

**XIV SEMINAR
ABOUT POPULISM,
XENOPHOBIA,
CONFLICT AND
COMMUNICATION**

The threads of democracy in Europe

número 174

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Presentation

Pau Solanilla:

Good morning, everyone. I welcome you in Catalan. Today's session will be in English and Spanish. Welcome to this fortnight's edition of the seminar on populism and xenophobia, a highly topical topic, and before quickly going on to the parliaments and the conference, know that you have simultaneous translation.

Thus begins our hostess, Judit Colell, vice dean of the faculty. Thank you, good morning.

Judith Colell:

Good morning, thank you very much and welcome. Welcome to all, to our friends, to our partners, in this event that is so interesting in troubling times. I would like to excuse our Dean, Dr Josep Maria Carbonell Abelló, he cannot be here today because of a last-minute issue, but I will be here representing the university.

Populism is a convoluted and highly charged term that has sparked debate among scholars for decades. It is not a political ideology, but a strategy that divides societies. The person fight, the traditional, supposedly corrupted elites versus the have-nots, that is the people, who feel they have been politically marginalised. Populism is often led by a charismatic leader who claims to come from outside the establishment – we have last week, Italy – a supposed common man or woman, in that case it was a woman, who will correct the situation and reinstate popular sovereignty. Although populism can come from both sides of the political spectrum, populism in Europe is mostly manifested through the right-wing politics, and also in other countries where we had – tonight, I was talking with Mariona, talking a little bit about what happened tonight. Well, in Brazil, finally it seems that it will be a second round, but finally it seems that Lula will win the elections.

Depolarising and simplistic division between the people and the elites is adaptive to different contexts and different times. This explains why this phenomenon has constantly reappeared throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. However, though populism is historically not new, we are witnessing a recent wave of political extremism, spreading globally and, most importantly for today's panel, within democratic societies in Europe. This increase informs us and warns us about the uncertainties and anxieties that old and new generations are experiencing in what political sociologist Lorenzo Viviani calls "the current period of misalignment in a hyper-fragmented and individualised society". This is why it deserves our full attention and consideration beyond our rejection and mockery. Political scientist Sahar Abi-Hassan has discussed the gender dimension of populism, in which populist women acquire a mother-like role in the public sphere, and how Islamophobia is a key characteristic of European populist leaders and parties who, however, use migrant people as scapegoats for the existing flaws in the economic and political system. The need to analyse populism from a multi-disciplinary approach – from political science to sociology, to history, to communication, among other disciplines – is key in order to better understand why and how it emerged in a holistic manner. Moreover, by looking into different case studies, such as Spain, Italy, Germany and France, we might be able to identify common patterns and characteristics in order to better understand in which circumstances it arises and why. An in-depth analysis of populism can help us acquire the knowledge and tools to prevent and tackle it. We are experiencing complicated times in which the economic crisis, combined with disenchantment and disillusionment with the establishment, may cause people to turn nationalistic with xenophobic rhetoric and be against globalisation and multiculturalism. Together with increasing new insecurities and threats, such as Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine, it is of utmost importance to discuss and debate and hopefully educate new generations in democratic principles and values.

In the degree in international relations at Blanquerna, we strive to provide our students with the necessary tools to analyse the present in a multidisciplinary and plural manner. Our lectures, readings and class discussions are centred on fostering critical thinking so that our students become aware of the complexities and variety of perspectives in tackling international affairs. Most particularly, in order to oppose and challenge populism and other forms of political extremism, we put emphasis on topics within the humanities. Our classes are based on an open, diverse and plural education by incorporating

different epistemological and ideological lenses as a key element to acquire sound argumentative tools. Moreover, we encourage students to obtain a broad perspective and different interpretations on all topics by analysing and contrasting varied and diverse sources, both primary and secondary, as well as from diverse authors in terms of gender, origin and background. We believe that with this approach we might be able to prevent political extremism from further expanding and stimulate productive conversation. In that same line, I thank you for your attention and look forward to an enriching and suggestive debate. Thanks a lot.

Pau Solanilla:

Thank you very much, Judith, for your words and for hosting us in this beautiful place, and for the possibility to make change with your students. Right now, we have Roger Albinyana, who is the managing director of the European Institute of the Mediterranean. He's also a person who has long experience both in civil society groups and institutions and with governmental responsibilities, and we know that the Mediterranean is a hot place for populism and xenophobia and radicalism, so thank you very much.

