism within this paper.

### 2.1.1 Ideology of separation

Populism is an ideology of separation. On the one hand it divides the society vertically, by separating the common people from the elites. This is represented the anti-establishment attitude that populist parties display. They oppose the common people to the elites, which are represented by business man, politicians or generally the upper class of a society. These elites are seen as evil, corrupt and intriguing.

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<sup>123</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 117.

<sup>124</sup> Jens Rydgren holds the Chair in Sociology at the Department of Sociology.

<sup>125</sup> Populist parties see themselves as part of the democratic system, yet are in mistrust of government institutions and other mainstream bodies, such as political parties. This is particularly true for institutions of representative governments which are seen as distant to the people.

<sup>126</sup> Populists oppose economic reasoning, which puts economic growth as the main goal. They therefore oppose for example centralization and mass production and favor small-scale production and family capitalism.

<sup>127</sup> Jens Rydgren, *From tax populism to ethnic nationalism: radical right-wing populism in Sweden* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 8.

The world view of populists counts with a clear definition of the enemy: on the one hand the virtuous people, on the other hand the evil corporates, parties, government bodies and other blocs of power, which are conspiring against its [the people] interests<sup>128, 129</sup>.

On the other hand populism makes a horizontal division between the common people and outside groups. Not only is a populist party rejecting the higher classes, the elites, but they usually also define an outsider group that is horizontally located to the normal people. In this the outside group is actually part of the people, yet it has some elements that make it different. Most often immigrants are used as such an outsider group, but also Muslims, homosexuals and intellectuals in general can serve as a target group that populists want to marginalize. These out-groups are then often used as scapegoats by populists. „In the imagination of populists, these minorities are not part of the praised *heartland*, they disturb the homogeneity of the ‘people’.”<sup>130</sup>

In this populists use a strategy by which they want to achieve the inclusion of the people at which their politics are targeted at, by the exclusion of other groups. As horizontal and vertical separation usually both appear within the same populist party, populists can enlarge their interests by claiming that the elite is giving advantages to these out-groups over the normal people, making use of the existence of welfare state chauvinism<sup>131</sup>, which can be found in most modern societies.

### 2.1.2 The people and the heartland

A second feature of populism is the emphasis of the ‘people’ and the so-called heartland, reflecting the ideal of the common people and the idealized world they live in. The target group of populist parties is referred to as the ‘people’. This people are seen as an absolute homogenous community, even if in the reality of the respective countries such a community never existed. “The people feature in the populist

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<sup>128</sup> Original quote: „Das Weltbild der Populisten entspricht mithin einer klaren Feindlage: hier das rechtschaffene Volk, dort die bösen Konzerne, Parteien, Regierungsapparate und sonstigen Machtblöcke, die sich gegen dessen Interessen verschworen haben.“

<sup>129</sup> Frank Decker, *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, 12.

<sup>130</sup> Tim Spier, *Modernisierungsverlierer? Die Wählerschaft rechtspopulistischer Parteien in Westeuropa*, 21.

<sup>131</sup> Welfare state chauvinism in this relates to the unwillingness of the ‘common people’ to share the benefits of the welfare state with the outside-group.

imagination as a collective body with a common (public) interest, in common possession of the polity.”<sup>132</sup>

Members of this people adhere to all the values and norms that are seen to be good, they represent the stereotypical image of good middle class citizens. These values are neither old values, as traditional farmer communities might have them, nor are they post-modern either, as these values are being ascribed to the elites and thus are to be rejected. Populist voters are critical towards multicultural and globalized societies<sup>133</sup>, but at the same time they support equal rights for men and women, freedom of expression and secularism.

When it comes to defining the people, the different populist parties, even within one country, might make a different selection, as it is not generally clear who the minorities are, within the defined people, or who shall be seen as a true foreigner. Therefore Paul Taggart introduced a new concept, by identifying the so-called heartland, “in which in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides.”<sup>134</sup> The common people live in the so-called heartland.

The heartland is a construction of the good life derived retrospectively from a romanticized conception of life as it has been lived. It differs from a utopia that is constructed as the embodiment of values and which is something not yet existing. Indeed, one of the literal implications of the word ‘utopia’ is that a place that exists nowhere whereas the key to understanding the heartland is that it is, for populists, a description of a reality — and one that has been experienced.<sup>135</sup>

The point about the good life as embodied in the heartland is that it is an apolitical vision, meaning that it has an apparent lack of politics. “Populists are reluctantly political and it is only when threatened by crisis that they will mobilize into movements and parties”.<sup>136</sup> This crisis is symbolized by the perceived discrepancy between the ideals of the ‘heartland’ and the practice of contemporary politics and thus gives rise to populist movements.

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<sup>132</sup> Paul Barry Clark and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought*, 677.

<sup>133</sup> Paul Lucardie, “Populismus: begriffshistorische und theoretische Bemerkungen,” in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 29.

<sup>134</sup> Paul Taggart, *Populism* (New York: Open University Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>135</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe”, 278.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

### 2.1.3 Charismatic leadership and style of communication

Populist politics are in many ways “politics of personality”<sup>137</sup>, as they are focused on a charismatic leader that usually represents the whole party on the one hand, yet serves also the function of representing the people, as he speaks on their behalf. When facing the outside groups and the elites, this charismatic leader represents himself as the ‘lawyer of the common people’<sup>138</sup> that fights the establishment, while at the same time he is representing himself, as mentioned before, as a politician against his will.<sup>139</sup> In doing so, he uses a style of communication that differs greatly from the communication that is being used in daily politics. “Populists offer simplistic solutions to complex political problems in a very direct language, appealing to the common sense of the people and denouncing the intellectualism of the established elites.”<sup>140</sup>

Yet the idea of a politician against his will is also being opposed by some scholars, such as Cas Mudde, who believes that

this statement needs further qualification to be fully accurate. If one looks at certain populist *actors*, such as Filip Dewinter (VB) or Jörg Haider (FPÖ), one cannot seriously argue that they are reluctantly political.<sup>141</sup>

They don’t even necessarily claim this status of being ‘reluctant’ themselves. Rather, the *heartland* of the populist leaders is reluctantly political.

Max Weber has, already in 1921, defined three types of authority: the legal character, the traditional character and the charismatic character. The ruler’s legitimacy to be in power rests upon one of the three dimensions of character<sup>142</sup>:

The legal character bases its right to rule on the “belief into the legitimacy of set rules and the authority to command of the people that have been called into duty by these rules.” The traditional character uses the “the daily belief into the holiness of traditional rules and the legitimacy of the people that have been called into duty by these rules.” Finally, and most importantly in this context, there is the charismatic character which bases the right to rule on the „the extraordinary commitment to the holiness or the

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<sup>137</sup> Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens, “Populism versus Democracy“ *Political Studies*, 55 (2007), 407.

<sup>138</sup> Florian Hartleb, *Nach ihrer Etablierung – Rechtspopulistische Parteien in Europa*, 20.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe”, 278.

<sup>140</sup> Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens, “Populism versus Democracy“, 407.

<sup>141</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist“, 547.

<sup>142</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 124.

function as an example of a person and the rules that have been revealed and created by this person.”

Charisma in this is defined as

a quality of a personality that is seen as extraordinary and for the sake of which the person is being attributed with supernatural or superhuman, or at with least specifically extraordinary characteristic traits which are not available to everyone, on the basis of which he is being seen as heaven-sent or a role-model, and is thus being acknowledged as a leader<sup>143 144</sup>.

As Friso Wielenga<sup>145</sup> and Hartleb correctly point out, only the last type can be used by populist parties to mobilize disinterested people, and even more, so a populist party needs a charismatic leader as they want to be able to convince people that traditionally vote for the traditional parties. This explains the appearance of charismatic ruling figures, as a populist leader can neither claim traditional legitimacy, nor can he be seen as a rational ruler.

In the way that populists mobilize they often rely on charismatic leadership at the extreme or at least on centralized political structures. This is clear in new populist parties that are often characterized by both centralized structures and by the pre-eminence of key individuals. When we think of the new populists, it is easy to associate this politics with individuals such as Berlusconi, Haider, Le Pen or Bossi.<sup>146</sup>

Ronald H. Linden explains the charismatic rulers of populist parties by saying that

the ideological empty set at the core of populism, the need for a human embodiment of the heartland, and especially the desire for simple solutions and distrust of the ambiguities of “politics” make a charismatic leader almost a necessity.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Original quote: “[...] eine als außeralltäglich [...] geltende Qualität einer Persönlichkeit [...], um derentwillen sie als mit übernatürlichen oder übermenschlichen oder mindestens spezifisch außeralltäglichen, nicht jedem anderen zugänglichen Kräften oder Eigenschaften [begabt] oder als gottgesandt oder als vorbildlich und deshalb als „Führer“ gewertet wird.“

<sup>144</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie*, 124.

<sup>145</sup> Friso Wielenga is the Director of the Center for Dutch studies at the University of Münster.

<sup>146</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe”, 5.

<sup>147</sup> Ronald H. Linden, “The New Populism in Central and Southeastern Europe”, 3.



#### 2.1.4 Demand for stronger democracy

Populism asks for a stronger democracy, reasoning that representative democracy has become distant from the common people and therefore a more direct democracy needs to be established. Already in the nineteenth century American populists had expressed suspicion of representative institutions, an idea that is again present in today's populism. Representative institutions are seen as unrepresentative, unresponsive and abused "by corrupt politicians and an unrepresentative elite who betray our interests, ignore our opinions, and treat us with contempt."<sup>148</sup>

When taken to extreme, some modern populists go as far as to question the necessity of these institutions, claiming that with technological advances it has now become possible for the people to rule themselves directly, for example by referenda done via internet.

Populism therefore underlines the importance of the sovereign rule of the people. They thus describe themselves as presenting and proclaiming the wishes of the population and not as a representation of it. In order to keep the sovereignty of people guaranteed, there cannot be representation of the people, which is why people favor immediate representation, which manifests itself as a kind of "direct presentation or embodiment, whereby populist leaders give voice to the singular will of the people."<sup>149</sup>

To achieve this, the use of direct democracy is being favored, or at least elements of it, to replace or amend the current representative government, by the use of the majority rule or referenda. The will of the people is considered to be transparent and therefore immediately accessible, as long as one is willing to listen to the *vox populi*. In this, populism is wary of compromise and accommodation, emphasizing the need for a politics of will and decision.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy," in *Democracies and the populist challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 27.

<sup>149</sup> Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens, "Populism versus Democracy", 416.

<sup>150</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy", 34.

### 2.1.5 Left- and right-wing populism

Populism is most often referred to as being a phenomenon at the far ends of the political scale, with right-wing populism dominating the majority of publications. Typical examples of this are the parties which combine ethno-nationalist xenophobia based on the doctrine of ethno-pluralism with anti-political establishment populism<sup>151</sup>, usually expressed in a strong anti-immigration focus and in opposition to the multicultural society.

Right-wing populism is often mixed with and used as a synonym for right-wing extremism, which lacks a differentiated view on the subject. Right-wing populists are not (only) located in the part of the population that is often referred to as “Neo-Nazis”, but they also come from a background of the middle-class. The specific point of modern populists is that they are not extremists at all, but rather manage to use topics such as the resentments against foreigners and the need for security of the middle class, without addressing them in a way that National Socialism has done it.

Furthermore populism is not limited to the right-wing of the society. Left-wing populism has become important in modern times, as has for example proven the success of the German ‘Partied des Demokratischen Sozialismus’ (PDS) in 2005. Left-wing populists share the resentments against elites and thus the vertical elements of separation, yet they do not extend this on a horizontal level, where they usually remain committed to their goals of liberalism.<sup>152</sup>

The main criterion to differentiate right and left-wing populists is thus the ideological specificity of each movement. Right-wing parties usually focus on the rejection of immigration and include aspects of xenophobia in their political program, while left-wing populists present themselves as multicultural and egalitarian and put their programmatic focus on the rejection of social burdens and the problems of social and economy politics. The forces of left-wing populism are therefore not direct against immigration and foreigners but against the processes of globalization, imperialism and

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<sup>151</sup> Jens Rydgren, “Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family” *European Journal of Political Research*, 44 (2005), 433.

<sup>152</sup> Frank Decker, *Populismus, Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 23.

Americanism.<sup>153</sup> This can, in some cases lead to the rise of xenophobic resentments but, different from the right-wing populists, it is not a necessity.

#### 2.1.6 Mediaphil populism

Finally, populism is a phenomenon that is highly mediaphil. Populists tend, in the course of gaining support for their party, to address topics and problems of society that are very recent and that interest and maybe even divide the biggest parts of society.

By doing so they achieve a great coverage of their cause by the media, which in turn makes their campaign and ideas more present and allows them to reach more possible voters. This had been a general criticism of Joseph Alois Schumpeter<sup>154</sup> when looking at democracy and to a certain extent all parties follow this path, yet it becomes especially dominant with populist parties. Short-term politics are given a favorable position over long term programs as they can generate a quick rise in support.<sup>155</sup>

Populists want to bring the politics back to the people and the media are the major means of doing so. Different from the politics behind closed doors, which is the politics done by the ‘others’, the elites, the charismatic leader of populist parties tries to bring the issues of political importance closer to the population.

As Bernard Manin has pointed out in his elaboration on audience democracy, media have become a major player in recent politics, supporting the idea of the media being the fourth power. He defined the new politicians of this democracy as media experts<sup>156</sup>, who form a new type of elite which is overall capable of handling new media to address and inform their voters. Politicians rise to and remain in power because of their media talents and not because the people see themselves reflected in the politicians or feel that they are close to them.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Oliver Decker et al., *Die Mitte in der Krise. Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland 2010* (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2010), 123.

<sup>154</sup> Joseph Alois Schumpeter was an Austrian-Hungarian-American economist and political scientist who is most famously known for his publication “Theorie der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung” (Theory of Economic Development) of 1911.

<sup>155</sup> Manfred G. Schmidt, *Demokratiethorien. Eine Einführung*, 191.

<sup>156</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 220.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

In order to keep the audience interested, the media needs to serve the interest of the masses, by selecting topics of general interest. This leads, especially with television and the boulevard print media,

to a downslide of mediocrity and the infantilization of the communicational offers, which plays into the hands of populism and creates pressure on the successful politician to make a selection<sup>158.159</sup>

Populists might even try to create a tense atmosphere or the attention towards a certain topics themselves, in order to raise an issue that they can exploit for their cause.

The newsworthiness of an event increases depending on how many of the following factors apply to it: short duration of the event, local, political and cultural proximity to the audience, surprisal value, potential of conflict, unusual success and achievements, criminality, personalization, prominence of the action persons.<sup>160</sup>

The more of these factors being applied to an event, the bigger its media coverage will be. This is exactly what populists achieve by focusing on topics of general interest and of conflicts within the society.

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<sup>158</sup> Original quote: “[...] zu einer Rutschbahn der Mediokrität und der Infantilisierung der Kommunikationsangebote, die dem Populismus in die Hände arbeitet und einen Selektionsdruck auf den erfolgreichen Politikertyp ausübt.“

<sup>159</sup> Thomas Meyer, *Was ist Politik?* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2003), 201.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

**PART II:**  
**The Relationship of Populism and**  
**Representative Democracy**

### 3. Explanations for the rise of Populism

Yves Mény<sup>161</sup> and Yves Surel<sup>162</sup> state that “democracy and populism are intimately interlinked”<sup>163</sup> since they are both concerned with the role of the people in the democratic system. This democratic system sees, in modern politics, the struggle between principles of democracy and representation, which sometimes clash, while populism simply rejects the principle of representation.

