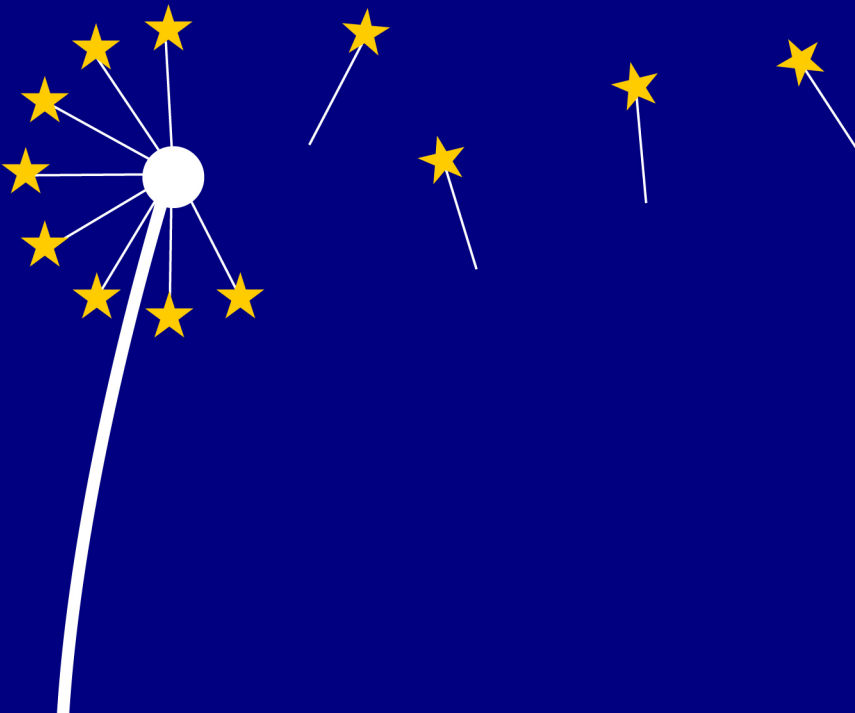


CRACKING BORDERS, RISING WALLS

POPULISM OR SOLIDARITY?

Edited by
Łukasz Pawłowski



**Cracking Borders, Rising Walls
Populism or Solidarity?**

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Introduction

Populism or Solidarity?

Łukasz Pawłowski



Kaczyński, Corbyn, Trump, Orbán, Le Pen, Sanders, Macron, Grillo, Wilders – is there anything all of these different politicians have in common? Yes – every one of them is regularly referred to as a left- or a right-wing populist, but what do those labels mean?

One thing is beyond doubt. Populism has recently become the most common, and definitely the most abstract, term used to discredit political opponents. As a result, the very idea of populism seems to have lost its essential meaning. If politicians like Kaczyński and Macron or Trump and Sanders, who have hardly anything in common, are bunched together in the same category, then something must be wrong with the category itself. It's the equivalent of saying that they are all the same because they all have one head and two hands – undoubtedly true, but it tells us nothing about them that is of actual use.

No wonder then that many political scientists are striving to better define the idea of “populism”. Recent attempts to do so by Jan-Werner Müller, a German political scientist from Princeton University, have attracted an unusual amount of attention. In his book “What is

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populism?”, Müller explains the term by reducing it to its two most important characteristics.

First, anti-elitism. Populists are always against “the system”, current “elites” or “groups holding power”. Also, in line with their name, they are always on the side of “the People” who, in populist narratives, are by definition wise and endowed with the natural ability to distinguish good from evil, while at the same time being enslaved by small, mythical groups who have somehow separated themselves from the masses. Definitions of who belongs to the People are always fuzzy – some of the wealthiest and the best educated members of society can also be considered to be part of this group, if only they have the right political attitude. In fact, in many countries – including Poland, the United States and Hungary – members of the intellectual or financial elites are at the forefront of populist movements.

However, anti-elitism is not quite the same as populism. Promises to challenge “the system”, introduce radical change and fight against “the establishment” are made by almost all politicians – from conservatives, such as Ronald Reagan, to liberals like Barack Obama. During the 2016 presidential campaign in the US even Hillary Clinton – former First Lady, senator and secretary of state – claimed that being a woman made her the most anti-establishment candidate in the race.

Therefore, according to Müller, one more feature is needed in order to classify someone as populist

– anti-pluralism. Almost all politicians try to convince voters that they represent “ordinary people” and will challenge the established elites. But only populists claim that they (and only they) represent the People with a capital “P”, and therefore no other political parties have the right to exist. That is why Viktor Orbán sees nothing wrong with staffing the Hungarian judiciary with his own nominees, Donald Trump thinks it fair to call any media outlets which dare criticise him “fake news”, while Jaroslaw Kaczyński labels anyone who disagrees with his ideas a “lesser sort” of Pole. If a populist represents this mythical “People”, and the “People” are always right, it inevitably means that any dispute with a populist becomes a dispute with truth and virtue. According to this way of thinking, no honest opposition has any right to exist.

Müller’s definition is extremely lucid and allows us to make clear distinctions. From this point of view, Trump, Kaczyński and Orbán are pure populists, but Emmanuel Macron and Bernie Sanders are not.

However, some critics of the German political scientist argue that his approach – seemingly so transparent – in fact obscures more than it clarifies. What use do we have for this elegant definition of populism if it does not fit actual reality? Imagine that Trump, Kaczyński or Orbán suddenly cease to fight their opponents tooth and nail, or even praise some of the ideas of the opposition, but continue to stick to their old political guns. Is that enough to stop them being populists?

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So maybe populism, like many other concepts in political science – democracy being one of them – is impossible to define using simple terms? If this is the case, however, then the consequences of populism cannot be unambiguously assessed. Is it – as Müller claims – a deadly threat to democracy, or can it shake democratic systems up in an invigorating fashion and bring the elites back in touch with “ordinary people”? In other words, can populism be the seed from which social solidarity might sprout?

Such discussions are taking place in all the countries where populist movements have disturbed the local political scenes – from the United States, through to Great Britain, the Netherlands, France and Poland. His Polish opponents admit that Kaczyński’s ruling Law and Justice party has managed to aptly identify and define many social ills, left unaddressed by previous governments, so that even after it loses power “mainstream” politicians will still have to pay more attention to social solidarity. In the United States, Trump’s presidency has revived the debate about economic inequalities and marginalized social groups.

But even if, paradoxically, something good comes out of populist rule, it cannot be seen as justification for populism itself. After the Second World War, many features of the welfare state were introduced in the countries of Western Europe as a way of countering the threat of Soviet communism spreading. No reasonable person

will, however, praise the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for this sort of social progress in the West. In this sense, populism is to democratic policy what a heart attack might be to a human being. Sure, such an experience tends to make people lead healthier lives afterwards, but that is not to say that heart attacks by themselves are good thing.

Populism is not a phenomenon which can in any way improve the quality of our democracies. It is instead a form of democratic disease. And, as in the case of every such condition, prevention is always better than cure. To prevent something spreading, however, one needs to know the initial causes, and at this point it is difficult to make a clear diagnosis. Is the voice of populists a result of the global financial crisis or perhaps rapid cultural changes?

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Populism: What Lies Ahead?