Roger Albinyana:

Thank you very much, Pau, and welcome to everybody. It's a pleasure, on behalf of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, to share this space with each and all of you. It's become a tradition, as was stated by the preceding speakers, that we gather once a year around the Olof Palme Foundation and the Rafael Campalans Foundation on always very timely and important subjects, as it is today. Now, the vice-dean was, I think she was recalling the results of the elections in Brazil – and it is true that I have no doubt that Lula is going to win the second round – but if you look at the Senate, the results of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, you will see that there the presence, the massive, impressive presence of right-wing and extreme-right-wing members of parliament is quite frightening. I think it was yesterday that El País actually published an article with their own calculations that nearly 20 percent of the voters in Europe within the last years have been choosing extreme right-wing options, and, of course, this is a very scary figure, and that's why I'm stating that this seminar is very timely. Myself, of course, I still have difficulties

understanding, assessing, from a cultural perspective, why today there are still people who support these kinds of options that basically place discrimination against gender, sexual orientation, origin, ethnic origin, whatever, in the heart of its political programmes. I, myself, cannot understand that in the 21st century this is still happening. But the reality and the truth is that it happens and, of course, it has to be combatted, combatted democratically, of course, and it has to be studied and researched upon. However, I've been looking at elements of political economy to better understand these phenomena – myself, I'm an economist – and I have no... let's say, I do not regret to say that globalisation is very much at the centre of the causes that have triggered these kinds of movements. I would say, even further, that it's the way how globalisation has been shaped within the last 20 years. And myself, as an advocate of globalisation – I've always advocated greater globalisation, open societies, but a globalisation that is not limited to capitals and trade, as has happened, but a globalisation that is also advancing in the field of rules, governance and institutions, which has obviously not happened; a globalisation that shapes an order whereby citizens can feel protected. And this has not happened, and probably, in some of your courses, you're studying neo-functionalism, and neo-functionalism normally – again, I'm not a political scientist, I'm an economist – but normally, neo-functionalism tells you that globalisation is a continuous process by which integration is happening first in the economic field, and later in the political field. We are not seeing this integration in the political field. Not only are we not seeing it regionally, but we are not seeing it globally.

My second idea is that the neoliberal revolution of the 1980s has obviously fooled this model of globalisation. It has also triggered, especially during the 90s and during the 2000s, an unnecessary wave of deregulation and liberalisation, and especially downward pressure on the tax revenues to the GDP in most western economies which, at the end of the day, these downward pressures have weakened the welfare state and, of course, out of the weakening of this welfare state, these populist extremist movements have also gained strength. And yet, nowadays, it's amazing, it's incredible, but yet, nowadays, we're witnessing, for instance, here in Spain, but also in other European countries, this toxic and populist debate on the need to decrease the tax burden. I mean, this is absolutely insane that after what we have been living in the last 20 years we are still repeating the same mistakes and, of course, by creating this tax competition among territories, at the end of the day, what we are endangering is the welfare state. And endangering the welfare state instead

of reforming it – because the welfare state needs to be reformed – we are fuelling these populist movements for the future. We are seeing this unnecessary debate nowadays, but the really necessary debate is how to raise the tax burden while enhancing the progressivity of the tax system so that we revert specifically this trend that has been existing since the 1980s. I have students at the university from economics, they often complain, “but in Spain the taxes are too high.” And I tell them, “no, this is wrong.” I mean Spain is paying taxes below the average of the OECD; it’s not true that we are paying high taxes. That’s why I cannot understand this kind of debate, especially not now when we are trying to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. So, at the end of the day, from my point of view – again, as an economist – what we need to put at the centre is how we mitigate inequalities, how we create more cohesive societies. By doing this, we are going to, in the future – this is not going to be an investment with short-term returns – but in the mid and long-term returns we will be able to offer something that will help reject extremist and populist options.

Two last messages before I close. For many decades, of course, both the moderate right and left wings – I mean, we have to say, because it’s true, from my point of view – have behaved alike when it comes to reducing the tax burden, when it comes to promoting and prompting deregulation and liberalisation – unnecessary deregulation and unnecessary liberalisation. And, of course, we are now seeing the effects of these policies from the 1990s and from the 2000s. I mean we are seeing how difficult it is for many social democratic parties to basically occupy the space they should occupy in the political arena. That’s why I think that it is important to keep these principles alive and, in any case, to propose options for the future that keep societies cohesive. And finally, a last idea, now that I’m seeing my colleague, Professor Lurdes Vidal, who is a true expert on the subject, is my worries and my concerns about the rise of Islamophobia in Europe. And this, I say it very clearly, the subject of the seminar is about xenophobia in general, but within xenophobia, the rise of Islamophobia in Europe is really worrisome, and we are seeing that not only when it comes to organised groups – when it comes to all these populist forces in the extreme right wing that use Islamophobia to gain support – but we are also seeing that in some European governments – I’m thinking about Austria, for instance – with a sort of an institutionalised xenophobia and xenophobic and Islamophobic policies. So, I hope that by exchanging today we will be able to have a very rich debate, and I’m glad that the founder and

main promoter of these forums has already arrived, so with that, I would like to thank you once again on behalf of IMED for this invitation, and I look forward to the debates. Thank you very much.