As Gianfranco Pasquino<sup>164</sup> confirms, there is an intimate connection between populism and democracy, yet there is also a tension. The connection lies in the fact that both refer to and have their roots in the ‘people’ and in their emphasis of the importance of the people. “Ideally, an increase in the power of the people means an increase in the quality of democracy, and since populists seek to increase the influence of the people on modern politics, they do search to ameliorate democracy”<sup>165</sup>

In order to judge the phenomenon of populism though, as to whether its good or bad for the democratic system, it should first be investigated which are the reasons for the rise of populism. During an international conference in June 2003, entitled “Parties and political culture - A comparison of the Netherlands and Germany“, René Cuperus contributed with a paper explaining the rise of populism in the Netherlands. He came up with five reasons for this phenomenon, all of which can be used, slightly adapted, to explain the rise of populist parties and movements in general.

First of all, there is the political explanation, defined by the decline of the importance of mass parties. Secondly there is a multicultural explanation, which mostly presents itself as the rise of xenophobia, particularly in Islamophobia. Furthermore, an explanation is to be found in the public-sector, in which voters are dissatisfied with the government’s performance. The media-democracy explanation focuses on the need of politics to have

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<sup>161</sup> Yves Mény is the former Director of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and President of the European University Institute in Florence.

<sup>162</sup> Yves Surel is a professor of Political Science at the IEP in Grenoble and a Research Associate at the Centre d’étude de la vie politique française Sciences Po in Paris.

<sup>163</sup> Yves Mény and Yves Surel, “The constitutive ambiguity of populism,” in *Democracies and the populist challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 16.

<sup>164</sup> Gianfranco Pasquino is Professor of Political Science at the University of Bologna.

<sup>165</sup> Gianfranco Pasquino, “Populism and Democracy,” in *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, edited by Albertazzi, Daniele and Duncan McDonnell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15.

an entertainment value. Finally, the sociological explanation focuses on the crisis of representation and the rise of an audience democracy.<sup>166</sup>

### 3.1 The political explanation

An explanation on a political level can be found in the decline of the importance of mass parties. Most European states have, for a few decades, been confronted with this evolution and it is often stated that the idea “that the main big parties are representing the people nowadays is only believed in by these parties themselves.”<sup>167</sup> Dutch mass parties have lost half of their supporters since 1980, in Germany it was a third. „The age of mainstream parties comes to an end, they are socially, politically and historically outdated<sup>168</sup> „<sup>169</sup>

With the establishment of party democracy and the loyal attachment of voters to certain parties, electoral stability had been achieved. Over long periods of time, voters chose the same party over and over again, without giving much interest into who the specific representatives would be. Manin also sees a generational aspect in this by saying that

party preferences are handed down from generation to generation: children vote as their parents did, and the inhabitants of a geographic area vote for the same party over decades.<sup>170</sup>

With the decline in party preferences, the new system is marked by a high number of floating voter, which makes the power basis for parties highly dependent on the atmosphere and the “degree of popularity becomes the central resource of political leadership.”<sup>171</sup>

Besides political parties, other actors have entered the political playground, such as NGOs, social movements, civic associations and mass media organizations. These

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<sup>166</sup> René Cuperus, “From Polder Model to Postmodern Populism. Five explanations for the "Fortuyn Revolt" in the Netherlands” (paper prepared for the conference “Parties and political culture. A comparison of the Netherlands and Germany”, Münster, Germany, June 4-5, 2003), 17.

<sup>167</sup> Werner Perger, “Wenn die Mitte einknickt,“ *Zeit Online*, December 1, 2006, available on: [www.zeit.de/2006/49/Parteienlandschaft-Europa](http://www.zeit.de/2006/49/Parteienlandschaft-Europa) (accessed October 26, 2011).

<sup>168</sup> Das Zeitalter der Volksparteien kommt zu seinem Ende, diese sind gesellschaftlich, politisch und historisch überholt.

<sup>169</sup> Peter Lösche, “Ende der Volksparteien,“ *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 51 (December 14, 2009): 6.

<sup>170</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 208.

<sup>171</sup> Markus Wilp, “Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien,“ in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 150.

organizations manage to attract public attention and are successful in “channeling the political energies of considerable sectors of the citizenry.”<sup>172</sup> Political parties therefore lose their importance as representative linkage between the political sphere and the citizenry, as they are no longer able to perform their main tasks: “participation, transmission, selection, integration, socialization, self-regulation and legitimation.”<sup>173</sup> This crisis of representation is reflected in declining voter turnout and the weakening in the identification that political parties create amongst the electorate.

The reasons for the losses of the big traditional parties are numerous.

First of all, the big parties target their election campaigns towards a broad public, in order to reach as many voters as possible. They therefore put themselves into the political middle. Yet, with present countries being as diverse as they are, it is hard to present itself as a universal party.

The void created by the disappearance of the left-right confrontation was, in effect, filled by another fundamental political cleavage: the characteristic opposition of populism, political outsiders against the established order.<sup>174</sup>

Secondly there is a lack of profiling in the mainstream parties, as they aim at becoming part of the government (coalition) and can thus not create expectations by including goals and promises into their party program that they could not fulfill in the coming term of office. Furthermore, in order to be able to successfully create coalitions, parties need to have great flexibility in their programs and can thus not develop a specific and inflexible core program that would cause great clashes with other parties. „Controversial issues are thus not used to create a profiled party program, but are usually addressed with the aim of scaring away as little voters as possible.“<sup>175</sup>

Finally, mass parties are confronted with the loss of the loyalties of their voters. While traditionally worker classes might have voted for socialist parties and religious groups for Christian parties, these correlations are no longer given today.

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<sup>172</sup> Enrique Peruzzotti, “Representation, accountability and civil society” (prepared for the session "Civil society and democratic innovation in Latin America: The politics of social Accountability and control," LASA XXV International Congress, Las Vegas), 9.

<sup>173</sup> Ulrich von Aleman et al., *Das Parteiensystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2010), 216.

<sup>174</sup> René Cuperus, “From Polder Model to Postmodern Populism. Five explanations for the "Fortuyn Revolt" in the Netherlands” (paper prepared for the conference “Parties and political culture. A comparison of the Netherlands and Germany”, 7.

<sup>175</sup> Markus Wilp, „Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien“, 148.



Individualization is destabilizing the system from inside, as it takes the tradition out of relations with the parties and makes it subject to an individual decision [...] which, due to the fragmentation of interests, opinions and topics equals the attempt to herding cats<sup>176 177</sup>.

Especially the younger generation is no longer willing to bind itself by the membership in a party, which is an institution working on complex and controversial political problems and in this a little entertaining domain.<sup>178</sup>

The problems of the big, established parties come hand in hand with opportunities for new political groups, which, amongst other factors, due to their self-proclaimed proximity to the ‘simple citizens’, their explicit distance to other parties, their simple (and often provocative) answers to complex questions, their strong identification with certain personalities, as well as to their appearance, are often being described as populist<sup>179 180</sup>.

The decline in the importance of mass parties and the rise of the number of volatile voters that comes with it, are a fruitful ground for populist parties to start on. As party loyalties decrease it becomes possible for basically every party, be it an established one or not, to win the votes of the citizenry. Long-term orientation can sometimes suffer in this process, especially if the populist candidates and parties are able to present themselves as the solution to every urgent problem, often achieved by better media coverage and presentation than the one that traditional parties achieve.<sup>181</sup>

When parties developed from class-related mass parties to become loose and professionalized voter parties, populist elements got the chance to move from the fringes towards the center of the party system<sup>182 183</sup>.

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<sup>176</sup> Original quote: „Individualisierung destabilisiert das Großparteien-System von innen her, weil sie Partei Bindung enttraditionalisiert, entscheidungsabhängig [...] macht, was bei der Zersplitterung der Interessen, Meinungen und Themen dem versuch gleichkommt, einen Sack Flöhe zu hüten.“

<sup>177</sup> Hubert Kleinert, “Abstieg der Parteiendemokratie,“ *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 35 (August 27, 2007): 8.

<sup>178</sup> Markus Wilp, “Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien“, 153.

<sup>179</sup> Original quote: “Die Probleme der großen, etablierten Parteien [...] gehen [...] mit Chancen für neue politische Gruppierungen einher, die unter anderem aufgrund ihrer für sich selbst reklamierten Nähe „zu den (einfachen) Bürgern“, ihrer demonstrativen Distanz zu den anderen Parteien, ihrer einfachen (und in vielen Fällen provokanten) Antworten auf komplexe Fragestellungen, ihrer starken Personenorientierung sowie ihres Auftretens oftmals als populistisch bezeichnet werden.“

<sup>180</sup> Markus Wilp, “Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien“, 132.

<sup>181</sup> See also Chapter 1.4 and Chapter 2.1.6.

<sup>182</sup> Original quote: „Als die Parteien sich von klassengebundenen Massenparteien zunehmend in lose Bewegungen und professionalisierte Wählerparteien entwickelten gewannen populistische Elemente die Chance vom Randphänomen in das Zentrum des Parteiensystems zu gelangen.“

<sup>183</sup> David Gehne and Tim Spier, *Krise oder Wandel der Parteiendemokratie?* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2010), 177.

### 3.2 The multicultural explanation

As had been pointed out in Chapter 2.1.1 right-wing populist parties apply both horizontal and vertical antagonism, with vertical antagonism meaning the rejection of elites as opposed to the 'ordinary citizens'. Horizontal antagonism is therefore directed towards parts of this common people, thus towards certain parts of the population, most often against foreigners. Amongst the rejection of foreigners, Muslims are often the target of populist mobilization. The main characteristic of this populism aimed against outsider-groups, is its xenophobia, which finds expression in an opposition to the presence of immigrants and in the appeal to the growing resentment against the big parties and the domination by political elites<sup>184</sup>.

Taken to an extreme, in the case of opposition to Islam this may well reach the state of actual support of Islamophobia. Islamophobia is, by definition, the fear of Islam. This is rooted in the fact that Islam is seen as 'the other', not sharing values with other cultures. It is often seen as inferior to the Western world and as "barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist"<sup>185</sup> as well as "violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a 'clash of civilizations'"<sup>186</sup>. It is therefore being used as a justification for discrimination and even racism against Muslims.

In 2005, 23 million Muslims were living in Europe<sup>187</sup>, which equaled 4.5% of the total population. Each year around one million immigrants come new into Europe, mostly from Muslim countries. It is estimated that by 2050 Muslims will make up 20% of the population.<sup>188</sup>

Economic problems, in particular unemployment, are blamed on immigrants who are said to take away the jobs from the Europeans. At a European Union level the signing of the Schengen Agreement created a separation between EU-citizens and the non-EU outsiders and after September 11 Muslims in particular were now attached with new attributes, shifting the main threat "from the economic burden to the danger brought

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<sup>184</sup> René Cuperus, "Populism against globalisation: a new European revolt," in *Rethinking Immigration and Integration: a New Centre-Left Agenda*. (London: Policy Network, 2007), 155.

<sup>185</sup> Islamophobia Watch, "Islamophobia: A definition," available on: [www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-a-definition](http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/islamophobia-a-definition) (accessed October 24, 2011).

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Without Turkey.

<sup>188</sup> EurActiv, "The future of Europe: Islamophobia?" available on: [www.euractiv.com/enlargement/future-europe-islamophobia/article-145688](http://www.euractiv.com/enlargement/future-europe-islamophobia/article-145688) (accessed October 26, 2011).

about by their culture”<sup>189</sup>. The rejection of Muslims got enforced and voices appeared that spoke of the incompatibility of Muslims with the European culture

The rise of Islamophobia is documented in a 2008 Research Project of the Pew Group, undertaken in March to April 2008 in 24 countries. Its results show that a growing number of European population states that they have an unfavorable opinion of Muslims. More than half of the German population (52%) and 50% of the Spanish population have issued negative opinions regarding Muslims.<sup>190</sup>

This negative view prevails mainly amongst the older generations and amongst the parts of the population with lower levels of education. Furthermore, these Islamophobic attitudes are mainly present in citizens that adhere to the political right, as for example in France: 56% of respondents that have opinioned negatively about Muslims place themselves on the political right.<sup>191</sup>

As mentioned before, these xenophobic tendencies in the population are a basis for populist parties, dominantly from the right-wing of the political spectrum, to build on. By using these outside groups, such as the Muslims (or any other group), as scapegoats for all the problems of society, populists are able to use their rejection as a cure for the everyday problems of the potential voters. As has been mentioned in Chapter 2.1.6, this turmoil does not even have to be dominantly present in the society, at least not on a level where it is publicly discussed, but populist politicians can actively create this atmosphere in order to exploit the fear and the xenophobic traces in society.

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<sup>189</sup> EurActiv, “The future of Europe: Islamophobia?” available on: [www.euractiv.com/enlargement/future-europe-islamophobia/article-145688](http://www.euractiv.com/enlargement/future-europe-islamophobia/article-145688) (accessed October 26, 2011).

<sup>190</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, “Unfavorable Views of Jews and Muslims on the Increase in Europe,” available on: [www.pewglobal.org/2008/09/17/unfavorable-views-of-jews-and-muslims-on-the-increase-in-europe](http://www.pewglobal.org/2008/09/17/unfavorable-views-of-jews-and-muslims-on-the-increase-in-europe) (accessed on October 17, 2011).

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3 The Public sector explanation

Furthermore, an explanation for the rise of populism is to be found in the public-sector, pointing to the fact that voters are dissatisfied with the government's performance. On a European Union level these governments are trying to reach a capacity to act on a higher level, yet this decision-making process can only be followed by a minority of the citizens who have the political knowledge and education to do so, in part due to the bad transfer of information by the EU itself as well as by the media. Political querulousness and shrinking interest in parties are on the rise amongst the "losers" of these developments.<sup>192</sup>

The so called 'theory of the losers of modernization' tries to find an explication on the level of social change, the social status of the individual and the psychological disposition of the individual.<sup>193</sup> The 'losers' of modernization show the features of political discontent, the fear of losing their social status, material poverty and the lack of orientation and identity. Studies have shown that the average voter of the populist parties, exemplified by the Netherlands, is less educated than voters of other parties.<sup>194</sup> The fear of social loss can be divided into two groups: objective and subjective deprivation.<sup>195</sup>

Objective deprivation generally refers to the disadvantages in parts of the population, the lack of goods and the means of self-development. These can be material, as for example in the case of homeless people, or poverty in a more broad sense of the word, meaning low incomes. Immaterial forms are possible too, such as a low level of education and lacking social contacts.

The second group, subjective deprivation, cannot be as easily grasped as objective deprivation. It refers to a situation which is marked by a gap between the status quo and the perceived ideal status. On the contrary to objective deprivation, there does not have to be an actual deficiency but it is enough for a feeling of deprivation to exist or even the fear that such a situation might occur.

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<sup>192</sup> Tim Spier, "Populismus und Modernisierung," in *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, Frank Decker (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 49.

<sup>193</sup> Tim Spier, *Modernisierungsverlierer? Die Wählerschaft rechtspopulistischer Parteien in Westeuropa* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2010), 57..

<sup>194</sup> Paul Lucardie, "Populismus: begriffshistorische und theoretische Bemerkungen," in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 28.

<sup>195</sup> Tim Spier, *Modernisierungsverlierer? Die Wählerschaft rechtspopulistischer Parteien in Westeuropa*, 52.

Processes of modernization can appear in a variety of forms, such as industrialization, bureaucratization, democratization or secularization. Generally, they mean a change in society on a large scale, as they change and redefine the living and working situation of great parts of the society. A commonly used example is the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, which meant a decline in population working in the primary sector in favor of a rise of the industrial sector, often referred to as rural exit. With this, agricultural self-sufficiency was replaced by wage labor and division of labor was introduced. This led to changes in the population, both negative and positive. Tim Spier<sup>196</sup> concludes that “modernization *always* creates losers and winners.”<sup>197</sup> The winning parts of the population are usually those that manage to adapt quickly and efficiently, whereas the losers are those that have trouble adapting or that are influenced negatively in any way by this modernization process.