Paul Berman: There are – by my estimates – two theories explaining the wave of populism sweeping across most of Europe, but also across many other parts of the world, including the United States. According to the first theory, this wave has been caused by various political factors as well as cultural, demographic and institutional changes. According to the second theory, the wave of populism is something impossible to define and explain. Something strange. I'm a partisan of the second theory.

But let's begin with the first. The starting point of this theory is that the revolution of 1989 and then the collapse of the Soviet Union fostered a non-utopian utopia – a perfect world based on globalized markets, globalized workforce, technological innovation, a new global spirit, modernization of cultural mores and new international institutions designed to preserve and regulate this new world.

The populist movement at the moment is essentially a rebellion against every one of those revolutionary developments. It is grounded in the belief that each of these developments has led to negative consequences. This is why the wave of populism is in some sense a

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counter-revolution. The counter-revolution stipulates that globalized trade and technological innovation, instead of increasing general prosperity, only generates prosperity for the privileged classes, resulting in stagnation for the traditional working classes. The new cultural spirit and the modernization of cultural mores, instead of liberating the whole society, has left people feeling that the revolution of 1989 is a finger of accusation pointed at them. The combination of globalized markets and of a new cosmopolitan cultural spirit have produced massive waves of migration which are an advantage to some and a disaster to others. As for international institutions, instead of strengthening democracy they tend to undermine it by taking power away from ordinary people.

So it is natural and ought to be predicted – from this point of view – that new movements will arise with the aim of rolling back every one of these developments. From this perspective, populist movements may somehow seem attractive.

In broad terms, this is the first theory which explains populist waves. I'm skeptical about it for two major reasons: one broad and one narrow. The first reason has to do with the nature of international waves of rebellion. The modern age – I think we can agree – began in the late eighteenth century with the American and French revolutions. And since then it has been punctuated, from time to time, by international waves of political rebellion. Maybe the first such wave recognizable to us today

occurred in 1830 in France, and was echoed by many other events around the world.

Subsequent waves of political rebellion took place in 1848, then a wave of workers' uprisings between 1917 and 1921 in many parts of the world, a wave of labor upsurges in 1926, a wave of fascists uprisings in 1930s, a wave of students' uprisings all over the world in 1968. And then the revolution of 1989. These are all examples of international waves of rebellion. If you look back at these rebellions, you will see it is very difficult to identify their causes.

If we conclude that the causes of these rebellions are shrouded in mystery even 100 or 150 years later, then there's a reason to raise an eyebrow at anyone promising to solve the mystery of why these populist rebellions have spread around the many parts of the world today.

I also have a narrow reason to be skeptical. I draw this skepticism from my perception of what's going on in the US. I think it's undeniable that the Trump movement in the States figures as a current within a larger tide of populism present all around the world, and not just a "current", but probably the largest current which is achieving political successes.

It emerges, for instance, from the outrage felt by the industrial working class which came out in support of Trump. This outrage, however, is a little difficult to understand. It's true that in the US many people who belong to this class are suffering – especially because of the decline of old industries. But it's not clear to me what

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the economic basis for this feeling of anger is. Although many manufacturing workers' wages have been stagnant, unemployment in the US is relatively low and unemployment for working class White males is exceptionally low – around 4.5 %.

In fact, from the narrow economic point of view of jobs and wages, the situation of the traditional working class in industrial and rural parts of the country is not good, but neither is it comparable to how bad the situation was during the past economic crises. It's not comparable to the situation in 2008 or 1980 and certainly not comparable to the Great Depression, which was devastating. And yet the Trump movement has been in some degree a working class rebellion.

Indeed, it needs to be thought of as something really radical. It's radical, because Trump expresses values that are outside of the American political tradition. During his political rallies at the time of campaign – and even after he won – masses of people chanted “Lock her up!”, demanding Trump's political opponent, Hillary Clinton, be put in prison.

The other chant that has appeared during the rallies – even more popular than the first – is “Build that wall!”. That refers to Trump's single most popular campaign promise – tackling illegal immigration to the US from Mexico by building an enormous wall along the border with Mexico. Trump promised not only to build the wall,

but also to deport people without papers who are already in the United States – around 11 million individuals.

It is not obvious to me why there is such an animosity towards Mexican people. The situation in the US is not even remotely similar to that in certain neighborhoods of Amsterdam or suburbs in Paris which are overwhelmed by immigrants from distant places and different cultures. Mexicans in the US are a traditional part of society. The Spanish language has always been the second language in the US. Mexican culture is not at odds with national American culture. Mexican Catholicism is perfectly compatible with the dominant forms of Christianity in the US. It's true that Mexican immigrants can compete for jobs in US, but they do not compete for the good jobs – they usually compete for the jobs that other people do not want to take on. And finally these Mexicans who are already in the US are extremely necessary for the economy: if Trump succeeded in deporting these 11 million, he would destroy whole industries along with American agriculture. Nor is it true that Mexicans are threatening and overwhelming the neighborhoods. On the contrary, immigration from Mexico to the US is diminishing. Today, more Mexicans are leaving the US to return home. And yet masses of people keep on chanting “Build that wall!”.

People's hatred is a normal thing. People love to hate. If you want to have the answer to why people hate, you should ask: what is it that allows them to hate? If the masses of one population are not hating entire masses

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of another population, it is because the culture in which they live teaches them not to do so.

What is happening now? In my interpretation we are observing a collapse of that cultural structure, a collapse of cultural norms. I think we're living through a cultural collapse, a crash of values, a collapse of rational analysis and even the ability to calculate self-interest. One of the reasons behind this phenomenon is the collapse of the press and the arrival of the Internet, which replaces journalism with electronic rumors. But, of course, it is more than just the press. Other institutions are collapsing too. Trump's victory in the US signifies the collapse of trade unions and the Republican Party.

What I have just said is not a systematic theory. It is not doctrine. It is an expression of alarm.

Jarosław Kuisz: People would like to know what's going on to be able to give a name to what they see. The year 2016 was quite often described as a year of global battle against populism. The battlefields were the old democracies – the US, the UK, France – but also new ones, like Poland. Where are we now?

Stephen Bush: It's a huge question. The Brexit vote in 2016 may be seen as an eruption of populism. Many Britons voted in the referendum believing you can leave the EU, but still have a lot of benefits from it. And that you can reduce immigration from the EU without taking

an economic hit. Obviously, all of these things are completely untrue. So, the big question in British politics is what will happen when the Article 50 process has come to an end.

There's no real precedent for a democracy to do to itself what the UK is about to do. And yet even the people who voted to remain believe we are probably going to be fine after Brexit. In Britain, no matter how bad things might be, people think they'll manage to get through, because the UK is an extremely lucky country which (mainly thanks to its geographic features) avoided many of the tragedies experienced by other states – land-based invasions and occupations being just two of these. But the big question is what will the reaction be if everyone in Britain becomes a lot poorer? No one is expecting that.

Jarosław Kuisz: A moment ago we heard about a cultural collapse happening all over the West. Is this how British populism can be explained as well?

Stephen Bush: I'm always a bit of skeptical about global narratives, because we also argue that we have two kinds of populism in Britain now. One is exemplified by the Brexit campaign, the other by the success of Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour Party, who in the last parliamentary elections received 42 % of the vote. In some ways Corbyn's rhetoric is populist, but it appeals to well-educated voters in big cities. I'm also not really

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sure whether Brexit itself was about populism. I think it was really about managing the Conservative Party, about making a gamble for settling its internal affairs, which then backfired horrendously.