Pau Solanilla:

Thank you very much, Roger, and thank you for joining and also helping us in promoting these conferences and seminars and ideas.

I speak on behalf of the Rafael Campalans Foundation, the Foundation and Think Tank of the catalan Socialdemocrats. But this debate is not about ideologies, this debate is about a shared purpose of a mission that we have as a society and I wanted to share five brief comments in this regard with all of you:

We have a serious trust problem with democracy, it's obvious, isn't it? In general a trust problem with institutions, within the traditional sectors, in representative democracy... that is, there is a serious reputation problem. We have to accumulate reputational capital again in democracy and its institutions.

Secondly, empty political spaces do not exist, when democratic parties and institutions do not occupy the center of the game board, when we do not occupy emotional spaces in the citizens minds, there are others who come to occupy them, the radical, the populist or the xenophobic movements... mainly from the extreme right. The extreme right knows how to handle emotions very well and we are living in a highly emotional world. And the extreme right mainly, but not only, has come to comfort some citizens, offering a false comfort, proposing a return to the good old days that we know that will not return, but many citizens given the inability of democracy and its institutions to respond to the challenges and problems, they embrace these ideas. We have seen that not only in Spain, this is happening in all Europe as we will see with our experts.

As Moisés Naím has said and written well in his latest book "The Revenge of Power: How Autocrats Are Reinventing Politics for the 21st Century", there are three «P's» that are contaminating our democracy: In on hand polarization, which is even more, extreme political radicalism. The second, the post-truth, that is, building political narratives based on lies, the "fake news" reinforce polarization. Finally populism, these new movements and these new leaderships that emerge and erode our democracy.

This brings me to the fourth idea that I want to share with you. We need a new governance. The governance that we currently have is from the 20th century and with some actors that work with political structures design at the 19th century. We need a clash of modernity in political governance. That goes far beyond the institutions, we must also open the institutions to innovation. Innovation, as the Anglo-Saxons say, «is in the fringe», is on the margins, and the powers are in the centre in their fortress. It is necessary to connect the centers of innovation with the centers of power. Politics and institutions are the places where the least innovation has been introduced in recent years. Therefore, we need new alliances, new collaborations, new ways of doing things to be able to provide within new coherences and solutions to the current challenges of our societies.

Finally, why are we doing this seminar? Why are we here today? As I was saying, because we have a mission, a shared purpose and we need to think slowly together to act fast. And what we are doing is acting quickly and thinking very little, overreacting. This is why we are working in think tanks and organising these events, to try to put ideas on the table that can become political actions. Ideas that can be implemented as public policies and that we can recover reputational capital and the trust of citizens in institutions. And you, young people, you are the main actors. You have to challenge us, you have to challenge the institutions, committing yourselves, participating. We need a certain democratic radicalism that is also expected of young people because things can be changed, and as was said, politics is too important to leave it in the hands of others. We need that you participate more, knowing the difficulties that this has, with your active participation the quality of our democracy would be much better. So thank you very much and thank you for sharing this space with us.

Anna Balletbò:

First of all I am very grateful for the students that attend this seminar – it has already been 14 years, it is a successful seminar – and also for the passion of Ramon Llull University and the Blanquerna Group, the representative of academic responsibility, and also for all of us. We used to do this in Spanish with Xavier Casals, who called me and said, “look, my father is 90 years old” – he was not in an elevator, but anyway, he was in hospital. This happened in my hospital. I just went for a revision and I said, “but the only positive thing is that

there can be six people in this elevator and I was alone.” Can you imagine six people in the elevator? It's horrible.

So, Xavier Casals. We started this here when, you remember in Norway, there was an ultra attack, a very right-wing attack, and they killed a lot of boys from the Labour Party in Norway, on the island of Utøya. At that moment we realised that the egg of this was between us. But we don't want to realise that they are there and they are growing – slowly, but they are growing – because we are so proud of being democratic, we are so very proud to see what we have done in Europe, that we don't even want to think that the right-wing can come back in the extreme and they can threaten us. That is what is happening now. Our good friend Piero Ignazi – and this isn't the first time he has come here to this seminar – can explain to us what it means to the whole of Europe what happened in Italy in the last elections, and especially because, until now, the right wing, the ultras, we saw them in a very – how can I say it? – in a very special way because they were not trying – only in France – they were not trying to reach power. They just go to see if they can get some votes, etc., but they were not thinking that they could be at the top of the system having all of the responsibility. So now, more than that, they have succeeded and Piero, for sure, has something to say, and this democratic system must accept the result of the election. There's no other thing; there's no alternative, so we have to accept it and try to look at ourselves to see what sort of mistakes we have made to allow these groups to take over power. Worse than that, in some schools in Spain – now this is in fashion – little girls and boys are just training to put up their hand all these things because this is in fashion. It is more modern than the democratic system. We will probably have to give some reasons for – we have made some mistakes and we give some reason to the people, but one of the mistakes we have made is not telling the people that democracy is something that we have to fight for every day. And we didn't lead with example. And the second thing is, which isn't not written anywhere, that things will always go better. It's not written anywhere.