Other norms, values and patterns of behavior are developing, according to which the individual is being judged without regards to the necessity of and the wish for self-adaption [to them].<sup>198</sup>

The resulting discontent with life and the social status can turn into political discontent, if the population is under the impression that the ruling government is either incapable or not interested to solve their problems. In many cases this vote does not necessarily reflect a party preference, but it might simply be used as a protest vote. René Cuperus therefore called populism the “revolution of those not represented.”<sup>199</sup>

In this the populist movements, with their appeal to the ‘common people’ as opposed to the ruling elites, find their point of contact with the electorate. “In this socially isolated people without orientation are being given a feeling of belonging and as well as a social identity.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Tim Spier is an assistant professor at the Institute for German and International Political Party Law at the Heinrich-Heine University in Düsseldorf.

<sup>197</sup> Tim Spier, *Modernisierungsverlierer? Die Wählerschaft rechtspopulistischer Parteien in Westeuropa*, 59.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>199</sup> René Cuperus, “Der populistische Dammbbruch,” in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 169.

<sup>200</sup> Frank Decker, “Die populistische Herausforderung,” in *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, edited by Frank Decker. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 36-37.

Tim Spier has developed a study which results in showing that there is an inner correlation between processes of modernization that lead to crisis situations for parts of the population and the support for populist parties and movements. The resulting “populist moments”<sup>201</sup> make the population receptive for populist ideas.

This is not surprising, since both compete for a similar clientele of voters, which is mainly made up by members of the lower and middle classes that are threatened by the loss of their social status (the so-called “losers of modernization”)<sup>202 203</sup>.

Another aspect of the theory of losers of modernization is the theory of social identity, presented by John C. Turner<sup>204</sup>, which assumes that humans usually intend to create a positive self-image. Yet in some cases they fail to realize this by their own actions and achievements, especially in the above mentioned cases of deprivation. A solution in this case, according to the theory, is to achieve this positive self-image by rejection of others, the out-groups.<sup>205</sup>

As a result, the theory of the losers of modernization assumes that due to the specific situation that the losers of modernization find themselves in, they develop certain psychological dispositions that increase the probability of them choosing a populist party.<sup>206</sup> As populist parties create out-groups that can be used as scapegoats they provide a way for citizens, especially the losers of modernization, to see a chance to get out of their current situation. Since these processes of modernization and the resulting conflicts are very recent and controversial topics, they are likely to be taken onto the agenda of populist parties which are thus able to raise support for these parties.

Thomas Mayer<sup>207</sup> concludes that

populism in modern mass democracies is a constant problem, which may change in magnitude and virulence, yet it will always be present, due to crisis of modernization and political problems of representation.<sup>208 209</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(3) (October 2004), 270.

<sup>202</sup> Original quote: „Dies ist auch nicht verwunderlich, da beide Vertreter um ein vergleichbares Wählerklientel konkurrieren, das sich überwiegend aus den abstiegsbedrohten Angehörigen der Unter- und Mittelschichten zusammensetzt (den sogenannten „Modernisierungsverlierern“).“

<sup>203</sup> Frank Decker, „Die populistische Herausforderung“, 23.

<sup>204</sup> John C. Turner was a Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the Australian National University.

<sup>205</sup> John C. Turner, “Social Comparison and Social Identity. Some Prospects for Intergroup Behaviour,” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 5(1) (1975), 15.

<sup>206</sup> Tim Spier, *Modernisierungsverlierer? Die Wählerschaft rechtspopulistischer Parteien in Westeuropa*, 60.

<sup>207</sup> Thomas Meyer is a Professor Emeritus for political science at the Technical University of Dortmund.

### 3.4 The media-democracy explanation

The media-democracy explanation focuses on the need of politics to have an entertainment value. As had been explained in Chapter 1.4, the rise of audience democracy has put the citizen in the place of a spectator, while the politicians have to take over the role of the media expert which is using the media to gain support for his cause. In today's society and political sphere the leaders have to be good actors and they need to be able to "master the tools of drama in order to address effectively a domestic audience that has become increasingly distracted from politics."<sup>210</sup>

The relationship between populists and the media is a reciprocal one.

In some ways, this is a vicious cycle: the majority mainstream media are increasingly engaged in the agenda setting for politics, actively promoting certain points of view and rejecting others. They do so by constantly referring to the supposed wishes of the public, changing public opinion trends in the process. Politicians then react to the public opinion. In other words, the mass media and populist politicians live in a strange sort of symbiosis.<sup>211</sup>

In many cases media have, intentionally or not, served as a tool for the mobilization of populist causes. "Populists use the offers of media to create „infotainment“ – a mixture of information and entertainment."<sup>212</sup> Infotainment in this means the supply of entertainment and sensationalism, especially in the information domains. The media on the other hand are using the populists as a source of information that can be used to create stories and contents for their products. And populists provide a lot of this, as

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<sup>208</sup> Original quote: „Populismus in den modernen Massendemokratien [ist] infolge von Modernisierungskrisen und politischen Repräsentationsproblemen ein Dauerphänomen darstellt, das zwar in seiner Größenordnung und Virulenz beträchtlichen Schwankungen unterworfen, aber jederzeit zu gewärtigen ist.“

<sup>209</sup> Thomas Meyer, "Populismus und Medien" in *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, edited by Frank Decker (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 81.

<sup>210</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 52.

<sup>211</sup> Jiri Pehe, "Populism in the Age of Mediocracy" in *Populism in Central Europe*, edited by Václav Nekvapil and Maria Staszkiwicz (Prague: Association for International Affairs, 2007), 61.

<sup>212</sup> David Gehne and Tim Spier, *Krise oder Wandel der Parteiendemokratie*, 184.

media value everything that ‘breaks the routine’ in political arenas”<sup>213</sup>. This relationship has been referred to as ‘media complicity’<sup>214</sup>.

If we examine the processes of media-driven representation and the symbolic construction of favorable opinion climates – and of populist leadership, credo and action – we find that the media provide a significant degree of support for the rise of populist phenomena.<sup>215</sup>

Both parties, the media and the populist politicians, have one thing in common: “they speak supposedly in the name of ‘vox populi’.”<sup>216</sup>

Media in this can refer to a variety of complexes, such as channels, print media, electronic outlets, journalism in general or, broadly spoken, the entertainment industry. As for political populism it is mostly the news media, presented in print and electronic media, and most dominantly in television.

In this, there is another differentiation, between the established news media and the so-called tabloid. Established media is often opposed to populism and

they tend to adopt a law-and-order attitude and to use their journalistic weapons for the defense of the *status quo* when it comes under attack from anti-establishment forces, such as protest groups and populist movements.<sup>217</sup>

Tabloids on the other hand are different and are strongly focused on commercial values and the coverage of sensationalistic events, such as news that “stirs the emotions or provides for a kind of political voyeurism.”<sup>218</sup> The greater the sensational value of a piece of news, the greater the response by the audience and thus the commercial value. With their extreme language and their address of topics that are of great presence in society. “Populist leaders, as noted earlier, are all strong personalities that perfectly fit the news media’s demand for the spectacular and emotional treatment of social reality,

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<sup>213</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 50.

<sup>214</sup> Gianpietro Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media,” in *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 50.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>216</sup> Jiri Pehe, “Populism in the Age of Mediocracy”, 60.

<sup>217</sup> Gianpietro Mazzoleni, “The Media and the Growth of Neo-Populism in Contemporary Democracies” in *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, edited by Mazzoleni, G, J. Steward and B. Horsfield (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 16.

<sup>218</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 52.



including political life.”<sup>219</sup> Populists are in this capable of providing a lot of material for the media, which in turn create great media coverage and thus presence for these populists. “Personal charisma and media savvy have thus played a significant part in the origins and subsequent construction of populist movements.”<sup>220</sup>

But the media have changed even more in modern democracies. While until the late 1960s media was strongly connected to and thus influenced by political parties, they have now come to achieve independence from this.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, there is ongoing competition between public media and the private media, putting both of them in a situation of struggle for readers and viewers. As a consequence they “focus on the more extreme and scandalous aspects of politics”.<sup>222</sup> It is thus not only the tabloid press that is open to include news coverage on populism but, in order not to fall behind, even the established media is doing so.

Moreover, also the politicians are aware of how to increase their success in media and thus, in extreme cases, “he or she will say what the audience wants to hear, rather than trying to convince the audience that his or her opinion [...] make sense.”<sup>223</sup>

The relationship of media and populism is marked by a life-cycle. During a ground-laying phase, media coverage is not yet explicitly dedicated to the populists, but is rather reporting on the shortcomings of recent politics and the problems present in society. “Media coverage may spread a sense of malaise and can trigger anti-Establishment reactions and political disaffection.”<sup>224</sup>

The following phase sees the insurgence of populism during which populists gradually gain public support and become challengers to the established political system. By doing so the populist leaders try to gain and keep the attention of the media, while the media itself covers their actions with different attitudes, either supportive or rejecting.

During this phase, it is possible to observe the media savvy of leaders in action: they stage controversial events, engage in verbal extremism and

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>221</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist” *Government and Opposition*, 39 (4) (Autumn 2004), 553.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 553.

<sup>223</sup> Jiri Pehe, “Populism in the Age of Mediocracy”, 62.

<sup>224</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 59.

fiercely attack government policies (for example, on immigration, taxes and social welfare).<sup>225</sup>

The third phase is the final establishment of populism in society. This phase can be quite critical, as to some degree their presence and discourse have become ‘normal’ and thus media coverage might decline. Populist leaders lose some of their original charismatic appeal and find it more difficult to retain the media spotlight than they did in previous phases.

The final phase, the decline, is not relevant to all European populist parties, as some of them manage to establish themselves and receive ongoing media attention, most famously the case of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy. If the party does not achieve establishment in the political area, media coverage might direct itself towards the sensational fall of the populist presence or towards the appearance of competitors.

As mentioned before the attention of society in modern mass media times is mainly attracted to certain topics, which are chosen by two set of rules: The *Selektionslogik*<sup>226</sup> searches to select events and news that are worth to be covered whereas the *Präsentationslogik*<sup>227</sup> defines how the chosen material is being staged.<sup>228</sup> The more potential conflict, surprise value or prominence of the person involved, the more the media will generate coverage.

In order to explain this phenomenon, Mark Elchardus<sup>229</sup> has coined the term of *Dramademocratie*,<sup>230</sup> the drama democracy, which is marked by a great importance of images and emotions and the personalization and emotionalization of politics. He defines drama democracy as

a political system in which huge power emanates from depiction in the media and in which legitimacy is derived from the way people, groups and organizations are represented in that depiction.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 60.

<sup>226</sup> Logic of Selection.

<sup>227</sup> Logic of Presentation.

<sup>228</sup> Thomas Meyer, *Was ist Politik?* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2003), 201.

<sup>229</sup> Mark Elchardus is a Flemish professor for sociology at the Free University of Brussels.

<sup>230</sup> Mark Elchardus, “Moet populisme omarmd worden als politieke vernieuwing?” *Socialisme en Democratie*, 58(6) (2001), 260.

<sup>231</sup> Mark Elchardus, “Moet populisme omarmd worden als politieke vernieuwing, 261.

Therefore the relationship of media and populism is reciprocal, with benefits arising for both parties. The media are crucial for the spread of the populist cause and in this they create a basis to give rise to it. It is often referred to a convergence of goals between the media and populists, as both aim at creating as much media output as possible.

The media must cover the sensational stories provided by contentious, often flamboyant (and in some cases ‘media darling’) figures while populist leaders must use the media to enhance the effectiveness of their messages and build the widest possible public support.<sup>232</sup>

### 3.5 The sociological explanation

Finally, the sociological explanation focuses on the crisis of representation and the evolution towards an audience democracy which gives rise to the rule of ‘charismatic leaders’. This in many parts is connected to the media democracy explanation of x.4. The crisis of representation on the one hand is created by the phenomenon that today’s voter’s identification with certain parties is no longer of (great) importance and their traditional ties with them disappear. This is also due to the fact that a great part of the population does not see itself represented in any of the traditional mass parties. “He or she seems more likely to cast their vote for one specific person who appeals to them than for a party.”<sup>233</sup> The stability and the identification, due to social background, gender or other indicators of social status are no longer the defining factors. This lack of representation can give rise to populism.

They are people who become open to a populist experience because they suffer from political isolation and alienation and are in serious need of emotional attachments, of both the vertical and horizontal type.<sup>234</sup>

If the discontent about the lacking representation in society remains strong it might turn into an “overall sense of collective malaise”<sup>235</sup>. Populism is therefore appealing to the voters as it is not only exclusive, as has been seen in its horizontal and vertical rejection,

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<sup>232</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 62.

<sup>233</sup> René Cuperus, “From Polder Model to Postmodern Populism. Five explanations for the “Fortuyn Revolt” in the Netherlands”, 19.

<sup>234</sup> Gianfranco Pasquino, “Populism and Democracy”, 23.

<sup>235</sup> Gianfranco Pasquino, “Populism and Democracy”, 24.

but by doing it is at the same time inclusive towards the ‘common people. This inclusion is rather hazy and not specific, yet it gives the voters that feel unrepresented a chance to regain this representation.<sup>236</sup>

On the other hand there is the importance of charismatic leaders that try to gain the trust of the electorate. In the early stages of democracy, when the system of Parliamentaryism was still dominating, trust towards the representatives was a key issue and usually the elected representative and the people would belong to the same social community, entertaining a non-political interaction that would be reflected in the results of the elections.<sup>237</sup>

With this basis of social connections in their background, the representatives, when being up for election, did not need to undergo any process of electoral campaign, as they could mobilize the existing resources. Bernard Manin points out that this type of politician, who is being chosen to represent the people due to his character, social status or occupation, is a particular form of elite: “the rule of the notable”<sup>238</sup>.

With the political system evolving towards party democracy, mainly due to the rise in number of voters granted by universal suffrage, the choice of representatives changed. The electorate no longer put its trust into a person it was socially connected to, but decisions are now being taken along the lines of parties and the linkage between voters and their government in the new-born mass democracy has been organized mainly by the parties.<sup>239</sup> With the foundation of mass parties, the idea was brought up that they would represent the common man into office. Yet, as Manin criticizes, this was not the case, as party democracy eventually gave rise to a new kind of elite. Even though the new representatives, being part of the parties, were people that descended from the same social classes, as in the case of socialist parties most commonly the proletariat, it was still that part of the population that had special characteristics and abilities all along. “Leaders and deputies of the working-class party became different not only once they

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<sup>236</sup> Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the edges of liberalism. Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2007), 64.

<sup>237</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 202.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>239</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics” in *Democracies and the populist challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 84.

had reached their positions of power, but also that they originally were different.”<sup>240</sup> The rule of the notables was replaced by the rule of the political activists and the party bureaucrats.

The choice of party in this case, was no longer a choice of trust and confidence earned by social relations but was often a “means of expressing a class identity.”<sup>241</sup> Most societies therefore divided along electoral cleavage lines of two mass parties: the social democrats and the conservatives. “Each camp was a community, united from top to bottom by powerful links of identification.”<sup>242</sup> Representation therefore turns into a reflection of the social structure: the bigger one social group, the stronger the support for the party that was seen as attached to it.