Jarosław Kuisz: We are often told that the Brexit referendum should be seen as a larger, global phenomenon which allows politicians like Nigel Farage in Britain, Marine Le Pen in France or Donald Trump in the US to create appealing narratives – quite often based on so-called “fake news”. I assume you are skeptical about making these international comparisons?

Stephen Bush: If the Brexit referendum had solely been Nigel Farage’s idea, he would have lost. The reason why Brexit succeeded is it co-opted large chunks of the British center-Right and populist far-Right. And British newspapers have been lying about relations with the EU for the last 20 years, so you can’t say that misinformation is a new phenomenon either.

Jarosław Kuisz: Let’s now turn to professor Andrzej Zybertowicz. Would you say that Polish populism is part of a global phenomenon or is it our own “local product”?

Andrzej Zybertowicz: Basically, scholarship is helpless faced with the present crisis. I agree with Paul Berman that we probably cannot find any convincing models

which would explain what is going on. Yet, while I share some of Mr. Berman's impressions, I believe the conclusions he draws are rather unproductive. Mr. Berman says that we are experiencing some sort of cultural collapse. Even if there is some truth in it – from that kind of diagnosis we cannot deduce any practical measures of dealing with our problems.

Regarding your question of whether the Polish situation is a local phenomenon, or a part of some worldwide change, I would say it's both. According to the now popular definition of populism by Jan-Werner Müller, populism can be defined by two criteria: anti-elitism and anti-pluralism. Let me focus on the second definition.

I would say that in Poland we have now more pluralism than ever in the last 25 years. Let me explain. If somebody is accustomed to the situation in which one world-view is hegemonic and suddenly, after democratic elections, this world-view becomes just one of many, one may feel that pluralism has just been limited.

From this point of view I would say – there has been a shift in the scope of the pluralism spectrum, but since you don't like the direction of the shift, you feel traumatized. What bothers me in both – Mr. Berman's and your attitude – is that this trauma impairs your analytical capabilities.

On the one hand, it is to some extent good that it crushed your point of view. From the educational standpoint, this kind of trauma may lead you to become more

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empathic to these traditional, Catholic views and groups, which felt that trauma in previous years. If you and me agree that we've both suffered traumas, we may find ways to communicate.

Jarosław Kuisz: So in your view this profound political shift may facilitate communication between different social groups?

Andrzej Zybertowicz: I would say maybe one of the deep reasons behind all this upheaval is the fact that the world has become too complex, too diversified, too dynamic – too pluralistic in a way! We need to take a step back from too much pluralism.

Now, the first criterion of Jan-Werner Müller's definition of populism is anti-elitism. Indeed, the world has become too elitist as well. It was recently announced that only a few people possess more wealth than the bottom 50% of the whole global population. These two factors – over-concentration of power combined with an extremely dynamic and pluralistic environment engenders the situation which people cannot cope with any more. As a result, they react by voting for those we call “populists”, because of our lack of better conceptualizations.

Dagmar Engel: Paul Berman's opening lecture was supposed to annoy us. I would not say that you have annoyed me, but it made me a bit sad, because you partially

sound like you're giving up. Or like half of you has given up already.

There's no reason to give in and talk about trauma. That's very optimistic I know, but I think it's time to fight back. Perhaps we should define populism more precisely – I would not say that Jeremy Corbyn's populism is the same as Nigel Farage's. For me populism gets dangerous when it's founded on conspiracy and on cultural identitarian movements. All waves of populism, in Europe at least, are founded on problems with immigration. It's not about social-economic factors, but cultural identitarian factors.

Jarosław Kuisz: Sylvain Cypel worked for Le Monde and is now a contributor to Orient XXI. You defined a populist as a person who says to the voters the things they want to hear. Is it not over-simplistic and too general?

Sylvain Cypel: I can give you many examples of differences between populists. But there is something that unifies them all – it's the question of foreigners, of immigrants coming to “my country”. In one of the first speeches after announcing his candidacy Donald Trump called immigrants from Mexico rapists, murderers and drug-dealers. The question of immigration has become a core-issue in our rich countries. Of course, when we say “immigrants” it at first refers to immigrants of a different color.

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Stephen Bush: Actually, in Britain it doesn't. I think it's quite important to remember that in Britain – unfortunately – the hostility is towards people who migrated to the UK from Eastern Europe. Britons are not afraid of illegal immigration. Illegal immigration is not an issue. What they're frightened of – I'm sorry if I put this in a not-quite delicate way – is you. They're afraid of people from Eastern Europe coming to the UK perfectly legally. It's not a rational fear – it's not a concern you can address.

Sylvain Cypel: Yes, I know, but it usually starts with people who are of a different color. Today, in the US most immigrants – including those who are “illegal” – come from Asia. But Trump didn't start his campaign by talking about Asians. He focused on Latinos.

If you want to define who populists are, I'd also say they're people who never take any responsibility – nothing is their fault. It's always the others.

Jarosław Kuisz: I'd like to go back to what professor Zybertowicz meant – that the voice should be given to those, who are...

Andrzej Zybertowicz: ...deplorable. To those whom Hillary Clinton called deplorable. Because by this definition, they don't deserve to be heard.

Dagmar Engel: My country has an electoral system which gives a voice to every person. We have a 5 % threshold, but you do not have a “winner takes all” system similar to the one operating in the US.

Sylvain Cypel: I think it’s important to modify electoral rules and have a form of a double vote: one in each county and one national. That would give the far-left and far-right a greater representation. But that doesn’t solve our problems, which with these kinds of movements are quite obvious. The National Front’s roots are not only populist – they are fascist. The party may now be changing, but its roots remain the same.

Jarosław Kuisz: You can’t say the same about Nigel Farage.

Sylvain Cypel: But the problem with these kinds of organizations is that they deserve their democratic rights to be respected and should be integrated. We don’t see any other way to fight them – because if we don’t let them speak publicly, this may only make them stronger. The problem is that they’re using democracy to destroy it. It’s an old story.

Stephen Bush: I understand that the way people like me are feeling after the Brexit vote is the way some people in small towns in Britain had felt for decades. I think

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it's true to some point – particularly in Britain, where we have a “winner takes all” system, and the loser basically gets nothing.

But there are limits to the range of opinions which can be tolerated. Let's take the Brexit vote as an example. People around Nigel Farage see having countries of Eastern Europe in the EU as a tragedy and they do not think that people from there should come, work and pursue their dreams in the UK. That is not something you can tolerate as just another point of view. I have friends who may lose their right to stay in Britain because of the referendum.

So you can have tolerance of some diversified opinions about the economy – but in a liberal democracy you do have to draw hard lines about people's rights to live and move as they wish. That can't be negotiated.

Andrzej Zybertowicz: I would like to propose an analogy. Liberal democrats fear populist waves because of the unpredictability they bring. But those who fear migrants are worried about the unpredictability of their life conditions. It's a clash of two anxieties.

Now, let me jump to an overall definition of the situation. Is it a crisis of liberal democracy? It will be good to quickly identify threats because the vision of authoritarianism is near. If we prepare for this change, that may help soften it.