Sometimes they go worse. And now we are in a bad situation because of the change of the climate, the climate crisis, etc. And especially because we are at war. We are at war, and because of the war, there are many consequences we have. We shall see a lot of consequences because of that. And we shall have to face a difficult summer, a difficult winter, sorry, a difficult winter. And it's not clear that the stream, the second pipe that has been blown up, it has been done by the Russians. It is not clear. Neither by the Americans, who

could also have done it, because they are the ones who will get more profits from that. Some voices said perhaps the Polish, we don't know. We just hope that this will be clarified and we shall know it.

But the problem is not to know it. The problem is why did it happen? It's done. And this is going to be very difficult for, not for this winter, but for winters to come, because in this winter, people have some stock already. They bought a lot of gas, etc., and they have to keep it. But in 2023, we'll see how it goes. So that's all I wanted to tell you. Thanks again to all the speakers that came and accepted our invitation. And let me just say, especially Michael, Michael Gehler, who is here. You know, it was not easy to find a German because today is the anniversary of the unification of Germany.

And I called a common friend. I said, "well, I cannot, I cannot." So, they were all on this festivity, which we understand. And we don't regret the festivity, and especially we don't regret it because I picked up, I convinced this speaker to come. Because my point of view – and now I'll finish – is there is no Europe without Germany. This is my point of view. Piero said, "well, well, but we cannot do the unification of Europe without Germany." Now we're blaming them because they shouldn't make so many agreements with the Russians, etc. But there is one thing to say: it's very difficult to be fighting with your neighbours, especially if you have thousands of kilometres around. So, I understand that the Germans open the door to the Russians. What I understand less why some years ago we didn't put the Russians inside NATO.

They wanted it, when they blew up the Warsaw Pact, there was the NATO and the Warsaw Pact. So, when they blew it up, they asked, they knocked the door, but they were Communists, you know, Satan, they were Communists. And then life and politics made things that we thought impossible to become real. And this is the thing, there was a very good article in *La Vanguardia* two days ago – no, maybe this was today – by Shlomo Ben-Ami, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel. He's a diplomat, a very clever person. He did a very wonderful article about what Russia means. How do they think about themselves? And he says something that I agree with which is, if we take out Putin, the problem will still be there. The one who follows will be the same or worse, because it's something inside, the feeling of the big Russia and the humiliation of the last 30 years of everything.

Because I mean, you must remember that James Baker told Gorbachev, "if you allow me to unify Germany, I can promise you that NATO will not advan-

ce. Not one inch, not one inch.” Well, the result is 14 countries more. And now Ukraine was asking, Georgia was asking. So, if you try to close a sort of empire – of course the Americans are stronger, etc. – but a sort of empire like Russia, and not allow them to go out to the sea, and you close the whole Black Sea, I mean, something may happen. Something may happen. But the problem at the end is hegemony. I mean, the fight, the real fight is hegemony. Who's going to be a hegemonic country for the next century, or even for this century. The fight is between... No, because this is not a war between Russia and Ukraine, and not between Russia and the States, the United States. It is a fight between the United States against China. What scares the United States is China. So, after we'll talk about all that and our speakers will create a very good summary. Thank you.

Pau Solanilla:

Thank you, Anna, for your energy, your passion, always. You're going to chair the next tables. Just to remind you that at the end of the session, we are going to have the Secretary of State for the European Union of the Spanish government, Pascual Navarro, and you will have the opportunity to exchange with him. And he's preparing, they are preparing the Spanish presidency of the European Union, for the second part of the year 2023. So, you have the opportunity to interact with, with him. Thank you very much. So, we jump into the sessions. Thank you.

Populism and political radicalization. European overview

Anna Balletbò:

I would like to give the first word to Fernando Vallespín. Is an expert on populist issues, he is, as he puts it and it is well explained, he is a professor of Political Science at the Autonomous University of Madrid and was president of the CIS from 2004 to 2008, that is, he has the experience of seeing them come. I have brought the book with me so that he can dedicate it to me, I have not bought it today because I have read it, but it is a book that he did together with Marian Bascuñan that I told him if he could also come to moderate this table, but he had some commitment that could not change. Therefore, Fernando, thank you for coming and you have the floor because this far-right thing is also being raised here, right?