Since the late 1960s though this has changed. “Election results vary significantly from one election to the next even when the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of the voters remain unchanged.”<sup>243</sup> The support of individual candidates, which had become almost unimportant during party democracy, is now increasingly significant again. “There is a massive level of unease in many Western countries; trust in institutions and politics is at a record low and there are crises of confidence and of political representation.”<sup>244</sup> Voters no longer cast their votes by social connections as in Parliamentarism, nor due to party loyalties, but they favor personal qualities in politicians such as “a better command of the techniques of media communication than others.”<sup>245</sup> These politicians form a new type of elite, they are no longer successful political activists but they are overall capable of handling new media to address and inform their voters.

In today’s audience democracy the capability of confronting diverse challenges can no longer be provided by party programs. In order to be able to react quickly to them, politicians tend to not bind their hands by commitments to detailed programs.

If a certain form of discretionary power is required by present circumstances, it is rational for candidates to put forth their personal

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<sup>240</sup> Bernard Manin and Nadia Urbinati (2007), *Is representative democracy really democratic?*, Interview with Hélène Landemore, (New York, April 10, 2007), available on: [www.booksandideas.net/IMG/pdf/20080327\\_manin\\_en.pdf](http://www.booksandideas.net/IMG/pdf/20080327_manin_en.pdf) (accessed on October 3, 2011), 1.

<sup>241</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 209.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>244</sup> René Cuperus, “Populism against globalisation: a new European revolt”, 2.

<sup>245</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 220.

qualities and aptitude for making good decisions rather than to tie their hands by specific promises.<sup>246</sup>

People therefore do no longer vote for actual political contents, they vote for a representative whom they find capable of addressing the upcoming problems. Depending on which issue is the most prominent during the respective election campaigns, it is different representatives that will find themselves favored by the electorate.

The electoral cleavage does therefore no longer coincide with the social cleavage; the importance of the social background is still important, yet different issues in daily politics create different social cleavages. Representatives have to identify these cleavages in order to target their election campaigns onto them. In some cases they can even artificially create these distinctions in society, yet this turns into a process of trial and error, as they need to see whether the population accepts these cleavage lines.

Representatives are thus no longer spokesmen; the personalization of electoral choice has, to some extent, made them trustees. But they are also *actors* seeking out and exposing cleavages.<sup>247</sup>

The sociological explanation is thus to be found in this crisis of representation, which gives strong charismatic leaders, as populist parties usually provide them, a chance to increase their influence and presence in society and politics. As the population loses trust in their traditional party affiliations it needs to find a new institution to put this trust in. Populists, with their eloquence and the promise of a better future for the ‘people of the heartland’ are therefore taken as a new source of representation that trust can be put in.

Populism will [therefore] be a more regular feature of future democratic politics, erupting whenever significant sections of ‘the silent majority’ feels that ‘the elite’ no longer represents them.<sup>248</sup>

If this discontent last for a long time in society it can turn into a situation of anxiety, which can give ground for the formation of an environment “in which any kind of populist/authoritarian experiment has the opportunity to appear and flourish.”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Bernard Manin, *The principles of representative government*, 221.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>248</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, 563.

<sup>249</sup> Gianfranco Pasquino, “Populism and Democracy”, 24.

#### 4. Positive and negative implications of populism

As has been seen, populism has a variety of reasons and sources from which it can arise. When speaking about the impact of populism on the democratic system, the conclusions vary: the qualification of populism reaches from the attribution of the utmost danger to the greatest blessing, from a threat to the system to a corrective function, from “solving the broken promises of the representative system” to “complex and, potentially, detrimental to democracy.”<sup>250</sup>

Judging whether populism is a positive or negative element of modern politics is not easy to be done by a quick first look on the issue. Scholars have already been arguing and discussing for years, whether the useful aspects of populism outweigh or whether its destructive forces are stronger.

Populism is seen both as the purest form of democracy and as potentially tyrannical and disruptive of some of the core elements of a democratic regime.”<sup>251</sup>

As has been mentioned before, populism is to a great extent opposing the establishment and upholding of the representative democratic system that is present in most modern European societies. Representation is not what the ideal form of democracy is meant to be, as to a certain extent it takes away the sovereignty from the people by installing representatives. Yet “if representation is an ad hoc and second-best solution to ‘pure’ democracy, it is condemned to constant adjustment.”

Such an adjustment can be seen in the rise of populism, as it is happening in the late years all over Europe. On the one hand, populism represents some positive aspects: it can function as an early warning system in society, pointing towards the miscommunication between elites and the people; it is a way of giving certain issues a chance to be discussed on a political level, which otherwise might have been ignored, and finally it advocates for a better democracy, meaning a development towards the way democracy is ideally meant to be, by the attempt to introduce elements of direct democracy into today’s representative system.

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<sup>250</sup> Gianfranco Pasquino, “Populism and Democracy”, 16.

<sup>251</sup> Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens. “Populism versus Democracy.” *Political Studies*, 55 (2007), 405.

On the other hand, there is a negative side to it, too, which can pose a potential threat to the political system. First of all, populism does not necessarily produce a stable democracy, as it counts with some inherent self-limiting qualities. Furthermore, populism is often opposing minorities, a situation that becomes worse as they ask for the abolition of the representative system and thus the protective privileges that had been given to these minorities. Finally,

from the point of view of accountability and legitimacy, populist mobilization is ambivalent: on the one hand, and in line with the democratic ideals, it serves to enhance popular control over the representatives; on the other hand, it enhances the personalization of politics, favors simplifications and ready-made solutions, and undermines the deliberation of substantive issues.<sup>252</sup>

Populism as such is not thus all black and white, and the following section will be dedicated to explain first the potential corrective function of populism, followed by an analysis of the threat that it can pose to the democratic system.

There are two faces of democracy: redemption and pragmatism. Populist mobilization arises in the gap between the two, primarily as a way to counteract the pragmatic excesses of established democracies. This is a conception of populism that retains a relation of interiority with democratic politics. Populism is not the 'other' of democracy, but rather a shadow that follows it continually.<sup>253</sup>

#### 4.1 Populism as early warning system of malfunctioning communication

The appearance of populism in a society, especially if supported by an increasing part of the population can be seen as a warning sign that something in the traditional political system is not the way it is supposed to be. “Populist practices emerge out of the failure of existing social and political Institutions to confine and regulate political subjects into a relatively stable social order.”<sup>254</sup> It can thus function as an early warning system, in particular pointing at distorted communication between elites and the people.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi et al., “Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century” (position paper prepared at the National Center of Competence in Research), 14.

<sup>253</sup> Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the edges of liberalism. Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*, 82.

<sup>254</sup> Francisco Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, 9.

<sup>255</sup> Karin Priester, *Populismus. Historische und aktuelle Erscheinungsformen* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2007), 28.



Populism needs a populist momentum, such as a crisis to appear and to gain support in society. If traditional and established mass parties were actively and satisfactorily fulfilling the needs of the citizens, populism would not have a basis to grow from. “The party system and the democratic system as a whole are bearing the brunt of *Parteiverdrossenheit* [party apathy] and *Politikverdrossenheit* [political apathy].”<sup>256</sup> Yet as more and more citizens feel not represented in modern politics, or as more and more topics are not being addressed or resolved in a way that the voters would like it to be, they become receptive for populism. With politics being still seen as a domain of elites or at least of a group of people different from the general population, this turn away from traditional parties towards populism is a sign of a lack of communication or of a severe discrepancy of what the people want and what politics are doing. Populism thus uncovers “the malfunctioning of the linkages between citizens and governing elites.”<sup>257</sup>

The major reason for this alienation of the people to the elites is furthermore the increasing sophistication in both the process of politics and the language that is used to describe and to report on them. This is especially visible once politics are taken to a European Union level, which becomes more and more important as European Integration continues. “In the process of reform and adaptation to the new global world order, there has been a fundamental breakdown of communication between the elites and the general population.”<sup>258</sup>

Populism represents the opposite of this increasingly difficult discourse, as they call for and practice the use of simplified language in order to explain to their (potential) voters what their goals are and where, according to them, the shortcomings of the current system are to be found. In this populism is, according to Margaret Canovan<sup>259</sup>, “the reaction of the growing complexity and intransparency of politics and the decision making processes.”<sup>260</sup> She defines this as the democratic paradox that calls populism

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<sup>256</sup> Frans Becker and René Cuperus, “The Party Paradox. Political parties between irrelevance and omnipotence,” *IPPR - Institute for Public Policy Research*, available on: <http://ippr.nvisage.uk.com/ecomm/files/The%20Party%20Paradox.pdf> (accessed on November 18, 2011), 4.

<sup>257</sup> René Cuperus, “Populism against globalisation: a new European revolt”, 3.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>259</sup> Margaret Canovan is an English political theorist.

<sup>260</sup> Margaret Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” in *Democracies and the populist challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 25.

into action to radically simplify politics in order to give the people a feeling of transparency.

Besides the lack of transparency it is also the lack of visible progress that causes discontent in the population. The populist solution therefore intends to bring about a quicker process of democracy, as the current democratic system is marked by breaks and compromises that are used to find a decision, but which slow the process down. In a populist system the will of the people could be implemented quickly and “by this they create a visibility of progress that the mainstream politics can no longer provide.”<sup>261</sup>

If populism is thus seen as a warning system whose appearance in the political arena points towards malfunctioning communication between the representative rulers and the people, it can serve as a way to improve the democratic process, by making it more visible and more understandable to the voters.

#### 4.2 Better Democracy

One of the most important claims of populism, by many scholars even seen as the most important one, is their mission for the re-strengthening of the people in their position of power towards the ruling elites. “From this point of view, populism constitutes the most acute tension between the power of elites and the role of the masses.”<sup>262</sup>

The representative system has taken a great part of the sovereignty out of the hands of the people, who have given it to their elected representatives. In theory, this is coherent with the social contract of democracy, yet in today’s system it is no longer based on a willing decision of the people, but on the tradition of ‘it has always been like that’.

Confronted with the shortcomings that the system is presenting today, populist parties arise and ask for the system to be changed. They fight to get the overall sovereignty

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<sup>261</sup> Armin Nassehi, “Demokratie in Europa Die Potenz der Populisten,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, available on: [www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/demokratie-in-europa-die-potenz-der-populisten-1.1090121](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/demokratie-in-europa-die-potenz-der-populisten-1.1090121) (accessed on November 12, 2011).

<sup>262</sup> Yves Mény and Yves Surel, “The constitutive ambiguity of populism”, 17.

back to the people, as they see the representatives no longer capable of doing what they were elected for.<sup>263</sup>

When too great a gap opens up between haloed democracy and the grubby business of politics, populists tend to move on to the vacant territory, promising in place of the dirty world of party maneuvering the shining ideal of democracy renewed.<sup>264</sup>

This has to do with the ‘democratic faith’ that the people have, or should have, in the political system. Democratic faith is a key issue in the functioning of modern democracy. Politics are too complicated to be understood by most of the people it is set out to represent. People believe that their taking part in the political game, elections, can lead to the establishment of a better world. This democratic faith thus represents the “faith in salvation through popular power, and particularly in the brave new world to be found on the other side of electoral victory.”<sup>265</sup>

With the malfunctioning political system of modern politics, the people see their faith in this system gambled away. As has already been explained before, this is the momentum when populists come into play. Democratic politics create expectations that cannot be fulfilled and with the disappointed population the mobilization of populists is being made possible.

In order to solve the conflict of the “broken promises of democracy”<sup>266</sup>, populists promote the use of a more direct democracy, or taken to an extreme a pure direct democracy, as a way of giving back the sovereignty to the people. This is usually referred to as a plebiscitary democracy, which is a representative democracy that includes the use of direct-democratic elements. In this, classical institutions of representation become less important, such as parliament and parties, and direct relations between people and government gain importance.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Hans-Georg Betz, „Rechtspopulismus: Ein internationaler Trend?“ *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 48(B9/10) (1998), 5.

<sup>264</sup> Margaret Canovan, ”Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy” *Political Studies* (1999), 11.

<sup>265</sup> Paul Barry Clarke and Joe Foweraker, *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 678.

<sup>266</sup> Gianpietro Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media,” in *Twenty-First Century Populism: the Spectre of Western European Democracy*, 50.

<sup>267</sup> Frank Decker, “Die populistische Herausforderung“, 25.

While the establishment of such a plebiscitary democracy can be potentially harmful to the democratic system, it is the overall idea behind these claims that can be a positive influence.

In spite of its often unpleasant tones, it may constitute an effective reminder that democracy is not a given, but is instead a constant enterprise of adjustment to the changing needs and values of society.<sup>268</sup>

Some scholars therefore go as far as calling populism a necessary part of modern politics as they invoke to the concept of the people as a collective body, which is important as the democratic theory often overlooks this issue and takes for granted the existence of bounded and stable politics. Moreover, in its ambition to speak for the majority of the people and making sure that the minorities and their interests are not disproportionally given power to, “populism is profoundly compatible with democracy”<sup>269</sup>, even more so since it supports the use of more direct action in order to increase the participation of citizens. It creates pressure on the established political system to get back closer to society.<sup>270</sup>

This increase in participation is also achieved by the introduction of certain topics into the political sphere. As has been explained in Chapter 2.1.6 and 3.4 populists tend to focus on topics that are of immediate importance to the society in order to gain the most turnout at the elections. By doing so they often create a lot of attention for topics which are otherwise ignored or only barely covered by the traditional parties. This leads to an increase in votes gained by the party as they can win over the parts of the population that have a major interest in these areas and do not feel them represented by the traditional parties.

In order to react to these developments, the other parties have two options: they can either ignore the emergence of this populism and the topics it represents and focus on their own program, not admitting to any changes; or they can give into the claims of the population by taking these issues onto their own agenda, making them part of the wider political discussion. In this they can take these problems, thus the strong points of populism, out of the populists’ hand, and thus prevent a further rise of the populist’s

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<sup>268</sup> Yves Mény and Yves Surel, “The constitutive ambiguity of populism,” 17.

<sup>269</sup> Francisco Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, 30.

<sup>270</sup> Thomas Meyer, “Populismus und Medien”, 95.

importance.<sup>271</sup> Despite the decrease in the success of the populist party that this might mean, as now the population sees these issues addressed by the traditional parties as well, this nevertheless means a n important win of populism, as it “was successful in agenda-setting and promoting new topics which were then increasingly accepted by the established parties.”<sup>272</sup>

Finally, as has been mentioned in Chapter 1.4 the political arena has been changed and societies have evolved into audience democracies, where people mainly watch what is happening in the political sphere and judge their representative by their actions in the past. In order to make sure that the results brought out of politics are more to the likings of the population, including them via elements of direct democracy can lead to a greater voter satisfaction. Populism is therefore often described as a particular mode of representation that is compatible with the democratic understanding of representative government today in the audience democracy.<sup>273</sup>

#### 4.3 Unstable democracy

As Paul Taggart has pointed out, populism is marked by the existence of self-limiting qualities. He includes them as his fifth defining theme of populism as they do become of great importance, once the party is in power. Most importantly so, it becomes difficult to retain power on the long-run, as

the appeal of the populist to their constituencies is usually on the basis of their unusualness and therefore as they become institutionalized into politics, they inevitably lose a major part of their popular appeal.<sup>274</sup>

Furthermore, as has been seen, populists rely heavily on the presence and the attraction of their charismatic leader, which due to democratic basic principles, party decision or simply personal development are not able to hold this position for an indefinite period

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<sup>271</sup> Markus Wilp, “Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien“, 148.

<sup>272</sup> Klaus von Beyme, “Populism and right-wing extremism in modern democracies.” In *Populism in Central Europe*, edited by Václav Někavil and Maria Staszkievicz (Prague: Association for International Affairs, 2007), 33.

<sup>273</sup> Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the edges of liberalism. Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*, 51.