Dagmar Engel: I'd say it's not possible just to let a part of democracy go. We have to work out why people are anxious, take away that anxiety and not let those exploiting it take over our countries, because history teaches us that the moment populists rise to power they begin killing democracy.

Andrzej Zybertowicz: We have to explore Anthony Giddens's notion of ontological security and the fact that people have lost it. They don't understand what's going on. They've lost control of their own lives. And they feel that most leaders have lost that control too.

If we want people to regain ontological security, we have to decrease the speed of social and technological changes. In order to achieve this, we have create a kind of technological moratorium.

Jarosław Kuisz: What do you mean by that?

Andrzej Zybertowicz: To decrease the speed of technological innovation. We have to cease to believe in the demon of innovation. If we follow him, we will be fueling populism.

Sylvain Cypel: I am also scared of some aspects of technology – but how can you stop it?

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Andrzej Zybertowicz: Learn Polish and read my books.

Stephen Bush: If you're suggesting that people shouldn't buy a new iPad next year, there's no policy that politicians can introduce to achieve this goal. And there's no future in politics unless you can really address people's concerns.

Panelist Biographies:

Paul Berman writes about politics and literature for various magazines, he is a regular contributor to *The Tablet*. He is the author of *A Tale of Two Utopias* (1996), *Terror and Liberalism* (2003), *Power and the Idealists* (2005) and *The Flight of the Intellectuals* (2010).

Stephen Bush is a special correspondent at the New Statesman. His daily Morning Call briefing provides a quick and essential guide to domestic and global politics.

Sylvain Cypel is a journalist; he writes for Orient XXI and Le 1; for many years, he has been a member of the editorial board of Le Monde, earlier also the editor-in-chief of the Courier International. Recently, he authored *Liberty: Quand les États-Unis, malgré de puissantes résistances intérieures, attirent en masse les immigrés et en bénéficient, la France les rejette et se prive de cette chance* (2016).

Dagmar Engel is the head of the Capital Studio of Deutsche Welle in Berlin. Previously, she served as the editor-in-chief of DW-TV.

Jarosław Kuisz is the editor-in-chief of *Kultura Liberalna*.

Andrzej Zybertowicz is a professor of sociology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and an advisor to the Polish President Andrzej Duda. Recently, he co-authored *Samobójstwo Oświecenia. Jak neuronauka i nowe technologie pustoszą ludzki świat* [The Enlightenment's Suicide. How Neuroscience and New Technologies are Devastating the Human World] (2015).

Discussion 2

Solidarity: A Europe Divided?

Karolina Wigura: It is difficult to choose a word which would be more connected to Polish history than “solidarity”. Firstly, it relates to the Solidarity movement of 1980-1989, which many believe was the founding moment of today’s free Poland. But solidarity is also the moral principle of bearing the burdens of others.

However, before we get to the subject of solidarity, I would like to continue the discussion from the first panel. In *The Republic*, Plato wrote that the state isn’t actually made of stones, buildings and streets. It is built by living people with their characters, emotions and habits. So, is the main reason behind the current rise of populism – as Paul Berman claims – the collapse of institutions and culture or else is it the collapse of a certain elite?

Mr. Berman referred to several important emotions – fear, anger, hatred, suffering. It seems to me that these emotions are genuine, but liberal elites – as I observed both in Poland in 2015 and in the UK in 2016 – didn’t want to acknowledge their existence. As a result, the only politicians willing to listen to social groups experiencing such emotions were those with completely irresponsible ideologies.

Discussion 2

Paul Berman: The problem is that these feelings of suffering and fear are at least partly difficult to understand, as for example the fear of Mexicans in the US.

I believe that there's something that is prior to the fear, which in this case is not caused by immigration itself. I think that the fear is aroused by the collapse of the ability to understand the nature of the world. That's an epistemological crisis, a crisis of information. One of my explanations for it is the crisis in journalism and the collapse of the press. You're suggesting the elite did not pay attention to this fear. This elite no longer exists. In every small town in the US there used to be a newspaper, now there's none. In medium-sized cities there were usually two newspapers, now there's mainly one. We used to have local TV stations which are now gone.

There's a crisis in our understanding of reality. I don't believe that the rise of populism was caused by arrogance on the part of elites. I believe it comes from a failure to respond to some basic innovations. In one tiny respect I can sympathize with Mr. Zybertowicz who told us that it would be good to slow down or stop the pace of technological innovation. I think it would be good if we were able to slow down the pace of technological innovation that is destroying journalism. The reason I don't sympathize more with Mr Zybertowicz's claims is because I think it is impossible to slow down the pace of innovation in general and the effort to do so can only be violent and

tyrannical.

I can agree with Mrs. Wigura that there are foolish leaders, but I do not think that the crisis we're in was caused by some sort of mistake. It is not that a wrong choice was made. The crisis evolved from these mysterious factors. If we look back on the last 20-30 years, I don't think we can find a decision through which we could have avoided the crisis.

Karolina Wigura: What do you mean by “mysterious factors”? Emotions, fear?

Paul Berman: Fear can be mysterious. It's not mysterious if we can explain it on a material basis. We can say immigrants are arriving, they're competing for good jobs and causing a lowering of wages. That's not a mysterious fear. Or the fear of people in parts of Amsterdam, whose entire neighborhoods have been overwhelmed by immigrants speaking foreign languages.

But there are fears which are mysterious. What is the reason for the fear of Polish immigrants – as described by Mr Bush in the previous discussion – felt by some people in Great Britain? There can be certain anxieties over people who speak with a different accent, there could be anxieties of various sorts. But it goes beyond anxiety. There's a real fear. It's not obvious why some people feel it and others don't.

Discussion 2

Karolina Wigura: Is it necessary to understand the fear to provide a responsible answer?

Paul Berman: No, it's not necessary to understand the fear. During our previous discussion, Mrs. Engel said that my lecture made her sad, helpless and hopeless. Mr. Zybertowicz criticized me for offering no solutions. I do not feel hopeless. I think there are things we can do. I think we have a crisis in civic education, in understanding what democracy and the republic are. In the US, we obviously have a crisis in understanding what American political tradition is and what is good about it. There's a crisis in the understanding of proper civic and moral values. It is all about education – that can be addressed!

There's also a crisis in institutions like the press. That can be addressed too. When I was young I wanted to destroy institutions, but now I think that we should rally to defend them. Good institutions. Another type of institutions we need to defend – as well as the press – are political parties. In the US, Trump managed to win because the Republican Party collapsed. The same thing could happen to the Democratic Party, my party.

It can happen everywhere. We've entered an age – for mysterious reasons – in which institutions have become extremely fragile. The institutional crisis looms behind the epistemological crisis.

Karolina Wigura: While we were talking about the

media and education, Mr. Bremer applauded. However, just before our discussion started, I talked to people who in July of this year organized very creative mass protests in many Polish cities, trying to defend our judiciary. They are in their twenties. So who should educate whom?

Jörg Bremer: I would like to start with a personal note, which can, however, contribute to this discussion. When I came here at the beginning of the 1980s, I realized how beautiful and full of hope the nation was. What I see now after so many years is the scale of progress Poland has made. Seeing how the country has evolved I would feel very, very proud to be a Polish citizen. You seem, however, to have entered a phase of Romanticism, which comes after the phase of Enlightenment.