Fernando Vallespín:

Good morning to everyone. I'd like to thank first of all the organisers for having invited me. It's always marvellous to come back to Barcelona. It really is, for us who live in the middle of a country that's barren and dry, you know, to see the sea, it's always perfect. And also because of the subject, I think, although here are Italian friends, we'll probably have to have the last, the most interesting intervention, you know, the last word – not the last word, so. Okay, I'll try to be very schematic. First, I think populism, it has a very easy concept. I think it's very simple. It's a very simple phenomenon if we try to define it. But what is incredibly complicated is explaining why populism has had such a renewal in the last decade.

So that's the big mystery. The big mystery is not what is populism, but why populism now. So, and I think this is the main question that we would have to answer today, here in this seminar, right? So, I'll try to be very brief presenting what I and most academics that deal with these issues consider to be populism, and then I'll try to present some of the features of the Spanish case. And

then I'll try also to put it in relation with the why. Okay? Why did they appear? Because I think this is the best way of being able to establish comparisons then with other cases. Okay. What is populism very simply? I would say that populism is not an ideology.

If it were an ideology, it wouldn't be possible to speak of leftist populism and rightist populism. I think it's more a way of doing politics, a particular way of doing politics, which has a lot to do with political communication with, demagoguery, with rhetorics, and which is based on certain basic principles which are, I would say first, the political field is split into two – us and them. We, the populist, represent, or supposedly represent, the real people; and them, who are basically the elites. But, you know, this seems to be simple, but then, in the end, once we analyse one party or one movement after the other, we realise it's not that simple in the end, neither. Okay? So, the second idea is there is almost an existential antagonism between us and them.

So, it's practically impossible that we may coexist. Either we win or they will win in the end, and then we'll have problems. And the third point, and this, from my point of view, is one of the basic points, if not the most important point regarding populist politics, which is the element of moralising or moralisation. So, it's not just that there's a difference between us and them, but, you know, this split is connected to another split, which is the split regarding good and bad. We are the good guys, so we are the ones who are morally superior. And they, them, are, you know, the corrupted ones, the ones that only think about themselves, the ones that don't have an attachment to the country, the ones who follow their own interest. We just follow the interest of our people. And here is the term on which populism is of course based.

And then there's another element, which I think is crucial but, you know, it's complicated. And it's that they don't share the idea of the existence of countervailing powers – separation of powers, you know, autonomy of the judiciary and, you know, all those elements that belong to the liberal conception of democracy, which, as you know, the main point for the liberal conception of democracy is, how can we control power? How can we control those in power? Whereas for populists, the majority ought to be capable of doing whatever they want, precisely because that majority has a moral value, as I said before. So, populism is against restrictions, formal restrictions of power. We have seen it in Poland, we have seen it in Hungary, you know, we have seen it – at least they tried to do it.

I mean, Trump tried to do it in United States, How to restrict the independence of the judiciary. This is the main struggle. And the second point is they are not pluralistic. They're not pluralistic. This, I mean, so in this, and I don't see this underlined as much as it should be. This has a direct connection with the idea of representation. The liberal idea of representation implies that there are a lot of diverse interests that compete among them in order to get seats and therefore to be capable of fighting for them within parliament, following certain rules. Whereas their idea of representation is radically different. I'll give you an example. I haven't seen the poster by Le Pen in these last French presidential elections, but in the former ones, there was something which was marvellous because it was somehow the best representation of what populism means, this idea of, you know, political representation. You could see a huge French flag and in front of it, Marine Le Pen, who was seated, dressed in a blue suit, white blouse and red neckerchief.

So, she somehow represented France. But the best thing was, you know, what was underneath. There was a message which said, "votex la France". It didn't say "vote for le Front National," no, no, no. It said, if you vote for me, you vote for France. So, this is the idea that they tried to represent the whole, not particular interests. And I think this is decisive, because when they speak, you know, the performance, what they present is because we represent the whole, those that we consider to be non-people – the elites, but also, but also migrants – they're somehow out of our policies. So, this is the important thing. The liberal idea is, the main point is to integrate the pluralism and the diversity of a certain population and incorporate them into parliament, whereas the populist idea is to push them out.