<sup>274</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(3) (October 2004), 276.

of time. “Personalizing leadership works while the same person is in command but creates problems in transferring authority to new leaders”<sup>275</sup>

In his definition of the types of authorities, Max Weber already pointed out that the third type, the charismatic character, is threatened by the “Routinization of charisma”<sup>276</sup>. In many cases these leads to a fatigue of the population, who gets used to the slogans used by the populists and developed a routine, resulting in an almost inevitable decline of support of populism.<sup>277</sup>

As a rule, you don’t get very far with charisma in complex democracies where negotiation is key . . . The charismatic politician’s aura diminishes, his appeal weakens, his nimbus finally fades away . . . When it comes to the nitty-gritty of practical politics, [charismatics] often cause chaos. So their brief spring is followed by a long autumn dominated by disciplined organizers. And that’s probably unavoidable.<sup>43</sup>

Their focus on topic of immediate interest to the population is another factor that makes populism an instable part of democracy. By following this path, they manage to attract many votes of the silent voters as well as the floating voters, yet they run the danger of just as quickly losing these votes again once the next elections are coming up. Traditional mass parties used to be able to count on the votes of their loyal voters, which, as we have seen, are rapidly declining. Nevertheless they are established parties and can therefore still win over a lot of voters, which might be skeptical to the new arising populist parties or which for example believe that only by voting for the bigger parties, their voice will be taken into account.

Furthermore, the focus on the most recent topics in society presents a danger to the long-term orientation of politics. In order to gain voter support, populists offer solutions that show results within a short period of time, in order to prove their capability of solving these problems and thus to satisfy the people. Populism therefore tends to be marked by discontinuity, which, if a party adhering to populism does get into power, can lead to a greatly instable political system.

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>276</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 142.

<sup>277</sup> David Gehne and Tim Spier, *Krise oder Wandel der Parteiendemokratie?*, 184.

#### 4.4 Minorities

Populism, as has been defined above, creates antagonisms on a horizontal level by excluding parts of the population, creating out-groups. Most often these out-groups are minorities within the society, such as different cultures, languages, or religions. One success of the modern democracies is the inclusion of these minorities by the proportional representation, which leads to a representation of all parts of the society in the respective political sphere, despite of their size.

Democratic practices [...] are full of [...] procedures and forms of accommodation of minorities. They are democratic in the sense that they try to generate inclusive policies that have been influenced by the participation of all citizens.<sup>278</sup>

Populism, on the other hand, advocates for a clear rule of the majority, as the ideal type of democracy was meant to be. Whoever, or whichever issue for discussion, wins most of the votes in its favor, thus has convinced the biggest part of society, is to become winner of the electoral process.

In the populist tradition, the majority comes closer to the discovery of the true social values, ideals and aims. The instinct of the masses and the will of the society are often evoked. Hence, the majority rule is based on being right. In the populist tradition, the minority can only be wrong.<sup>279</sup>

In cases of minorities this would in many cases lead to non-existence of their needs and interests in politics, as their numbers are simply too insignificant in order to be of weight. Yet in order to ensure the functioning of the ideal democracy, thus the rule of the majority, populists are willing to accept this, or, if the minorities equal the out-groups they created, they even see it as desirable.<sup>280</sup> Since majority decisions are often weakened or sometimes even vetoed by minorities<sup>281</sup>, who in some democracies are given the right to do so, it could be stated that

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<sup>278</sup> Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens, "Populism versus Democracy", 411.

<sup>279</sup> Maria Marczewska-Rytko, "Populism in Central Europe: Theoretical Problems," in *Populism in Central Europe*, edited by Václav Někavil and Maria Staszkievicz (Prague: Association for International Affairs, 2007), 51.

<sup>280</sup> Susanne Fröhlich-Steffen, „Rechtspopulistische Herausforderer in Konkordanzdemokratien. Erfahrungen aus Österreich, der Schweiz und den Niederlanden,“ in *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, edited by Decker, Frank (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 146.

<sup>281</sup> Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the edges of liberalism. Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*, 12.

there is always a tension in our conception of a just society between the rights of minorities and the rights of the majority. Insofar as populism plumps for the rights of majorities to make sure — by 'intervening' — that they are not ignored (as they commonly are) populism is profoundly compatible with democracy.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Francisco Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, 30.



**PART III:**  
**Two Examples of Populism:**  
**The Netherlands and Germany**

The preceding chapters have been concerned with the phenomenon of populism and its implications on the democratic system. The following chapter will take a closer look on the countries, namely the Netherlands and Germany. In each country, one party will be analyzed, ‘The Left’ in Germany and the PVV in the Netherlands, in order to define if these parties can be categorized as populist.

Furthermore the social and political environment of both countries will be analyzed in order to explain the rise of this phenomenon. It can already be stated that populism has been a lot more successful in the Netherlands, which is why the reasons for this success will be studied, as opposed to the reason for a missing success of populism in Germany.

## 5. Netherlands

The first important rise of a populist movement, which even managed to create attention in other European countries, was the case of Pim Fortuyn and his ‘Lijst Pim Fortuyn’ (LPF), which he founded after leaving the ‘Partei Leefbaar Nederland’. His presence in this party has already generated an increase in its votes within one year from 2 to 7%.<sup>283</sup> On February 11, 2002 he created the LPF. On May 6, just a few days before the first elections his party was to participate in, he got shot. His party nevertheless ran for office, keeping Fortuyn as the chairman of the party and scored a landslide of 17%.<sup>284</sup>, making the LPF party the second strongest force after the CDA.

Not least because of the loss of their leading figure, but also due to inner quarrels within the party, the LPF was not able to keep his position in the government, as a vote of no confidence had been set in motion and on January 22, 2003, new elections were held. The LPF lost tremendously in votes, gaining only 5.7%.<sup>285</sup> By 2006, scoring only 0.21%, they had basically become insignificant.

With their dissolution in 2007 the LPF should leave the political arena, yet not so the right-wing populist phenomenon. A second figure arose, of which some say that he as

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<sup>283</sup> Gerd Reuter, “Unmut zwischen Maas und Marschen,” in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 67.

<sup>284</sup> Kiesraad.nl. “Verkiezingsuitslagen Tweede Kamer 1918 – heden.” Available on: [www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/Na1918/Verkiezingsuitslagen.aspx?VerkiezingsTypeId=1](http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/Na1918/Verkiezingsuitslagen.aspx?VerkiezingsTypeId=1) (accessed on October 1, 2011).

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

marked Dutch populist even more than Pim Fortuyn had. “This man has turned into a national obsession.”<sup>286</sup>

Geert Wilders, who had left the VVD in 2004, founded his party ‘Partij voor de Vrijheid’ (PVV) in February 2006. At the parliamentary elections in 2006 he scored 5,89% and rose in 2010 to gain 15.45%, making in the third strongest force in the country. After long discussions the VVD and the CDA decided to form a minority government under tolerance of the PVV, giving the government a narrow majority of 76 out of 100 needed mandates.<sup>287</sup> The short political program of the PVV clearly shows its populism, as in the first sentences of its election program of 2006 it states: “The political elites in the Netherlands are systematically denying the interests and problems of the citizens.”<sup>288</sup>

His party program is mainly associated with Islamophobia, which has caused criticism to rise but agreement, and in any created a lot of publicity.<sup>289</sup> More recently he also has started rooting for the rejection of other groups of immigrants, such as Polish workers.

When it comes to defining the PVV, whether it is populist or not, the academic debate is to a great degree agreeing on its categorization as populist. A study of the Anne Frank Foundation though defines the Party to be extremist, yet in a moderate form.<sup>290</sup>

Paul Lucardie<sup>291</sup> qualifies the PVV to be a party of “right-wing, half-liberal nationalists and populists.”<sup>292</sup>

Gerd Reuter<sup>293</sup> says that Wilders can be qualified as populist, since he makes use of short-time sentiments in the population and tries to win votes by making social promises, without necessarily having a real program as to how to implement these promises.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Koen Vossen, “Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten,” in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 77.

<sup>287</sup> Deutsche Presseagentur, “Niederländische Regierung lässt sich von Wilders dulden,” *Spiegel Online*, available on: [www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,720048,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,720048,00.html) (accessed on December 8, 2011)

<sup>288</sup> Partij voor de vrijheid. “Verkiezingspamflet.” Available on: [www.pvv.nl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=788&Itemid=139](http://www.pvv.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=788&Itemid=139) (accessed on December 10, 2011).

<sup>289</sup> Gerd Reuter, “Unmut zwischen Maas und Marschen“, 57.

<sup>290</sup> Koen Vossen, “Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten“, 79.

<sup>291</sup> Political scientist in the Center of Documentation for Dutch Political parties at the University of Groningen, Netherlands.

<sup>292</sup> Koen Vossen, “Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten“, 79.

<sup>293</sup> Gerd Reuter is a political scientist.

<sup>294</sup> Gerd Reuter, “Unmut zwischen Maas und Marschen“, 57.

Koen Vossen<sup>295</sup> conducted a study in 2009 in which he analyzed the PVV to find out to which extent it can be called a populist party. He concluded that it is easy to find a number of populist characteristics in the political discourse of Geert Wilders. He used a total of seven indicators, out of which he concluded that four (strongly) apply to Geert Wilders and his party, while the other three are only partially applicable. He justified this by saying that the question is

whether his [Geert Wilders] cause really is about the antagonistic opposition of the virtuous people and the corrupt elite. For this to be true, it lacks a consistent and consequent glorification of the people; thus one of the basic characteristics of a populist discourse is only present to a limited extent<sup>296, 297</sup>.

Furthermore, he sees a lack in the emphasis of the quest for direct democracy. Yet in a later publication of 2011, Vossen relativizes these findings by saying that over the last few years, after the first study, the PVV has changed its political discourse and is now giving greater emphasis to the idea of the ‘common people’ and the claim for direct democracy.<sup>298</sup>

When applying the defining characteristics of populism laid out in this paper to the PVV, its populism becomes clear. First of all, they do create great antagonisms in the population, most dominantly on the horizontal level, by rejecting the out-group of ‘foreigners’. Secondly, there has been, especially recently, a strong emphasis of the people and the idealized homeland. Despite the fact that the PVV is most often defined as a right-wing populist party, it still succeeds in attracting voters from the left as well. Moreover, and in the case of the PVV, being a one-man party, probably the most important aspect, the PVV is marked by a strong charismatic leadership. Finally, the mediaphil dimension of the party is of tremendous importance, making Geert Wilders and his party one of the most covered political subjects of the country.

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<sup>295</sup> Koen Vossen is teaching at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Leiden.

<sup>296</sup> Original quote: „Maar het is de vraag of het hem uiteindelijk gaat om de antagonistische tegenstelling tussen het deugdzame volk en een corrupte elite. Daarvoor ontbreekt het toch te veel aan een consistente en consequente verheerlijking van het volk, waarmee een van de basisingrediënten van een populistisch discours slechts in beperkte mate aanwezig is.“.

<sup>297</sup> Koen Vossen, “Hoe populistisch zijn Geert Wilders en Rita Verdonk”, *Res Publica: politiek-wetenschappelijk tijdschrift van de Lage Landen*, 51 (2009), 451.

<sup>298</sup> Koen Vossen, “Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten“, 80.

## 5.1 Reasons for success of populism in the Netherlands

With the LPF and the PVV being two obviously populist parties that had and have tremendous success in the Netherlands, the question remains why this has been possible, as opposed to the German case, where it has been seen that populism has not succeeded yet in rising. There are three major explanations that can be used to describe the circumstances that facilitated populism in the Netherlands: the political explanation, being made up by the electoral system in the Netherlands and the process of “verzuiling” which is quite specific to the Dutch society. Secondly, there is a multicultural explanation to it. Finally, the charismatic leadership is playing an important role in the Netherlands as well, as it has, on the contrary to Germany, managed to bring up charismatic leaders that led the populist movements.

### 5.1.1 Political explanation

The political explanation has two aspects. First of all, the Netherlands have always known a vast variety of parties making up their parliament. To get into the Dutch parliament, a party needs 1/150 of the votes, which equals 0,667% of the casted votes; in 2010 this was almost 63,000 votes. As a result of the elections in 2006 and 2010 the “Tweede Kammer” had ten fractions.<sup>299</sup> It is therefore easier for new smaller parties to enter into parliament and to become part of the government.

With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands were marked by the introduction of universal suffrage for men in 1918, followed by suffrage for women in 1922. At the same time, the equality of confessionnal and public schools has been introduced into the Constitution, as had been longed claimed by the Catholics. The following decades in Dutch society have been marked by “verzuiling”, i.e. the pillarization of its citizens, which split society and politics into religious and ideological pillars, which had little contact with each other and the elites of each pillar managed to bind the respective society groups

The term of pillarization appeared for the first time in the 1950 with J.A.A van Doorn and J.P Kruijt, which realized that the dividing lines between Dutch social groups were

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<sup>299</sup> Friso Wielenga and Florian Hartleb, *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich* (München: Waxmann, 2011), 7.

extremely sharp, between Catholics, Protestants, Socialists and Liberals, and each group had complex and dense networks.<sup>300</sup> J.P. Kruijt defines these four pillars as:

legally equal blocks of societal organizations and forms of cohabitation, based on a common *Weltanschauung*, which are found in a bigger democratic society, which has mixed *Weltanschauungen*, yet is ethnically and racially mainly homogenous.<sup>301</sup>

This pillarization penetrated daily life, from schools, to newspapers, shops and virtually any organization, as well as the relations between the people, who tended to rest amongst people of their own pillar. It led to the

development of a differentiated set of autonomous sociopolitical and sociocultural services in the sectors of health, accommodation, welfare and recreational activities.<sup>302</sup>

Some examples of these pillarized structures are for example the Katholieke Radio Onroep (KRO) and the Nederlands Christelijke Radio Vereniging (NCRV), as well as the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen which was founded in 1923.

The success of the pillarized system lies in the fact that the majority of people showed great passivity when it came to politics. The elites dominated the pillars, gave it a direction which they published with ideological statements, while at the same time they took care of the purity of the pillar<sup>303</sup>. Since the pillars displayed a great loyalty to their elites, these had all the freedom that they needed to work on a level superior together with the elites from the pillars. This pillar construct gave the Netherlands the stability it experienced between 1917 and 1967. (Pacification Theory)

Wielenga summarizes the importance and validity of all theories by saying that:

pillarization has contributed to the emancipation of different parts of society, but it also served as an instrument of social control and disciplinary actions: Pillarization protects [society] from influences from the outside and

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<sup>300</sup> Koen Vossen, "Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten", 98.

<sup>301</sup> Paul Pennings, "Verzuiling: consensus en controverse," in *Nederlandse politiek in historisch en vergelijkend perspectief*, edited by Becker, Uwe (Amsterdam: Spinhuis, 1993), 99.

<sup>302</sup> Gerd Reuter, "Unmut zwischen Maas und Marschen", 63.

<sup>303</sup> Koen Vossen, "Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten", 102.

conserves the own environment, yet it was also a vehicle of modernization<sup>304 305</sup>.

As a result of this pillarization, the Netherlands established a consociational democracy, in order to try and overcome the rifts in society and to include all segments and interests in the government.

This pillarization was present in Dutch society and remained so in a stable way until the 1960. The elections of the 1920 and 1930s showed a great continuity in their results. The protestant, catholic and social democrat parties used to have a strong and loyal voter ship. Both, in 1922 and 1937, the Christian parties united more than 60 seats. The Catholic party<sup>306</sup> was always the strongest force, constantly gaining between 27.9 and 31.9% of the votes. Same for the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (SDAP) and the Communistische Partij van Nederland (CPN)<sup>307</sup>, which united in 1918 a total of 26 seats and in 1937 still the exact same number.<sup>308</sup>

Until the early 1960s the Netherlands were the prototype of a “frozen“ party system, reflecting the cleavage structure of the beginning of the 20th century. The outcome of elections was almost totally predictable as most voters were loyal to the zuil [pillar] to which they belonged and voted accordingly.<sup>309</sup>

The Dutch political system has long depended on the existence of the great parties, the Social Democrats on the one hand, and the Christian Democrats on the other. These parties could in the pillarized society of the 1950s unite more than 91% of the votes, most of them being voters for the Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) who won 28.97% in 1952 and 32.69% in 1956, and the KVP with 28.67 in 1952 and 31.7 in 1956.