Now, I do sympathize with professor Zybertowicz's dream of making our life easier, of getting rid of all unnecessary complications. But this is of course irrational. For 18 years, I had lived in the Middle East and came to realize that certain conflicts are simply insolvable. You can only bear them and try to make life a little more peaceful. And there always will be a conflict between Enlightenment and Romanticism.

I would therefore propose to treat this phase we're living through, the phase of populism, as a chance. We should make use of it and try to find new solutions as "cheaply" as possible. I admit I'm afraid that Trump's presidency can destroy the world. But I'm not afraid that current Polish government is destroying the world. So

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I'm giving Poland much more credit than I give Trump. When Hegel described the process of nation-building, he said there are two phases we can single out: one is directed against the other, and the second one comes out of ourselves. So I appeal to the Polish people, be proud of all you have done so far and build on it, but not against your neighbors.

Jacek Stawiski: When it comes to the crisis, I don't think we should idealize the past. Of course, we're living in a time of profound changes, we're undergoing a crisis of national identity, economy, of traditional journalism. But at least our nations are not at war with each other. We're from different countries – 70 years ago it would be impossible to meet so easily here and exchange ideas so freely. Yes, we're living in times of profound shifts, but let's not overrate the crisis.

My next point concerns solidarity. I'm 47, and when I came of age I thought that whether you're on the right or the left of the political spectrum, whether you're Polish or German, whether you're Ukrainian or Russian – you should always believe in interconnection, in the exchange of ideas and people, in unlimited trade, in tearing down barriers. I thought it would lead to more consolidation between people, that it would make societies feel free and bring us more solidarity.

What I notice nowadays through my work as a journalist – but also as a user of Facebook, as someone

who follows international media and closely observes Poland's internal debates on many issues – is a major need for solidarity. Actually, it strikes me all the time that people just need an example of someone who needs solidarity to go out and help him. When I ask my viewers – “Do we need solidarity with the people of Syria?” the answer is: “Yes, it's a conflict, it's a war, however we don't know the face of it”. But when we broadcast footage from Aleppo showing a boy who was rescued – where people could see his face, as well as the face of his mother – then everybody turns and says: “Yes, we should help”.

So, in this era of the global flow of information, solidarity with a nation suffering from war must be individualized. We have so many forces around that lead us to consolidation, but there's a side-effect which manifests itself in the forces of fragmentation.

Karolina Wigura: I couldn't agree more when it comes to the power of media coverage being individualized. But maybe I should ask: what do you mean by solidarity? What is “European solidarity”? Who defines it and who has the right to define it?

Jacek Stawiski: These days, everyone claims that the European project is in crisis. Yes, it is – but at the same time it is not. For instance, in the EU we have the Solidarity Fund which allows for the transfer of money

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from richer to poorer countries.

Karolina Wigura: It's good that you're talking about funding, because it seems that we've completely lost our sight of solidarity and are only thinking about solidarity funds.

Jacek Stawiski: In 2017, should we still see the Fund as an expression of European solidarity, or simply as a mechanism of transferring money from European institutions to certain states? We can say it's both. We should not forget, however, it was established on the basis of some kind of solidarity.

Karolina Wigura: But we might agree that it's very difficult to restore this understanding of solidarity when a country is informed that it may be punished with fines because it has made certain decisions – regardless of whether those decisions are right or wrong.

Jacek Stawiski: Let me address this by asking: was the unification of Germany, that monumental transfer of money from West to East, an act of national solidarity? Or was it just a form of economic development for restored territories which had been split due to geopolitical forces?

Jörg Bremer: It should be clear that solidarity is based

on partnership, not on giving out presents. And I think your example of West and East Germany is a good one. Basically, I think it shouldn't be contradictory to say, for example, "Poland first" and after that "I feel solidarity with somebody else." In fact, it may serve Poland best if it shows solidarity with its neighbors. It's not necessarily a contradiction.

I understand when your government says "Poland first". I understand that nations can deal with their own problems. But, on the other hand, sometimes they can't, and it may also be very useful to listen to advice from somebody else. I believe that at least sometimes all those governments crying "Poland first!", "England first!" or "France first!" are doing it just to create a conflict, which helps them solidify their power. This is something I actually remember from the 1980's when I was here. What was the government doing then? They were portraying themselves as the only good ones, the only opposition to the Western capitalists who should be hated and kept at a distance. And we know what all that leads to.

Paul Berman: I'm allergic to the word "first". "America first" is now Trump's slogan, but Americans with some knowledge of history know that in the 1930's "America first" was the slogan of American fascism.

I think there's a hierarchy of values which should be observed. I'm in favor of solidarity, but I don't think that solidarity is the highest value. I think it is one of the two or

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three basic principles of something higher, which is democracy. According to the American poet Walt Whitman democracy consists of two sexes: solidarity and individuality – and it needs to have room for both.

But then again, democracy is not the highest value either. More valuable than democracy is the search for truth. We have to search for truth, but first we need to acknowledge that something called “truth” actually exists.

We’re now living at a point in history when the very existence of truth is questioned. It is being questioned at some universities, but above all it’s being questioned by the political movements of the populist Right. President Trump does not acknowledge the existence of truth. He’s actively hostile to the press, because the goal of the press is to search for truth. Sometimes the press fails in this mission, but it essentially embodies and is devoted to the principle of searching for truth.

In this sense, the free press defends the entire civilization we call democracy or liberal democracy. That’s the civilization which brings solidarity and marries it to the opposite sex which is individuality. And does so in the spirit of living under the god of truth. We’re finding now that the entire constellation is under the question – philosophically and politically, with numerous consequences.

For example, Mr Stawiski admires the fact that our countries are not at war. But there’s a reason why we’re not at war with one another, which is that over the last 60 years we’ve been constructing institutions such as NATO.

The United States has been the dominant force behind NATO for years. But is it still committed to it?

Karolina Wigura: I would like to invite the audience to offer comments and ask questions.

Konrad Kiljan [Fundacja Polska Debatuje]: I'd like to question the title of the event – populism or solidarity. It somehow suggests that these two terms are at odds with each other. It doesn't take into account the fact that populist movements make use of the rage of the masses and promise they will create solidarity once they're in power. Some of those who campaigned for Brexit said they would increase the budget of the National Health Service. President Trump also promises some sort of solidarity to the people. To me it all suggests that politicians who were supposed to block the wave of populism were not promising enough solidarity. I'm not saying what kind of solidarity, because it varies from country to country. But I was very surprised when Paul Berman said that wages in the US generally grew, so people shouldn't be outraged. Do you think that they're not reasonable?

I do agree that we exercise solidarity through institutions. We also need to make journalism more sexy and more modern. But can we weaken those who use the promise of solidarity to stir hatred by using international or local institutions?

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Voice from the audience 1: I am concerned about the reopening of Polish-German antagonisms, through aggressive comments directed at the German government and suggestions made by the Polish government that all Germans are bad. I have a question to Mr. Bremer – how can we fight against these tendencies? I believe that Poles and Germans can live in friendship.

Jörg Bremer: I don't see it this way. What I see is that the Polish government is looking for conflicts in order to stay in power. But – as a German citizen – I'm not in conflict with the Polish nation. In fact, I see so much solidarity on the Polish side when I am here, and I see so much friendship that now I would like to suggest that all the youngsters in this room take part in the Erasmus program. Seriously, go and change the world. And please take reality into your own hands. Don't allow older people – who are full of hate – to rule you. Take it over! What are you waiting for?