So, we are the only ones really are capable of representing the people. This is exactly the representation that we find in the title page of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, you know, the giant. Can you remember? Do you remember the picture? Well, the giant which has small hats within, so that he encompasses the whole of the people. It's no coincidence that Hugo Chávez put in fashion for other populist leaders to be dressed in the flag of Venezuela, just like Maduro, which is art, right? It's very artistic. So, can you imagine, I don't know, Macron being dressed in a French flag, or Schröder in the German flag, and so on and so forth? Well, but they do it.

And Chávez used to say, "soy pueblo, I'm people. I am the people. I represent the people." So, what I try to incorporate into the discussion is that there is a clear break with the ordinary conception of representation that we're familiar

with in liberal systems. Okay, let me go quickly to the Spanish case. I think there were, in the beginning, supposedly, two populist parties. On the one hand we had Podemos, which was supposed to be leftist populism, and on the other hand we had – and we have – Vox. You know, I'm talking in the past because my thesis is that Podemos is no longer a populist party. It has turned slowly, has converted itself into a leftist party. So, and here is an extremely interesting question: how come? Why did they do it?

And I think this has a lot to do with the difficulty that old populist parties have when they have to be incorporated into a parliamentary system. I think populism was designed and is extremely dangerous in presidential systems. And it's easy to understand because the president is elected by the people, directly. Whereas in parliamentary systems, the prime minister or the president of government is elected by parliament, not directly by the people, but by other deputies; by a party, if it has the absolute majority in parliament, or by a coalition of parties. So, the prime minister or, for instance, Pedro Sánchez or the president of a government cannot say, "I am people, I am the people." No, you can say, "I represent the parliament, which represents the people." But Donald Trump, or Jair Bolsonaro, or Le Pen, in the case that she would've won the French presidential elections, could have said, "I represent the people," because they would have been elected directly by the people.

And I think this is, this is quite important because look at the main message of populist parties – "we represent the real people." But when they sit physically in a parliament, you see that they have at most 20%, they occupy 20% of the seats. So how can you keep on saying that you are the one that represents the people? And so, who are representing the rest, also the people? So therefore, the message breaks down slowly. And I think this is quite interesting, and I think Podemos, because they have very clever people. They soon realised that the populist discourse couldn't work. Because they were forced to be constantly having to answer to other political groups. And so, they couldn't simply base the rhetoric on a sole message, which is, we are the good ones and the others are not.

So, in that sense, I think it's important to see that. And so, but Vox is something different. Vox is a national populist party, as you know, but it could be interesting to see what provoked the appearance of both groups. In the case of Podemos, it has a lot to do with, first, the economic crisis. I think in both cases, you know, the economic crisis was the catalyst. The economic crisis,

but second, I think a crisis of representation. So, the Spanish bi-party system, or semi-bi-party system that we had was in, I mean, could last no longer. So, and the crisis created a reaction against the political class as a whole. And so, Podemos, in a way, presented themselves as the only alternative for an already sick political system.

Whereas in the case of Vox, what provoked the success of Vox was not just the economic crisis, but it was the Catalan process of independence. It is a reaction, in this case, not to a malfunctioning of a certain democratic institution, which was the case of Podemos, but it is a primary reaction of radical Spanish nationalism. And this is important to see because many people tend to put the blame on Podemos for being xenophobic, which they are, for being, you know, for sustaining an old fashioned morality, a conservative morality, which they have. But don't forget that the point, you know, that the reason for which almost 16% – 13 to 16% – of the Spanish citizens voted for Podemos had to do with the Catalan process of independence, right?

So, it was mainly a nationalist party. And, you know, that's why we call those parties national populist parties, because of that. So, in the sense that they are the real people, you know, we, the nationals are the real people. That's what we see in other places as well. So, I guess you are quite familiar with some of the details of the evolution of both parties. But what I'll try to underline here is that Vox has become more dangerous because it wasn't just, let's say, a Spanish radical nationalist party, but it has constantly copied the main outlines of Viktor Orbán and other European populist parties.

So, they belong to the same group, the European Parliament. So, in that sense, I mean, there is a process of trying to develop common principles, common strategies, common outlooks on part of all the different national populist parties in Europe. And we can see that in the case of Vox, how they change, you know, the subjects of which they're talking depending on what's going on also in Europe. So, I would finish here, but, if we don't do it, please feel free to ask us why populism? Because I think that's really the most important thing, because the message that I will try to try to transmit is quite simple. I don't fear so much populism as I do our incapability of solving the reasons for which populism has achieved this protagonism nowadays. Populism is a symptom, it's a reaction that there was something which wasn't working well in our political systems, in our economic systems, in our cultural and world views in most of the advanced European and American democracies. Thank you.

Anna Balletbò:

Thank you, Fernando. I'm going to give the floor to Michael Gehler.

(...)