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<sup>304</sup> Original quote: „Die Versäulung hat zur Emanzipation verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen beigetragen, fungierte aber auch als Instrument sozialer Kontrolle und Disziplinierung: Versäulung schützte vor Einflüssen von außen und konservierte die eigene Lebenswelt, war aber auch ein Vehikel der Modernisierung.“

<sup>305</sup> Koen Vossen, “Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten“, 106.

<sup>306</sup> The Catholic party was founded in 1926 as the ‘Algemende Bond’, changed its name to RKSP in 1926, and from 1945 onwards came to be called the KVP.

<sup>307</sup> The CPN had until 1935 been called Communistische Partij Holland’ (CPH).

<sup>308</sup> Friso Wielenga, *Die Niederlande: Politik und politische Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Waxmann, 2008), 9 - 10.

<sup>309</sup> K. Aarts and J. Thomassen, “Dutch Voters and the Changing Party Space 1989 – 2006” *Acta Politica*, 43(2-3) (July 2008), 203.

Yet despite this evident political stability, there were clashes happening in the Dutch society, especially amongst the many minorities that were assembled in the country and between Catholics and Protestants.<sup>310</sup> There was not a great degree of political consent in the Netherlands. Even though antidemocratic parties or left parties never played an important role in the system, the opinions even differed greatly within the democratic parties. Despite the fact that at times of elections the resulting governments were predictable, they often did not manage to rule until the end of their period.<sup>311</sup>

During the 1920 and 30s there were constantly between ten and thirteen political groups represented in parliament and also during the 1960 this variety of parties in the Second Chamber was normal.

After 1960, social milieus and pillars became more and more porous and different movements marked the modernization of Dutch society, the movement of change in the 1960s brought several new aspects into society: secularization, individualization, pluralization, the increase of mobility and education, international youth- and protest culture.<sup>312</sup>

The stability of pillars declined accordingly and the elites feel that they are about to lose their moral leadership. This process is referred to as *ontzuiling* ('depillarization'), describing the fact that

“the size of religious groups in society has dramatically decreased and furthermore that it has also become far less self-evident that those belonging to a particular social group also vote for the party traditionally representing the group”<sup>313</sup>

The binding power of the pillars began to decline and the elites had to realize that their former moral, theological and disciplinary guidance was no longer timely.<sup>314</sup>

In the 1960s, support for all the big parties, the three confessional parties, the liberal VVD and the PvdA went down, they shared a combined total of 78.83% of the votes in 1967 and had by 1971 fallen to 71.69%.<sup>315</sup> On the other side of the scale, the small and

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<sup>310</sup> K. Aarts and J. Thomassen, “Dutch Voters and the Changing Party Space 1989 – 2006”, 208.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>312</sup> Gerd Reuter, “Unmut zwischen Maas und Marschen“, 64.

<sup>313</sup> K. Aarts and J. Thomassen, “Dutch Voters and the Changing Party Space 1989 – 2006”, 206.

<sup>314</sup> Friso Wielenga, *Die Niederlande: Politik und politische Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert*, 306.

<sup>315</sup> Kiesraad.nl, “Verkiezingsuitslagen Tweede Kamer 1918 – heden,” available on: [www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/Na1918/Verkiezingsuitslagen.aspx?VerkiezingsTypeId=1](http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/Na1918/Verkiezingsuitslagen.aspx?VerkiezingsTypeId=1) (accessed on October 1, 2011).



new parties won more votes, exemplified by the Democrite 66 who won 4.48% in 1967.<sup>316</sup>.

The foundation of the left-wing liberal party Democrite 66 (D66) in the year 1966 and the access into parliament by a sensational result of 4.5% were, combined with the great losses of the established parties, a sign that the political culture was undergoing profound changes<sup>317 318</sup>.

Since 1967 the three confessional parties ARP, CHU and KVP increasingly collaborated and finally merged in 1980, forming the Christen Democratisch Appèl. Still the decline of the confessional parties continued, while the three had in 1963 won 49.18 it was only 31.28 in 1972. This decline continued after the merger in 1980, even though the CDA was now one of the two biggest parties in the Netherlands, together with the PdvA.

The PdvA also was confronted with a loss of votes, parts of them going to small left-wing parties, but others leaving the party with the ABSPALTUNG of the Democratische Socialisten '70 who in 1971 gained 5.3%, yet lost its last mandate in 1981. In 1966 the Democraten 66 emerged, situated at the left center, who in 1967 won 4.5% of the votes. The small left-wing parties merged into the GroenLinks and the Socialistische Partij develops into a mid-sized social protest party. By the end of 1980 the big parties only got a total of 60 - 70% of the votes.

With the beginning of the 1990 a new downtrend in the votes for the big parties set in.

From 1994 onwards, however, the picture has changed completely. Volatility levels are now the highest in Western Europe, with the most unstable elections, those of 1994, 2002 and 2006, breaking all sorts of historical records. Simply put: there is no other political system in Europe, in which such high levels of instability have been recorded in the context of what are otherwise “normal” social and political circumstances.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Friso Wielenga, *Die Niederlande: Politik und politische Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert*, 313.

<sup>317</sup> Original quote: „Die Gründung der linksliberalen Partei Democrite 66 (D66) im Jahre 1966 und der bereits ein Jahr später mit dem sensationell empfundenen Ergebnis von 4,5% erfolgte Sprung ins Parlament waren, zusammen mit den herben Verlusten der etablierten Parteien, ein Zeichen dafür, dass sich in der politischen Kultur tief greifende Veränderungen vollzogen.“

<sup>318</sup> Friso Wielenga, *Die Niederlande: Politik und politische Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert*, 314.

<sup>319</sup> Peter Mair, “Electoral Volatility and the Dutch Party System: A comparative perspective”, *Acta Politica*, 43(2-3) (July 2008), 249.

The losses for the CDA and the PdvA increased massively over 1994, while the VVD continued its triumph, rising up to 24.69% in 1998. In 2002 the whole political sphere was turned upside down when Pim Fortuyn and his List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) won 17% of the votes and in 2006 Geert Wilders followed in this populist uprising with his Partij voor de Vrijheid

By today, the Netherlands have, since the political breach of Pim Fortuyn, become to be a laboratory for the instability of the system of political parties in the post-war period<sup>320 321</sup>.

The Dutch pollster Maurice de Hond has commented on the elections of June 9, 2011 by saying that:

At the elections for the 'Tweede Kammer' on June 9, 2010, almost half of the voters voted for another party than they had in 2006. Never before have numbers as high as this been seen. One could now argue that this has been a period of four years. But it is indeed true that of people which voted one year before during the elections for the European Parliament, already 35% did vote for something else. On June 9 of this year 35% of the voters chose another party than the one they had selected during an opinion poll five months before, just before the fall of the cabinet<sup>322 323</sup>.

The prediction of the results of the future elections has, unlike in times after the Second World War, become almost impossible, as the "frozen" system has been replaced by one of the highest volatility.

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<sup>320</sup> Original quote: „Inzwischen sind die Niederlande, nach dem rechtspopulistischen Dambruch seit Pim Fortuyn, zu einem Laboratorium für die Instabilität des Systems der politischen Parteien der Nachkriegszeit geworden.“

<sup>321</sup> René Cuperus, "Der populistische Dambruch," in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 167.

<sup>322</sup> Original quote: „Bij de Tweede Kamerverkiezingen van 9 juni 2010 stemde bijna de helft van de kiezers een andere partij dan in 2006! Dat zijn ongekend hoge cijfers. Nu zou men kunnen tegenwerpen dat dit toch in een periode van 4 jaar was. Maar het is wel zo dat, van de mensen die een jaar geleden bij de Europese Parlementsverkiezingen hebben gestemd, inmiddels al weer circa 35% wat anders stemt dan toen. En op 9 juni jl. stemde 35% van de kiezers wat anders dan ze minder de 5 maanden, kort voor de val van het kabinet, in de peiling hadden gezegd op dat moment te zullen stemmen.“

<sup>323</sup> Maurice de Hond, *Volledig uit het lood*, available on: <http://maurice.oaip.nl/2010/06/13/volledig-uit-het-lood> (accessed on September 14, 2011).

The system is completely thrown out of kilter and can by its own means not find back to order. This has great negative consequences for the vigor of a government and can lead to strong unrest in the society<sup>324 325</sup>.

This is exactly the reason why the populists in the Netherlands had and still have so many possibilities to make their way up in the political sphere.

### 5.1.2 Multicultural explanation

The second reason why populists had it easier to come to power in the Netherlands can be found in the multiculturalism of the country. In 2011 the Netherlands had a total population of 16.6 million people, out of which 13.2 were Dutch and 3.42 had a foreign background, equaling almost 20% of the population.<sup>326</sup>

This has given rise to discontent within certain parts of the Dutch society, whom Cuperus calls “the other, misunderstood and neglected native Dutch residents of run-down, so-called ‘multicultural’ urban working-class neighborhoods.” According to him, these people felt unable to express this discontent that they felt facing the cultural changes, confronted with “the spread of foreign languages, customs and habits, and Islam in particular – and crime in their immediate living environment”<sup>327</sup>.

Many scholars agree that the integration of ethnic minorities into the Dutch society has failed. Wilders is addressing exactly these parts of the population and expressing their concerns by saying: “The Netherlands are more than full when it comes to non-Western immigrants, especially of Muslim descent.”<sup>328</sup>

René Cuperus concludes that it is ‘remarkable’ how little the immigration and integration process had been discussed in the Dutch past. He speaks of a not-supervised

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<sup>324</sup> Original quote: „Het systeem is volledig uit het lood geslagen en komt uit zichzelf niet meer in het lood. Dat heeft sterk nadelige gevolgen voor de slagkracht van een regering en kan voor sterke onrust in de samenleving zorgen.“

<sup>325</sup> Maurice de Hond, *Volledig uit het lood*, available on: <http://maurice.ooip.nl/2010/06/13/volledig-uit-het-lood> (accessed on September 14, 2011).

<sup>326</sup> Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, “Population; Key figures,” available on: <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLEN&PA=37296eng&LA=EN> (accessed on December 8, 2011).

<sup>327</sup> René Cuperus, “From Polder Model to Postmodern Populism. Five explanations for the ‘Fortuyn Revolt’ in the Netherlands” (paper prepared for the conference “Parties and political culture. A comparison of the Netherlands and Germany”, Münster, Germany, June 4-5, 2003), 8.

<sup>328</sup> Partij voor de Vrijheid, “De Volkskrant – Burger wil geen immigratie, wel integratie.” available on: [www.pvv.nl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=364&Itemid=10](http://www.pvv.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=364&Itemid=10) (accessed on December 8, 2011).

mass integration, which had been accompanied by a great carelessness of the political elites. The populist uprising, according to him, has “broken open the cocoon of political correctness”.<sup>329</sup> This mainly happened with Pim Fortuyn and his attacks towards Islam, which, after 9/11 found great resonance in the Dutch society. Fortuyn questioned the capability of tolerance of the Muslim culture and his critical position towards immigration has soon been taken over by other parties, and the consent to not address the issue of migration has been cancelled, turning it into a subject of political discussion.<sup>330</sup> Wilders followed up on this discussion, as he started to speak of the threat of a potential Eurabia<sup>331</sup>, thus giving a voice to the fears that run in parts of the Dutch society.

### 5.1.3 Personal explanation

The third major explanation for the success of populism in the Netherlands is the personal dimension, thus the existence of charismatic leaders. The first key figure to appear in the political arena was Pim Fortuyn, followed by Geert Wilders, both of which were leading populist parties that had great success.

By the means of their distinct personality and their often provocative rhetoric, they manage to create a lot of attention, both by the public and the media.

There was clearly a self-perpetuating spiral: wherever Pim appeared, the ratings shot up. So every channel, every station, every programme, loved Pim. And vice versa.<sup>332</sup>

This media attention reached a peak in 2008, when Wilders published his anti-Islam movie “Fitna”. This attention that the populists receive does not necessarily have to be only positive, as Koen Vossen describes it: “Once he resembles Hitler, then suddenly not.”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> René Cuperus, “Der populistische Dammbbruch“, 167.

<sup>330</sup> Susanne Fröhlich-Steffen, “Rechtspopulistische Herausforderer in Konkordanzdemokratien. Erfahrungen aus Österreich, der Schweiz und den Niederlanden,“ in *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, edited by Decker, Frank (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 160.

<sup>331</sup> A term that had been coined by the British Gisèle Littman, who used it to describe a future vision of Europe under Muslim influence, created by the strong and ongoing Muslim immigration.

<sup>332</sup> René Cuperus, “From Polder Model to Postmodern Populism. Five explanations for the “Fortuyn Revolt” in the Netherlands”, 14.

<sup>333</sup> Koen Vossen, “Vom konservativen Liberalen zum Nationalpopulisten“, 77.

Others ascribe the success of these charismatic leaders to the fact that they represent a new type of politician: “the new-style political leader who fits in perfectly with today's dominant entertainment and emotion culture.” Furthermore, as Bernard Manin has named it, they are ‘media-experts’ and know how to successfully present themselves in order to achieve their goals.

Without a doubt, this comes with a dangerous aspect for populism, too. As has been defined by Taggart, populism is marked by the existence of ‘self-limiting qualities’<sup>334</sup> and charismatic leadership can be such a quality. The case of the LPF has clearly shown, that the party success was based almost solemnly on the figure of Pim Fortuyn. René Cuperus therefore states that the LPF was never really seen as a political party but “rather as a movement around a charismatic leader, was hit hard by the assassination of that leader.”<sup>335</sup>

Nevertheless, populism has not left the Dutch political arena, as with Geert Wilders a new player has entered the game and has in many ways taken over the heritage of Pim Fortuyn, despite the fact that in some fields, such as the Islamophobia, Wilders has in his criticism and verbal attacks gone further than Fortuyn ever had.

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<sup>334</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(3) (October 2004), 284.

<sup>335</sup> René Cuperus, “From Polder Model to Postmodern Populism. Five explanations for the "Fortuyn Revolt" in the Netherlands”, 4.

## 6. Left-wing populism in Germany: The case of ‘The Left’

One party that, within the scope of this paper, will be investigated as to which extent it is populist is the German ‘Left Party’, which evolved out of the ‘Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus’ (PDS). The PDS was the successor party to the GDR state party, SED, and on June 16, 2007 they merged with the WASG, creating a certain political renaissance and turning the new created party “The Left” into one of the biggest parties in Germany. Different from the majority of populist parties, the PDS and consequently ‘The Left’ are not to be attributed to right-wing populism, provided that they are considered to be populist, but rather mark the beginning of left-wing populism in Germany.

Left-wing populists present themselves as the mouthpiece of the ‚people‘, yet they do fill this function with different contents than the right-wing populists do<sup>336 337</sup>.

Despite the initial losses that the PDS had suffered after the German reunion, the party did gain in votes and became to be one of the most important parties by constantly increasing its voter basis. On the first all-German elections for the Bundestag on December 2, 1990, the PDS gained 2.4% of the votes. As a one-time solution the electoral threshold of 5% had been altered and a party needed either 5% in one federal state or a direct mandate on one electoral district. The PDS won this direct mandate in Berlin (for Gregor Gysi) and thus entered the Bundestag. They gained only 4.4% in 1994, yet were again able to enter the Bundestag due to four direct mandates that they won.