Voice from the audience 2: Populism rose to power fueled by anti-liberal sentiments. And I'd like to try to search for a confession of our sins, what did we do wrong to make this happen. Otherwise, we'll never cure the situation.

Karolina Wigura: There is a famous essay by an American psychologist Jonathan Haidt, published in

The American Interest, in which he makes a distinction between globalists and nationalists. Globalists would be those who can be described as a liberal elite, and nationalists would be right-wing populists. Haidt argues that these two groups do not necessarily represent entirely different values. Listening to you I had a feeling that we liberals tend to think our values are the only values. Jonathan Haidt argues there are actually two sets of values and solidarity can be found on both sides, although it is understood in a different manner. Globalists may think more universally, they think probably just as you – we have to help the others because it would help us all. Nationalists, on the other hand, think we have to defend our home. And that’s what they probably mean when they say they would like to put their respective countries first.

Paul Berman: I’ll start by addressing the gentlemen who called for a liberal confession. It lies at the core of the very idea of liberalism that it doesn’t claim to have all the answers, it doesn’t claim to be perfect, or promise to create a perfect society. It offers an imperfect society, which perhaps could be improved by some steps, which then could be corrected again.

That’s the nature of liberalism. And this is why liberalism is distinct from what I call populism. Populism – in the sense I’m using this term – is the idea that there’s a “people” which has “enemies”. The elites are only enemies

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of the people. Populism in this sense is inherently dictatorial and it's made to fail. It's continually tempted to be tyrannical in order to pursue its goal, which cannot be achieved. Populism is a doomed effort.

What I see in this current wave of populism is one mistake made after another. Britons who called for Brexit voted to reduce the power and prosperity of their country. In the US the Americans who voted for "America first" have actually impaired American standing in the world. Poland is now making the same kind of choice.

I think that something very grand has to be defended which is the idea of liberal democracy. And democracy is made of its components: solidarity and individuality. It is a democracy because it has its values of truth and the search of truth. Sometimes we could be wrong and never achieve perfection, but without the idea of pursuing the truth we will not go anywhere.

Jacek Stawiski: Look at Venezuela. This is a country ruled by populists. It has been overtaken by people who called for more solidarity, but the result was exactly the opposite. Populism has never changed anything for the better, while solidarity did. The Polish Solidarity movement changed our country but it also had an impact on other countries, Germany for example.

I personally have been changed for the better by the example of German solidarity. When I was in secondary school, I did see people who were given medicines

from West Germany. The Germans were sending it to the churches, because Poland was then a backward country. That profoundly changed my picture of Germany. I will never forget the past, I know how horrible it was. But my attitude did change. So populism is always making the world worse while solidarity can do wonders.

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Panelist Biographies:

Paul Berman writes about politics and literature for various magazines, he is a regular contributor to The Tablet. He is the author of *A Tale of Two Utopias* (1996), *Terror and Liberalism* (2003), *Power and the Idealists* (2005) and *The Flight of the Intellectuals* (2010).

Jörg Bremer is the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung correspondent for Italy and the Vatican in Rome, and from August 1981 to August 1986 was a correspondent in Warsaw. He is a historian and author of books, recently *Unheiliger Krieg im Heiligen Land - Meine Jahre in Jerusalem* (2010).

Jacek Stawiski is a journalist, serving as head of the International Section at the Polish news television channel TVN24 BiS.

Karolina Wigura - sociologist and assistant professor at the Warsaw University. She is a regular columnist for *Kultura Liberalna*, where she also heads the Public Debate Observatory, which identifies and analyses examples of radicalism in both Polish and European public debate.

Kultura Liberalna Seminar

How to Beat Populists?

How should we fight populism? Is there some universal way or do we need methods appropriate for local – German, Polish, American, British – needs? And last but not least – does attempting dialogue with populists make any sense at all?



Łukasz Pawłowski: Donald Trump shares some characteristics with European politicians widely considered to be populists – for example his attitude towards the opposition, media or the judiciary. But he is also different from his European counterparts, at least in one respect: there is no party, no social movement behind him. It is said that he has “hijacked” the Republican Party, but he does not control it in the same way Victor Orbán or Marine Le Pen control theirs. It is much more of a one-man-show.

Paul Berman: The important thing to remember about Trump is that he is not really a populist; he is a charlatan. So it is easy to imagine that Trump might form his own party or that he might veer into the center. He’s an unpredictable force.

It is an unprecedented moment at which nothing in American politics can be predicted. No one knows whether Donald Trump will complete his term, no one

knows what will happen in the Congressional elections of 2018, no one knows what will happen when Donald Trump presents himself for reelection in 2020. It is imaginable that Trump might organize his own party and that could end up being a three-way race – between the established Republicans, the Democrats and Trump’s party.

Lukasz Pawłowski: A populist party?

Paul Berman: In the US the word populist has some ambiguities, which are not going to go away. That is because in the 1890s and early 1900s there was a US party which called itself the Populist Party or the People’s Party. It was fundamentally a farmers’ party and it was formed to defend the interests of farmers against banks. The PP lasted some 20 years and eventually merged into the Democratic Party, but is thought of well in retrospect. As a result, the term “populist” in conventional American political discourse merely means that you are for the underprivileged and for more equality. Populism is doomed to include these ambiguities, just as the word “socialism” means “communism” to some people and “social-democracy” to others.

Lukasz Pawłowski: This ambiguity is clear also in Europe where Emmanuel Macron is quite often called a “centrist populist”, somebody who connects with the people by using populist techniques. One such example is the issue of postal workers, which is of marginal importance

to the French economy, but is used by Macron to appeal to his electoral base. Does this make him a populist?

Sylvain Cypel: This is exactly why I feel very uncomfortable about Jan-Werner Müller's definition of populism. If you say that football, handball and basketball have something in common this is obviously true. They are all sports and they are played with a ball. But having said that, what precisely does it say about the rules of football, handball and basketball? It's similar with populists. You may try to look for what all these people have in common in terms of their behavior. But that does not tell us anything about the content of their policies.

Lukasz Pawłowski: Is there anything that unites them?

Sylvain Cypel: In my view – but this would exclude, for example, Macron from this group – the attitude towards globalization and immigration is common to a lot of them. Trump has built his triumph largely on hate and fear of globalization, people's feeling that they are losers in this story. And the second thing which is very common to most of these movements is their attempts to find scapegoats, to tell people that what is happening to them is somebody else's fault. So, it brings them to reject openness – mainly openness to immigrants and to others in general. The immigrant is a manifestation of "the other". In this sense you are right – Macron is using

populist techniques, but at the same time in the last election Macron excluded the whole issue of immigration from the French political debate. That was unbelievable. So you cannot put Macron and Trump in the same camp.

Tomasz Sawczuk: The German case seems to be yet another story. There is no strong political movement that could be labeled as populist. The Alternative für Deutschland is not even remotely as strong as, for example, the Front National in France. Does it mean that contemporary Germans are somehow more immune to populism as it is defined by Müller?

Jörg Bremer: Is it really helpful to look for definitions? It seems that we are putting ourselves, especially when we want to change the world, into some kind of prison. We come to the conclusion that we cannot talk to populist movements, because they are by definition wrong and threaten our democracies. I find this awkward and wrong. It seems we have already lost so many people because we have not talked to them. Let's not go further in the wrong direction.