He will give you the surprise after, but I'll just pass over. He has been a professor in universities in Germany, several ones, and then also in Austria, where he has also been in Salzburg, in Rostock. He's worked in many places, but mainly in Hildesheim. He's still a professor in history, contemporary history, but I'll let him give you the surprise that will contradict what I have said.

Michael Gehler:

So again, many thanks for the invitation. The reason why I can be here on the day of the celebration of the German unification, that's the 3rd of October, is very simple: I'm from Austria. I'm an Austrian citizen, but I'm working and teaching in Germany. Historian, as I said. I was born in 1962, that was the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, you know, but I didn't remember that. I grew up very close to the German border in the northern part of Bavaria. It's Franconia, it's Upper Franconia. And I realised the German division, and I think when talking about the special case of Germany – populism, xenophobic tendencies – we have to keep in mind that Germany is a special case concerning populism. I will tell you why. If you look back to the 20th century, we had six Germanies, you know. We had first the emperor, Wilhelm II, the Kaiserreich, then we had the Weimar Republic, followed by the so-called Third Reich.

Then we had divided Germany, the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. And then, in the end, the Berlin Republic of today. So, the Germans discovered six different regimes, government systems. And when looking at the case of Germany, we should keep in mind, first of all that we had a two-statehood Germany from 1949 to 1990. "Bonn is not Weimar" was the message of the so-called Basic Law from May 1949. And there's a very famous quote in the preamble of that document: "human dignity is inviolable". It mentioned – that's in German. And the consequence is a special asylum regulation. The Article 16A of the so-called Basic Law, the Grundgesetz, guarantees political-persecuted persons a basic individual right to asylum. So, it's a clear expression of Germany's will to fulfil its historical and humanitarian obligation and responsibility to accept refugees. The other

German state, the GDR, was founded on, let's say, anti-fascism as a motive for the founding of the Communist East German state, and in the Constitution from October 1949, the sentence of October 1949, there's no clear asylum regulation. And in the GDR workers came from other countries, especially Communist-oriented countries – Angola, Cuba, Mozambique – but they were separated from the East German population. So, there was no real multi-ethnic, no real multicultural experience and socialisations by the East German GDR citizens. That's very important to understand why today the question of xenophobic tendencies, of populism, has another significance in the eastern parts of Germany than in the West.

So, we had different xenophobic tendencies, let's say. So, don't forget the flight and expulsion of Germans from the East to the West. For example, German-Polish people, people of German-Polish origin, they were called in the West Polakken, you know, and the book by Andreas Kossert was titled “Cold, Cold Homeland”. They were not really welcome when they came, so-called Germans from the eastern regions, eastern parts of the former German Reich. And then the Turkish so-called guest workers – they were called guest workers, sometimes they were also called foreign workers, like those people of forced labour during the war time – they were recruited by an agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and Turkey in '61. And they were welcomed at this time of labour shortage. But then there was a stop in 1973 due to the economic crisis, which started at the end of the 1960s, and the rising unemployment.

And this is the time where the NPD, the so-called National Democratic Party of Germany started. The GDR tried to use the so-called Tamils refugees from Sri Lanka, from Ceylon, from East Berlin to West Berlin in order to destabilise West Berlin. And this caused a kind of refugee debate also in West Germany. So, the GDR used refugees as a kind of weapon. But we should then come to Germany after unification, you know, the Berlin Republic. We have some really ugly events there to observe, riots against asylum seekers in East Germany. So, in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in '92, also riots and attacks against foreigners, especially against the homes of those of Turkish origin and asylum seekers in West Germany, in Mölln and in Solingen in '92, '93. And I think a further tendency of xenophobic tendencies have to be observed in the years 2015 and 2016.

First we had a welcome culture, but this fades in spring 2016, and the Alter-

native for Germany party, Alternative für Deutschland – we are responsible for Germany, this is the title of this party – rises from 4 to 5% to over 10%. I will just very shortly go to different parties we had that would skip the level of the European Parliament. What are the characters of populism? I think my speaker before said it to you. Strengths and weaknesses of populism also. This is clear and definitions are also clear. We can focus on that in a discussion. But I will show you the Nationaldemokratische Partei, the NPD, was founded in 1964. Then it's also important to mention the Republikaner, the Republican Party, founded in 1983. I think the first-mentioned parties were not really significant, were not really important, but Alternative for Germany is a new dimension concerning right-wing national populist party in Germany.