Their voter basis increased up to 8.7% in 2005 and reached a high point in 2009, after the merger with ‘the Left’, the year in which they won 11.9% of the votes. This success has been described as “the breaking of the sound barrier. ‘The Left’ has made its way in Germany.”<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Original quote: „Linkspopulisten stilisieren sich als Sprachrohr des "Volkes", füllen diesen Begriff aber mit anderen Inhalten als Vertreter des Rechtspopulismus.“

<sup>337</sup> Frank Decker and Marcel Lewandowsky, “Populismus. Erscheinungsformen, Entstehungshintergründe und Folgen eines politischen Phänomens,” *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, available on: [www.bpb.de/themen/85B6F3,0,0,Populismus.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/85B6F3,0,0,Populismus.html) (accessed on December 6, 2011), 3.

<sup>338</sup> Gerrit Voerman, “Linkspopulismus im Vergleich,” in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 190.

This evolution continued as in the regional elections of August 2009 in the state of Saarland 'The Left' scored 21.3%, which is mainly attributed to its leading figure Oscar Lafontaine, who for a long time had been chairman of the social democrat party (SPD). While the PDS, and later 'The Left', had been mainly popular in the eastern, new federal states, they now scored up to 8% in the old federal states, too. "It was due to Lafontaine that the acceptance of 'The Left' increased substantially in the old federal states"<sup>339</sup> and with this the evolution of its reputation away from being a pure east-German party.

This underlines one factor which is of utmost important to the success of this party: the charismatic leadership. Today the party is publicly mainly attached with the persons of Gregor Gysi, chairman of the parliamentary group of 'The Left' in the German Bundestag, who has resurged after he had been already of great importance to the PDS before. "The PDS's success is inseparable from the political communication skills, populist self-styling and rhetorical ability of its lead candidate Gregor Gysi."<sup>340</sup>

'The Left' today does succeed in the historical path of the PDS, whose success has been ascribed to the fact that it

presented itself de facto as a 'television and media party', as a symbolic mediator, which tries to bundle the latent attitude of protest, resentments and the deeply rooted irritation in the form of a media- and camera-suited leading figure<sup>341 342</sup>.

With Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine, who served as chairman of 'The Left' until 2009 when he had to withdraw due to medical reasons, gave the party two profiled charismatic leaders. Some scholars say that Lafontaine has taken the role of a populist even further than Gysi has, by presenting himself as a protector of "vested interests and as acting as a mouthpiece for the ordinary man"<sup>343</sup>, and by fulminating against the richer classes and the Hartz IV<sup>344</sup> Parties which, he claims, "are indifferent to the plight of

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<sup>339</sup> Gerrit Voerman, "Linkspopulismus im Vergleich", 190.

<sup>340</sup> Patrick Moreau and Jürgen Lang, *Linksextremismus. Eine unterschätzte Gefahr* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1996), 72.

<sup>341</sup> Original quote: „[...] präsentiert sich de facto als eine ‚Fernseh- und Medienpartei‘, als symbolische Vermittlungsagentur, die latente Protesthaltungen, Ressentiments und tief sitzende Verärgerungen gezielt in Gestalt einer medien- und kameragerechten Führungspersönlichkeit zu bündeln versucht.“.

<sup>342</sup> Patrick Moreau and Jürgen Lang, *Linksextremismus. Eine unterschätzte Gefahr*, 72.

<sup>343</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb, "Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany," *German Politics*, 16(4) (December 2007), 449.

<sup>344</sup> German system of social welfare.

ordinary people.”<sup>345</sup> In this, he sometimes presents himself more populist than his own party is.<sup>346</sup>

In the scientific debate, the definition of the PDS and ‘The Left’ as populist is contested.

Some have persisted in seeing it as a dangerous, populist, extremist party on the fringes of democratic acceptability, others as a milieu-based protest party articulating fuzzily defined eastern German interests, while yet more have, as we have seen, concentrated on analyzing the party’s progress through the prism of left-wing politics.<sup>347</sup>

Gero Neugebauer<sup>348</sup> and Richart Stöss<sup>349</sup> do not use the categorization ‘populist’ in their 1996 publication in which they give a general analysis of the PDS, yet they do make use of it when speaking about the ‘Ingolstädter Manifest’ which has been published by Gregor Gysi in 1995. In this manifest, Gysi asks for the creation of a new social contract. The ‘Ingolstädter Manifest’ is subtitled „We – in the middle of Europe. Pleading for a new social contract.”<sup>350</sup> The basic claim of the paper was the establishment of a new social contract, as opposed to the one in existence since the beginning of modern democracy.<sup>351</sup> He claims that the uprising split of society can only be prevented by this new contract:

More and more new steps are undertaken which seek to split disrupt cleave the East and the West, the poor and the rich, unemployed and working population, women and men, Germans and migrants residing in this country [...]. We on the other hand ask for a new social contract that will open up new possibilities for all of us, together<sup>352 353</sup>.

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<sup>345</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb. “Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany”, 449.

<sup>346</sup> Paul Lucardie, “Populismus im Parteiensystem in Deutschland und den Niederlanden,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 35-36 (2007), 45.

<sup>347</sup> Dan Hough et al., *The Left Party in Contemporary German Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 47.

<sup>348</sup> Gero Neugebauer is a German political scientist working at the Otto-Suhr-Institut in Berlin, focusing on party research.

<sup>349</sup> Richart Stöss is a political scientist at the Freie Universität of Berlin, focusing on right-wing extremism and party research.

<sup>350</sup> Original subtitle: „Wir – mitten in Europa. Pladoyer für einen neuen Gesellschaftsvertrag.“

<sup>351</sup> Gregor Gysi, “Ingolstädter Manifest,” available on: [www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls\\_uploads/pdfs/allg\\_Texte/Gysi\\_Gregor/Ingolst\\_dter\\_Manifest.pdf](http://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/allg_Texte/Gysi_Gregor/Ingolst_dter_Manifest.pdf) (accessed on December 7, 2011).

<sup>352</sup> Original quote: „Immer neue Schritte werden getan, die uns in Ost und West, Arm und Reich, Arbeitslose und erwerbstätige, Frauen und Männer, Deutsche und hier lebende Migrantinnen und Migranten zu spalten suchen [...]. Wir dagegen fragen nach einem neuen Gesellschaftsvertrag, der uns allen gemeinsam neue Möglichkeiten eröffnet.“

<sup>353</sup> Gregor Gysi, “Ingolstädter Manifest”, 1.



According to his manifests, Gysi foresees not only a choice between either a society in concurrence and a society in cooperation, but he also predicts the resulting and final, inevitable, “choice between social war and a new social contract.”<sup>354</sup>

In this manifest, both Gero Neugebauer and Richart Stöss identify clear populist characteristics, yet since this manifest is not backed up by the whole party, it cannot serve as a means to qualify the PDS as populist.

Viola Neu<sup>355</sup>, who has made one of the biggest contributions to studying the PDS and ‘The Left’, explains that the PDS does in fact use populist means, yet it does so in order to implement their socialistic ideology, which does not make it a classical populist party. It is therefore rather implementing a periodical, short-term, use of populism.<sup>356</sup> She therefore defines the success of the PDS by saying it is a party “which can be characterized by a strange mixture of nostalgia, ideology and protest.”<sup>357</sup>

Paul Lucardie supports this view by saying that the PDS and its successor ‘The Left’ could be seen as a “not fully populist” party.<sup>358</sup> He concludes that there is no populist party in Germany at all and that there are merely parties with populist characteristics.<sup>359</sup>

Arguing in a different way, authors such as Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb clearly define the PDS and accordingly “The Left” to be a populist party, embodying left-wing populism “not only in its agitational style and methods but also in programmatic and ideological term.”<sup>360</sup> In his publication on left- and right-wing populism, Florian Hartleb also concludes, by an in-depth analysis of the PDS, that it can be seen as populist, and that it can be described as a “anti-establishment-party, a party with a media focus, [...] a charismatic party, a party of a ‘we group’ and as a plebiscitary party.”<sup>361</sup> He measures

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<sup>354</sup> Gregor Gysi, “Ingolstädter Manifest”, 6.

<sup>355</sup> Head of Empirical Social Studies at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

<sup>356</sup> Viola Neu, “Die Linke: eine Volkspartei?” available on: [www.kas.de/upload/dokumente/verlagspublikationen/Volksparteien/Volksparteien\\_neu.pdf](http://www.kas.de/upload/dokumente/verlagspublikationen/Volksparteien/Volksparteien_neu.pdf) (accessed on December 7, 2011).

<sup>357</sup> Viola Neu, “Die PDS: eine populistische Partei?“, in *Populismus. Populisten in Übersee und Europa*, edited by Nikolaus Werz (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2003), 268.

<sup>358</sup> Paul Lucardie, “Populismus im Parteiensystem in Deutschland und den Niederlanden“, 44.

<sup>359</sup> Paul Lucardie, “Populismus: begriffshistorische und theoretische Bemerkungen“, in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 26.

<sup>360</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb, “Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany”, 449.

<sup>361</sup> Florian Hartleb, *Rechts- und Linkspopulismus: eine Fallstudie anhand von Schill-Partei und PDS*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2004.

the PDS by the use of eight criteria that he sees as populist and comes to the conclusion that the PDS does fulfill six of these criteria.

Dan Hough, Michael Koß and Jonathan Olsen agree with these findings and describe the PDS as having a “populist touch”<sup>362</sup> and qualify their policy agenda as populist as well. Their study has shown that the presentation of the ‘Left Party’ differs amongst the different federal states. The ‘Left Party’ in Berlin as an example is classified by them as anything but populists, as their thematic focus is broad and giving answers to specific problems. “If any evidence of populist politics is to be found, it would be in the dogmatic fight to save Berlin’s high culture infrastructure.”<sup>363</sup>

The ‘Left Party’ in Brandenburg on the other hand appears to periodically have fallen back on “brazenly populist rhetoric.”<sup>364</sup> This can be explained by the lack of core values, as it has been mentioned by Paul Taggart<sup>365</sup>, which makes the ‘Left party’ not seem united on a country-wide perspective, but rather show difference according to the federal states.

Furthermore, they found evidence that the ‘Left Party’ is more heterogeneous in federal states where it is not part of the government and is therefore suffering from personality clashes, does not provide well-developed policy packages and, again, “developed a taste for populist rhetoric.”<sup>366</sup>

For the overall, averaged, performance of the PDS and later the ‘Left Party’, the authors conclude that they used to be more populists, with the late 1990s being marked by an “almost completely disown itself from all detailed programmatic positions”<sup>367</sup>. Later on they have then found their way to pragmatism, yet are now possibly moving back towards populist appearance.

When applying the defining characteristics of populism, which have been laid out in this paper, to the “Left Party”, one can see that there is evidence to support their position.

First of all, the party counts on strong charismatic leaders, with Gysi and Lafontaine remaining the decisive figures. As Hartleb puts it, when speaking about Gysi:

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<sup>362</sup> Dan Hough et al., *The Left Party in Contemporary German Politics*, 34.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>365</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe”, 284.

<sup>366</sup> Dan Hough et al., *The Left Party in Contemporary German*, 131.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 125.

The 'figure of light' represents at the same time the simple man of the people and the intellectual, but also the victim and, as representative of a discredited elite, the avenger<sup>368 369</sup>.

Secondly, they focus on specific topics to gain voter support, such as Hartz IV, despite the fact that they do have a party program, which usually is rather atypical for a populist party.

Furthermore, 'The Left' asks for a more direct democracy, for the use of referenda and initiatives and asks to enlarge the democratic control exerted on economy, the state, the mass media, education and science.<sup>370</sup>

Fourth, when it comes to creating antagonism, 'The Left' adheres to the general principles of left parties and does not create horizontal out-groups targeted on immigrants, yet they do create these out-groups by accusing the upper classes of society of an unbalanced distribution of wealth. On the other hand they strongly foster the creation of vertical antagonism, by opposing the people to the ruling elite. 'The Left' searches the return to the common people, which is being threatened by the interests of banker and the general economy.<sup>371</sup> It claims that the political class does not see the interests of the people anymore and thus has lost its political legitimacy.<sup>372</sup>

Former Chairman Lothar Bisky explains the achievements of the party by saying that they were successful "because we went to the people to ask them which their problems were [...]. We were a party of daily life and as such we have been growing up."<sup>373</sup>

Finally, in order to spread their cause, they make heavy use of the new media, and public relations are amongst their major concerns. They follow the major issues that are present in the public, joining protest alliances in society, such as the "anti-Hartz-IV movement" and the "anti-Afghanistan-War movement".<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Original quote: „Die ‚Lichtgestalt‘ verkörpert gleichzeitig den einfachen Mann aus dem Volk sowie den Intellektuellen, aber auch das Opfer und zugleich als Vertreter einer nun diskreditierten Staatselite den Rächer.“

<sup>369</sup> Frank Decker, "Die populistische Herausforderung", 111.

<sup>370</sup> Die Linke, "Programm der Partei DIE LINKE. Stärkung der Parlamente und partizipative Demokratie," available on: [www.die-linke.de/partei/dokumente/programmderparteidielinke/iv2wiewollenwiredemokratisierungdergesellschaft/staerkungderparlamenteundpartizipativedemokratie](http://www.die-linke.de/partei/dokumente/programmderparteidielinke/iv2wiewollenwiredemokratisierungdergesellschaft/staerkungderparlamenteundpartizipativedemokratie) (accessed on December 7, 2011).

<sup>371</sup> Frank Decker and Marcel Lewandowsky, "Populismus. Erscheinungsformen, Entstehungshintergründe und Folgen eines politischen Phänomens", 3.

<sup>372</sup> Florian Hartleb, *Rechts- und Linkspopulismus: eine Fallstudie anhand von Schill-Partei und PDS*, 240.

<sup>373</sup> Gerrit Voerman, "Linkspopulismus im Vergleich", 195.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

Obviously some of these characteristics are true for the other major parties in Germany, too, as especially the use of media has become indispensable for today's politics. Yet the concentration of the presence of so many defining characteristics of populism in one group makes it appropriate to speak of 'The Left' as a populist party.

## 6.1 Reasons for trouble of populist parties in Germany

Germany has always been more resistant to the rise of populist parties than the Netherlands have been. Yet there are (at least) two examples that point to a potential for populist mobilization in the Germany society: First, the case of the Schill Party, who became successful 2001 - 2003. Secondly, the tremendous impact that Thilo Sarrazin had on the German society with his book 'Germany is abolishing itself'.<sup>375</sup>

These cases have shown that voters can be mobilized with right-wing populist themes:

From immigration politics over the fight of criminality to the criticism of the European Union, it are the same problems that in other parts of Europe send the voters into the arms of right-wing populists<sup>376 377</sup>.

The fact that no major populist movement has achieved success all over Germany, can be attributed to three main reasons: the political explanations, to be found in the 5%-threshold and the strong party democracy, the historic explanation of its Nazi Past and the personal explanation, meaning the lack of charismatic leaders that are heading united German populist party.

### 6.1.1 The political explanations

In the German political system there is a threshold of 5%, meaning that in order to get into parliament a party needs to win 5% of the votes. This has historically prevented the

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<sup>375</sup> Florian Hartleb, *Nach ihrer Etablierung – Rechtspopulistische Parteien in Europa* (Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011), 16.