Another point: in Italy there are at least three famous politicians you can call populists – Silvio Berlusconi, Beppe Grillo – the leader of the Five Star Movement – and Matteo Salvini, who is the leader of the North League, a very anti-immigrant, nationalistic party. They are all populists in a way and yet they all despise each other.

Berlusconi, for example, now presents himself as a liberal, supporting the integration of immigrants. And when he was compared with Trump he replied that he despises him, because Trump is not reliable and, instead of caring for ordinary people, only looks after his club of millionaires. The same goes for this European club – Nigel Farage, Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders. They might play at being friends, but at heart they have hardly anything in common.

Lukasz Pawłowski: Do you mean that we should not look for any common features in these movements? In the media we often hear about a “global wave of populism”, but to speak about a global phenomenon you need to first find something that these movements have in common, and that is what Müller is proposing.

Jörg Bremer: I disagree. You have your Polish problems, we have our problems in Germany. The British have Brexit – which, by the way, seems like the idea of trying to extract a single egg from an omelet made from twenty-eight eggs – but should we deal in Poland or Germany with this? No, and we make ourselves weak if we look for a global context in the pursuit of our national solutions. As I said, Italy alone has at least three kinds of populist movements, all of which have nothing in common.

Hubert Czyżewski: I’m not entirely convinced by your

argument that there's no point of looking for some more general definitions and ideas of what populism is. On the one hand, you say that each country has its own specific problems and its own specific context. On the other, however, you said the European Union resembles an omelet made of 28 eggs. If that's the case, you must also admit it takes only one rotten egg to spoil the whole dish. Being Polish, I naturally care about Polish problems. But I think AfD, Brexit and even president Trump are also issues of my concern. If the idea is to save as much as possible from what was good about the pre-2016 world, we should not ignore the fact that populism is indeed a transnational challenge.

Jörg Bremer: But I have a problem with calling all these people populists. It's not so simple and it doesn't really help to understand what's going on. We are talking here in political and sociological terms. But to me, populism is also a psychological problem. There are many people in Poland, Hungary, Italy who feel used, who are too weak to get up and hope for something totally different. And we have to face the question of what these hopes represent. Not by definitions, but by talking to these people, bringing them back into the debate.

Andrzej Zybertowicz: As a human being I sympathize with your attitude, Mr. Bremer, but we should be less emotional in our attitudes and try to define the task. And

the task is how to prevent, or curb populism. We all fear populism, fear it might lead to institutionalized violence and the demise of our freedoms and democracy. We fear history might repeat itself.

Yet, my impression is that many of the remedies which have been presented today and which are normally offered up are completely romantic and utopian. Let me name two. First of all, during our previous discussion Jörg Bremer completed his final observations by encouraging young people to take over, to be in charge. That is a complete nonsense. The moment they get to wield any influence, they will be used or rather abused by international corporations, by huge players. Young people have no independent, sovereign control of themselves, they are victims of massive information overload which basically pushes them to be diligent consumers, not diligent citizens. In this ocean of misinformation their intellectual capacities are ruined and their emotional sensitivities are blown up beyond any reasonable limits.

Secondly, while debating populism, it is quite often said we need more good civic education. Education is a mantra repeated by liberal intellectuals again and again, but in fact it's also completely utopian. Let me ask you some very practical questions. First: Who will take the role of educators? Second: Who is to be educated? Third: What is the message that we think should be passed to people to solve the problem of their susceptibility to sheer propaganda and demagoguery?

The educators are intellectuals, academics, journalists. The same journalists who lost touch with ordinary people, the same academics who live through their discussion panels, conferences, books and are part of the cultural establishment. And what would it mean to give people a good civic education? Should we tell them how democracy really works? Should we explain that Panama Papers are a standard mode of operation behind the scenes of politics in virtually every democracy? Should we educate people that, despite many comprehensive analyses of the causes of the financial crisis of 2008, those responsible have not been held accountable? And the major institutional arrangements which allowed this crisis to happen have not been amended? Do we really think that this kind of true knowledge will make people more attached to democracy and its values? Did you ever consider the possibility that a good mass civic education is not compatible with the core institutions of contemporary capitalism at all?

Tomasz Sawczuk: Do you believe that populism as it was defined by Jan-Werner Müller aptly describes the political situation in Poland? Müller often uses Law and Justice as an example of a populist party in his sense of the term, that is – anti-elitist and anti-pluralist.

Andrzej Zybertowicz: Currently, political communication in general is fueled by the populist attitudes of all

parties, all political groupings. Those who criticize Law and Justice's policies are themselves engaged in extremely populist miscommunication. And only if we accept this definition of the current situation can we start to look for some solutions.

Lukasz Pawłowski: In your view, are all political parties really the same?

Andrzej Zybertowicz: We need to understand that in the present mis/dis-information environment those who refrain from using populist tricks are unlikely to win elections. Some fifteen years ago, Law and Justice was focused on traditional communication in politics. They wanted to reveal scandals, to discuss statistics and arrangement of institutions. But since they had pretty limited access to mainstream media, this style of communication proved to be completely inefficient. Only when they got involved in this sort of post-political discourse, when they started to be as flexible as their opponents, did they have the opportunity to win. Law and Justice just adapted to structural conditions engendered by liberal democracy in Poland.

Adam Puczejda: Two questions to Professor Zybertowicz. You said that education is a mantra – do you mean to say that education is useless?

Andrzej Zybertowicz: I would be happy to educate you

and be educated by you. But that has nothing to do with the efficiency of the mass education. You can never expect the majority of people to discuss issues in the manner we – the intellectuals – do.

Adam Puczejda: What you have just said about how politicians use populist methods seemed to me like an attempt to legitimize cynicism within contemporary politics. You basically claim that everyone needs to act in the same way, because this is the way politics is. Is this your positive vision of politics?

Andrzej Zybertowicz: Not at all. I'm just describing the actual process with its ramifications.

Aadam Puczejda: From what I understand, you support our current government, which uses these methods by saying “Well, this is how it works.”

Andrzej Zybertowicz: Unfortunately, this is the iron rule of evolution: if you cannot adapt you will not survive. If you want to be a successful politician you have to use two legs while moving forward; one is your mission and values, the second is your gaming capacities, and that includes flexibility. If you lose one of these legs, you are lost. Right-wing groups in Poland were deeply fundamentalist for the first fifteen years of the transformation. They believed they are morally right and therefore can win by simply announcing their values and truths to the public. Only when Right-wing

parties learned how to play the game, they reached the capacity to rule and change the country.

Now we have a serious problem; once you attain power you might be willing to abuse it. In order to lower this risk you need to have good opposition, good media, and good civic society. We have none of those.

Adam Puczejda: Some time ago, I talked to a well-known Right-wing journalist and asked him about a very xenophobic image put on the cover of the magazine he works for. Is this how journalism should work in Poland? And he replied: Well, yes, this is the way it works. We have to do everything we can so that Civic Platform doesn't win. Is this what you understand by playing the political game, as well?

Andrzej Zybertowicz: I'm afraid, yes. The problem is that we all fell into the same trap. And we cannot get out of it by simply moralizing. Your aesthetic disgust is not helpful analytically any more.