<sup>376</sup> Original quote: „Von der Einwanderungspolitik über die Kriminalitätsbekämpfung bis hin zur Kritik an der Europäischen Union handelt es sich dabei um dieselben Probleme, die den Rechtspopulisten auch andernorts in Europa die Wähler zutreiben.“

<sup>377</sup> Frank Decker and Marcel Lewandowsky, "Populismus. Erscheinungsformen, Entstehungshintergründe und Folgen eines politischen Phänomens", 2.

number of parties in the government to grow and exceed five parties. As a second effect, it becomes hard for new parties to enter parliament, as they cannot count on the regular votes that already established parties might get<sup>378</sup>.

But also the relatively stable party democracy, which only began to change during the last decades, gives an explanation for the difficulties of populist parties to achieve great success in the German system.

With the end of the Second World War, in West-Germany there were initially only four parties that were allowed in all four zones of occupation: the Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschland (CDU), the SPD, the Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP) and the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD). In August 1956 the KPD was banned by the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany and by the beginning of the 1960 the two big parties were SPD and CDU who ruled, alternating in some elections, in coalition with the FDP.

By 1980 a new, ecological, alternative emerged, the party called “Bündnis 90/Die Grünen” (Green Party). During the first elections they assembled 1.5% of the votes and already by 1983 they could enter into government with 5.6% of the votes.<sup>379</sup>

In the German Democratic Republic the end of the Second World War saw the emergence of the SED on April 21, 1946, resulting out of the forced merger of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) and the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD), later on changing its name to SED-PDS and finally PDS.

Looking at the overall results of all seventeen elections to the German Bundestag, it has always been either the CDU or the SPD that won the elections, thus creating a greatly stable political system. In 1949 they won a combined total of 60%, which increased over time and by 1972 and 1976 they combined more than 90% of the votes. They lost some votes in the 1980, mainly due to the rise of the Green Party, yet they remained at over 80% in 1987.<sup>380</sup>

After 1990 a political sphere of five parties stabilized in Germany, consisting of the CDU, SPD, FDP, the Green Party and the PDS<sup>381</sup>, with the CDU and SPD being the

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<sup>378</sup> As has been mentioned before, despite the fact that floating voters are increasing and party loyalties are losing importance, there are still voters left that stick to their party preferences.

<sup>379</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, “Bundestagswahlen 1949 – 2009,” available on: [http://www.bpb.de/fsd/wahlspezial/index\\_flash.php](http://www.bpb.de/fsd/wahlspezial/index_flash.php) (accessed on December 8, 2011).

<sup>380</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, “Bundestagswahlen 1949 – 2009“.

<sup>381</sup> Since 2007: ‘The Left’.

biggest parties, forming part of every government<sup>382</sup>. This five party system came hand in hand with great losses for the two big parties. Between 1990 and 2002 they always had united more than 76 and 78%. Yet this fell to below 70% in 2005 and only 56.8 % in 2009, marking for both of the big parties the lowest results since 1949.<sup>383</sup>

The weakness of the Christian and social democratic parties is supporting the increasing importance of others, and new, parties (at least for a certain time) and is the reason why the political landscape [...] is changing and becoming increasingly complicated<sup>384, 385</sup>.

These new moment in political history, in which smaller parties have increased chances of becoming big in German politics, are exactly what is needed for a populist party to rise. The decline in the importance of mass parties is supposed to give rise to other parties, also populists, in the future. As has been explained, 'The Left' can be seen as a populist party, depending on the definition of 'populism' that is being applied, yet the party does not see an overall success on a German-wide level, but still remains confined mostly to the eastern parts, despite a small increase in its acceptance in the west.

Besides other explaining factors, which will be mentioned hereafter, the relatively newness of this decline in mass parties is one of the reasons why there is (not yet) a big and important populist party in Germany. "Germany, it seemed, was immune to the populist phenomenon."<sup>386</sup>

### 6.1.2 The historical explanation

A second factor that has until today inhibited the rise of a strong populist party is the continuing legacy of the National Socialist past. This lead to the tabooization of this topic and, to a certain extent, also of the issue of populism.<sup>387</sup> With the society being historically biased, the media tend to display reservation towards the topic and are

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<sup>382</sup> Only in 2002 the PDS did not overtake the 5%-threshold and thus could not enter government.

<sup>383</sup> Markus Wilp, *Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien*, 133.

<sup>384</sup> Original quote: „Die Schwäche der Christ und sozialdemokratischen Parteien trägt zudem dazu bei, dass andere und zum Teil neue Gruppierungen (zumindest für bestimmte Zeit) an Bedeutung gewinnen können und sich die politische Landschaft [...] sowohl verändert als auch verkompliziert.“

<sup>385</sup> Markus Wilp, "Die Krise der christ- und sozialdemokratischen Parteien," in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, edited by Wielenga, Friso and Florian Hartleb (München: Waxmann, 2011), 131.

<sup>386</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb, "Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany", 434.

<sup>387</sup> Paul Lucardie, "Populismus: begriffshistorische und theoretische Bemerkungen", 31.

therefore often careful when handling (especially) right-wing parties, which is the form in which populism most often arises. New parties that adhere to populist principles are therefore under the constant threat of being stigmatized.<sup>388</sup>

Even moderate representatives of right-wing populism are not save from being undermined by right-wing extremism through groups and person that want to use it in order to leave the political isolation. The “shadow of Hitler”<sup>389</sup>, as Frank Decker has called this phenomenon, has not lost its importance.

René Cuperus agrees with the German biased situation, saying that populism in Europe is associated with fascism, National Socialism and communism, with the “pathology of the voice of the people.”<sup>390</sup>

The problems that come with the definition of populism, as seen in Chapter 2, contribute to these difficulties for populist parties. Populism is often used as a synonym for extremism, fascism and other terms which in German history have become connoted with the National Social past. A party that is being described as populist will therefore encounter difficulties in explaining their cause detached from these associations.

The likelihood of being a successful populist party are therefore increasing if the party is orientated to the left-wing, such as the PDS and ‘The Left’ are, as they can escape the immediate stigmatization attributed with the field of right-wing politics, yet due to their massive importance of the charismatic leader, they might still evoke associations to the National Socialist Past.

### 6.1.3 The personal explanation

German populism, when it appears, comes in a rather unorganized manner, with different subgroups present all over the country, yet without a leading figure to unite them.<sup>391</sup> This is another greatly important factor for the success of populist parties: the

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<sup>388</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb, “Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany”, 443.

<sup>389</sup> Frank Decker, “Von Schill zu Möllemann. Keine Chance für Rechtspopulisten in der Bundesrepublik,“ *Außerschulische Bildung*, 2 (2003), 6.

<sup>390</sup> René Cuperus, “Der populistische Dammbbruch“, 163.

<sup>391</sup> Frank Decker and Marcel Lewandowsky, “Populismus. Erscheinungsformen, Entstehungshintergründe und Folgen eines politischen Phänomens“, 3.

existence of a charismatic leader. Their lack of cohesion thus has not only structural but also, as Decker and Hartleb put it, “random factors”.<sup>392</sup>

If the charismatic leadership is seen as a random fact though, chances are great that in the future this might change and such a charismatic leader will appear. First developments in this direction have been seen for example in Gregor Gysi or Robert Schill, yet no overall uniting figure, making populism powerful all over Germany has appeared yet.

The case of Ronald Barnabas Schill can be used as an ideal example for the tremendous importance of a charismatic leader. Schill, with his ‘Partei Rechtsstaatlicher Offensive (PRO)’, had entered the political playground with the image of „judge merciless“<sup>393</sup>, a name that he had earned due to his previous employment as district judge, a position in which he was known to sentence hard judgments. Schill was able to use his charisma and populist talent to create a certain closeness to the people. But the success of the party did not last, as the self-limiting qualities played out their forces, when Schill started acting out and thus damaged his image and consequently the image of his party. The following elections proved that the success of the Schill Party was mainly based on the populist qualities it had offered, and with the charismatic leader having lost his charisma, the party tremendously lost votes and dropped to 0.8%, leaving it as a splinter party with no importance. It turned out that the phenomenon of the Schill Party was nothing but a media construction. “Once the newcomer had fallen out of favour with the public, his flawed personality and the amateurism of his troops became only too apparent.”<sup>394</sup>

It can therefore be said, that there is a possibility that a populist party can win voters and increase in importance without a charismatic leader. Yet the chance are increasing tremendously if such a leader is part of the party and if this leader is able to avoid, or at least delay, the “routinization of charisma”<sup>395</sup>.

A lack of such a leader, especially on a German-wide level, is the third major reasons why no populist party has managed yet to win a major influence on the system. Gysi

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<sup>392</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb, “Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany”, 443.

<sup>393</sup> Paul Lucardie, “Populismus: begriffshistorische und theoretische Bemerkungen“, 25.

<sup>394</sup> Frank Decker and Florian Hartleb, “Populism on Difficult Terrain: The Right- and Left-Wing Challenger Parties in the Federal Republic of Germany”, 443.

<sup>395</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 142.



and Lafontaine did and still do serve, to a certain degree, as these charismatic leaders for 'The Left', yet their influence is not exerted all over the country. Whether this will change in the future though remains to be seen, as in late 2011 Oskar Lafontaine has announced his comeback into the political field, a decision that might give 'The Left' a new impulse and a new increase in votes.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Björn Hengst, "Linke steht vor Lafontaine-Comeback," *Spiegel Online*, available on: [www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,789677,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,789677,00.html) (accessed on December 8, 2011).

## Conclusion

As has been seen, populism can be both: a threat but in many ways also a necessary corrective to representative democracy.

As explained in Chapter 1, the representative democracy, the dominant democratic system in most European countries today, does offer a lot of advantages. It is greatly inclusive and protective of the minorities in a society, making sure that by proportional representation their interests are taken into account as well. It also leads to a professionalization of politics, as expert politicians can focus on the daily political life – an expertise that the general public does not have. Finally, these systems are less susceptible for the influence of short-term movements, as populists might present themselves to be, and rather focus on long-time stability and continuity in society.

Direct democracy on the other hand does offer some advantages too. Most importantly, it seeks the inclusion of the people into the decision-making progress. This also leads to the need of giving better information to the population. Furthermore, direct democracy has, especially with the new technologies, become easier and quicker to implement.

This is where populists come in, advocating a simple idea: this advantage of direct democracy can solve some of the problems of representative democracy. Their focus of ‘bringing the politics back to the people’ is therefore amongst the defining characteristics of populism. As has been seen within this paper, there are six factors that can facilitate the categorization of any given party. First, they advocate for the aforementioned strengthening of democracy by increasing its direct mechanisms. Secondly they create antagonisms, both horizontally and vertically, by defining out-groups in society. Furthermore, it places great emphasis on the ‘common people’ and the ‘heartland’ of a society. The person speaking for these common people in the party is the so-called charismatic leader, a primary figure that tends to present itself as the ‘lawyer of the common people’. In order to get their cause across, populists tend to make heavy use of the media, which in turn gladly accept the populist’s role as a frequent generator of headlines.

In all this, populism is no longer confined to one side of the political spectrum, as it used to be in its earlier appearances. Populism today is to be found both on the right- and on the left-wing of society, and has entered almost all modern European societies, yet in varying degrees of influence.

Two cases of populism have been examined within this paper: 'The Left' in Germany and the PVV in the Netherlands.

As has been seen, populism is not a strong movement (yet) in Germany and is still mainly limited to the eastern parts of the country. No party has come into existence that presents all characteristics of a populist party; 'The Left' however does come closest to it. This lack of populist success has a variety of explanation, but most importantly it is due to the high electoral threshold, strong traditional mainstream parties that were present until not long ago, the historical heritage of National Socialism, and the lack of adequate charismatic leaders that could head such a movement.

The Netherlands on the other hand have had a populist revolution, which started with the LPF and has successfully been continued by the PVV. Basically all criteria are fulfilled by this party and the academic discourse rarely disagrees on their status of being a populist party.

As opposed to the German system, the Netherlands have presented favorable circumstances for the rise of populist parties. The political process of 'ontzuiling' has created the need for the population to find new parties and new leaders to represent them, creating a 'populist moment' for such parties to intervene. Furthermore, the multicultural society of the Netherlands, greatly marked by the failed integration of immigrants, has driven the population into the arms of populist parties, who oppose further immigration. Finally it is the charismatic leadership of Geert Wilders, preceded by Pim Fortuyn that creates sympathy and support for populism in the Dutch society.

The question that has been asked in this paper therefore was pointed at whether this development, the rise of the phenomenon of populism, is to be qualified as good or bad, as a potential threat to the current representative democracy or as a necessary corrective to the flaws that the system might present.

The explanations why populism appears in a society are just as diverse as the characteristics it presents once arisen. The political explanation is to be found in the strong losses of traditional mass parties, while the multicultural explanation focuses on the rise of xenophobia in European countries, more specifically the fear of Islam. The public sector can be an explanation, as different parts of the society no longer feel represented by current politics and the so-called 'losers of modernization' are looking for new institutions to put their faith in. The media, as a fourth explanation, fosters the rise of populism by giving it great coverage, thus generating sales of their products and

at the same time media presence for the parties. Finally, the sociological explanation is to be found in the rise of an ‘audience democracy’ in which voters make their decisions based on retrospective judgments of a politician’s actions, thus turning themselves into ‘spectators’ and the politicians into ‘audience’. Charismatic leaders, usually at the same time media experts, can make use of their skills to influence the voters and to gain their trust.

To conclude, it has to be said that there can be no definite answer, thus ‘yes’ or ‘no’, as populism has both negative and positive effects on democracy. There are some harmful aspects to it, such as the fact that it most often produces an unstable democracy, marked by floating voters that might change their opinion over every issue and thus create an unstable political sphere. This is also disadvantageous to the long-term orientation of a democracy. Furthermore, populism is highly detrimental to the inclusion of minorities of a given country, whose interest run the danger of being neglected.

On a more positive note, populism can create a ‘better’ democracy, meaning that it brings democracy back to the people, thus re-approaching it to the idealized system of a democracy. By doing so, it also helps to make politics more understandable to the citizens and can even bring topics of public interest into the political debate, which otherwise might have been overlooked.

Moreover, the pure existence of a populist phenomenon can serve as an early-warning system in society, pointing out to existing failures in the communication between the political elites and the people which they are representing.

Populism is therefore a mixed blessing which, if taken to far, can be dangerous for modern political structures, yet, if incorporated adequately and seen as a way of addressing the democratic deficit, it can serve as a corrective to this system

Within the scope of this paper it was only possible to analyze two parties: ‘The Left’ and the PVV. Yet these are of course not the only parties in both Germany and the Netherlands that could potentially be considered as populist.

Germany, besides the left-wing ‘The Left’, has seen the creation of parties on the right, too, some of which could be seen as populists, such as for example the ‘Schill Party’ or the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands. The Netherlands, on the other hand, have not only experienced right-wing populism, but there is also a left-wing party of

great importance, the Socialistische Partij, which by some authors is also characterized as (slightly) populist.

The impact that populism will have on the modern political systems in Europe in the future cannot be predicted with full certainty, amongst other reasons due to the unpredictability of the floating voters. Furthermore, the world economic crisis and the restructuring of the European Union that has been initiated in December 2011 might influence the populist's performance as well, by either creating more support for their Eurosceptic position or by renewing the trust of the population in 'traditional' politics.

Immigration is and remains an important aspect of the daily life of the European Union, and as more and more agreements between member states and also non-member states are being signed, it is likely to even increase in the future.

Finally, as Bernard Manin has pointed out, audience democracy as the newest step in political development remains the environment that politics take place in. The relation of populism and audience is two-fold: on the one hand they greatly profit from the personalization of politics created by it. On the other hand, the desired introduction of a more direct democracy and thus the involvement of the electorate might in fact, if successful, lead to the end of this audience democracy.

Whether populism turns into being a phenomenon limited to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whether it disappears by the routinization of populist parties, or whether it remains an important force in the political systems, remains to be seen in the future.

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