Jarosław Kuisz: The more I think about Jan-Werner Müller's definition of populism, the more I believe that a book like his was very much needed and at the same time it proved to be very harmful. In fact it helps to create a bipolar division, a black and white image of the world, but gives absolutely no recipe on how to win with those it named populists. The only possibility to win is local, because the situation in every country is different. In the

UK, for example, Nigel Farage's party does not exist anymore, it's over. And it means that, whatever you think of the Conservatives, they were able to dismantle the local version of populism.

In Poland at least some of the representatives of the Right felt excluded from the mainstream media and yes, it could be justified to some extent. But you definitely can't say the same about the Front National in France. There was even too much of Marine Le Pen in the media recently, because people wanted to watch somebody who behaves this way, just as Americans enjoy watching Donald Trump.

It's horribly misleading to talk about populism as a global phenomenon, because eventually it helps populists, strengthening them in a way. To win with populists we should to some extent emulate what Emmanuel Macron did in France. He simply just got rid of all those big words, and started to talk about real problems. When he sat down with Marine Le Pen in a TV debate, he was able to show she was ill-prepared, she did not know the data and the solutions she proposed would not work.

Łukasz Pawłowski: That might have been true in France, but in the United States, Clinton repeatedly tried to show Trump policy proposals were counterproductive and this had no effect on his voters.

Karolina Wigura: I have never thought that describing Trump as just another type of populist was right. I have

always believed he was a unique person because of his temper, behavior, the way he thinks, etc. The problem in the US lies with the two major political parties. Were it not for the crisis of the Republicans, Trump would have never got this far. That is why I would rather turn to books like Peter Mair's *Ruling the Void*, which are perhaps less popular than Jan-Werner Müller's, but which show how political parties are losing their connection with their social base.

Jarosław Kuisz: The success of Macron can also be understood only when we realize how rotten French political parties must have been from within, if he was able to dismantle both Socialists and Republicans so easily.

Tomasz Sawczuk: Macron founded his own party. Is this the way to fix our democracies?

Karolina Wigura: It's not yet clear whether Macron will save or hurt French democracy. He won the recent presidential elections thanks to a fortunate turn of events, primarily because of the corruption scandal involving François Fillon. Another important factor was of course Macron's personal genius. But is democracy really about personal genius, or is it rather about the long term habits of society? Alexis de Toqueville in *Democracy in America* already showed us that democracy is about long term engagement of people at a local level. It's very important,

because you really cannot say what is going to happen France after Macron. Is it going to slide back into the void, or is it going to be saved by another Macron? I don't think we can build stable democracies by pinning our hopes only on outstanding individuals.

Łukasz Pawłowski: A question for Stephen Bush. Jarosław Kuisz said that the Conservatives effectively managed to sideline the UK Independence Party. Do you agree and if so, how did they fight against the populist agenda?

Stephen Bush: I have many doubts about the utility of populism as an umbrella term to describe these different movements, but it seems to me that the common story in most of Europe is that the center-right is defeating populism by adopting large chunks of its programme. We saw that for example in the Netherlands, where Mark Rutte has basically adopted some of Geert Wilders' policies and stolen some votes as a consequence.

Is it the way to beat populists? I'm not so sure. It's quite hard at the moment to tell what is the different quality of having a government led by Nigel Farage or having a government led by fear of Nigel Farage – which is effectively the situation we have in Britain now. The Conservatives have decided to prevent UKIP from grabbing their votes by moving as close as possible to UKIP.

Tomaz Sawczuk: Does it mean the so-called mainstream political parties will need to further radicalize in order to avert the threat of populism? If they do, will they themselves eventually turn into populists or even something worse?

Paul Berman: I fear not just that populist movements will turn into new fascists, but that we are going to collapse into chaos. We are already seeing the collapse of institutions – political parties, the press, international bodies. There can be a general collapse of institutions on both global and national scale.

Another crisis which goes even deeper is an epistemological crisis, the collapse of understanding what truth is, of economic and political reality. There are many people in the US who feel their country is a victim of globalization. This is insane. The US has been the king of globalization and our prosperity depends on it. American workers who fear that foreign factories might take away their jobs seem to have forgotten that foreign markets are providing the jobs.

And behind all this, there's another dark cloud which I described as nihilism. We should not forget that a great many people who voted for Donald Trump also considered him unqualified to be president. They voted for him anyway. Why? They would explain it's because the situation in the US is so desperately bad and the entire political class has not been able to cope with it. And should it

turn out Trump is not capable of coping with it either? Well, what the hell, we don't care. That was a nihilist gesture. I realize that is not the best way to start a conversation with somebody by saying – you're an ignorant fool, a nihilist and you're flirting with suicide. And yet I do think that certain percentage of Trump voters are exactly that.

I know many people voted for Trump because he won the Republican nomination and they would vote for a Republican candidate whoever it was. But I'm describing a distinctive feature about Trump that he himself seems to understand. That's why he once said he could shoot somebody in the middle of Fifth Avenue and his supporters would not turn away from him. This a way of saying that these people do not believe in moral values whatsoever, they believe in the leader.

Lukasz Pawłowski: What do you suggest should be done about it?

Paul Berman: We need to realize that this is more than a political problem. Therefore, the core of the answer – and here I reply to prof. Zybertowicz – has to be civic education. This might seem like a very weak answer, but it's not. Karolina Wigura mentioned Alexis de Tocqueville. What he describes in his book about America is not a political system but a political, democratic culture in which people are educated by institutions into the values of democracy. There's no alternative but to remind them of those values.

Kultura Liberalna Seminar

Panelist Biographies:

Paul Berman writes about politics and literature for various magazines, he is a regular contributor to The Tablet. He is the author of *A Tale of Two Utopias* (1996), *Terror and Liberalism* (2003), *Power and the Idealists* (2005) and *The Flight of the Intellectuals* (2010).

Jörg Bremer is the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung correspondent for Italy and the Vatican in Rome, and from August 1981 to August 1986 was a correspondent in Warsaw. He is a historian and author of books, recently *Unheiliger Krieg im Heiligen Land - Meine Jahre in Jerusalem* (2010).

Stephen Bush is special correspondent at the New Statesman. His daily Morning Call briefing provides a quick and essential guide to domestic and global politics.

Sylvain Cypel is a journalist; he writes for *Orient XXI* and *Le 1*; for many years, a member of the editorial board of *Le Monde*, earlier also the editor-in-chief of *Courrier International*. Recently, he authored *Liberty: Quand les États-Unis, malgré de puissantes résistances intérieures, attirent en masse les immigrés et en bénéficient, la France les rejette et se prive de cette chance* (2016).

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Tomasz Sawczuk is a regular columnist for Kultura Liberalna. Graduate in law and philosophy, he is the author of political commentaries, specializing in contemporary liberal thought.

Karolina Wigura sociologist and assistant professor at Warsaw University. She is a regular columnist for Kultura Liberalna where she also heads the Public Debate Observatory, which gathers and analyses radicalisms in Polish and European public debate.

Andrzej Zybertowicz is a professor of sociology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and an advisor to the Polish President Andrzej Duda. Recently, he co-authored *Samobójstwo Oświecenia. Jak neuronauka i nowe technologie pustoszą ludzki świat* [The Enlightenment's Suicide. How Neuroscience and New Technologies are Devastating the Human World] (2015).

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