The first was a socialist Reichspartei. So, the Sozialistische Reichspartei was founded in 1949. This party was banned by the Federal Constitutional Court in 1952, so it is not allowed to exist. Also, the Communist Party, then the German Reichspartei, a right-wing extremist party, which finished in '65. We had also the so-called NPD, the National Democratic Party of Germany. It was interesting in 1969 when the Bundestag elections were held. This party, the NPD, narrowly missed entering the Bundestag with 4.3% of the vote. So, the hurdle is 5%. It was very close. At this time, we had the social democratic coalition headed by Willy Brandt, thanks to the fact that this NPD could not enter the Bundestag because of only 4.3%. Then the Republikaner I mentioned, founded in '83 in Munich by former CSU members.

So, the Bavarian Christian Social Union Party had people who were not satisfied with the main party line, and they founded the Republikaner. They had small successes in '89, but they lost in '94 on the level of the European Parliament, as well as on the state level and the provincial parliaments. The, the DVU is also a further party, a right-wing nationalist populist party by Gerhard Frei - the DVU. But I think, in the end, without big success, they had to fusion, to have a merger with the NPD, but without big success. I think what I said is the most important thing is the Alternative für Deutschland, with Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel. This party was founded in 2013, part right-wing populist, part far-right party. Originally very EU-sceptical.

Then a split-off took place to an economic-liberal wing under Bernd Lucke. Then a trend to the right under Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen, and then the Bundestag elections. Also, the resignation of Party leader Frauke Petru. You see there are different splits, resignations in this year by Jörg Meuthen,

the party chair. He said, “this party, the AfD, has totalitarian traits.” I quote again Jörg Meuthen, the former party chair of the AfD, “no longer standing on the ground of the free democratic basic order.” You have always had power struggles within the party. We have one really right-wing extremist party chairman from Thuringia, it's Björn Höckle. And, you see, they also have links to the Pegida movement, the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the Occident, and also to the Identitarian movement, the Identitäre. And it's interesting to know that the AfD is the only party represented in the German Bundestag with environmental and climate policies denying climate change.

So, you see gains in 2013 also due to the mobilisation of former non-voters, swing voters from CDU-FDP, from the liberals, from the Christian Democrats and, to a lesser extent, also from the Social Democrats and from The Left party, Die Linke. It's interesting that at the Bundestag elections in 2017, 12.6%, at the time the third-strongest force in the Bundestag are represented in all the parliaments of the provinces of the Bundesländer. And also, interesting to note is that there is an observation by various state authorities for the protection of the Constitution since 2018. Interesting enough that up to 2020, there were losses in every federal state when the elections took place. Since 2021, in the federal elections, the AfD has only been the fifth-strongest party, and since 2022, there was a decision made by the Cologne Administrative Court on a complaint by the AfD.

The AfD was classified, the entire party, by the Federal Office of the Protection of the Constitution, the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, as I quote, “suspected right-wing extremist case under observation.” So, you see, we have ups and downs, from Lucke to Petry to Gauland. We have actually a trend from April, spring this year, concerning North Rhine-Westphalia, at that time, 8% for the Liberals, 30 for the Social Democrats, 31 for the Christian Democrats, and seven for the AfD. So, there is a certain tendency of decline. You can summarise this party Alternative for Germany as first an anti-Euro currency party, then an anti-refugee party in 2015 and so on, and then also an anti-Coronavirus politics party. So, we have opportunism, occasional populism, no consistent party program. It's actually not a decisive political factor at the federal level.

So, 79 members of the Bundestag out of 736, but always represented in the Bundesländer parliaments. We have a clear East-West difference. I would like to underline that in East Germany, the AfD has the character of a kind of

people's party. And this could be a point, I think, for further discussion. What can I say concerning the grand coalition constituted by the Christian Democrat Union and the Christian Social Union and the Social Democratic party? I think this grand coalition is a guaranteed factor for keeping and preserving the so-called red line. But the other side of the medal is also a kind of radicalisation of the margins of the spring, of the fringes. What about Angela Merkel? Angela Merkel, I think, can be described and can be analysed as a kind of anti-populist politician, but a secret populist through strongly watching the polls.

Strongly poll-oriented policies. We can discuss this for 2011, and the Fukushima catastrophe started, and the so-called refugee crisis concerning 2015. So, you see here concerning the line presenting the question of level of content with Merkel, there is a clear decline when the consequences of the so-called refugee crisis could be observed. And she had no real idea how to stop this decline. Concerning the actual traffic light Ampelkoalition constituted by Social Democrats, Greens and the Freedom Democratic party, I would argue this is a guarantee factor also for an anti-populist policy, and the Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, I think is neither a practicing nor a secret populist like Angela Merkel. The role played by the media, I think we should make clear that it's another situation. As in Italy, we still have quality mass, quality printed media in Germany, but Bild, like the Kronenzeitung in Austria, is a kind of, let's say, populist acting print media.

I'll skip modern and new populism, and I'll also skip the question, what did populist parties actually want and what have they achieved so far? And the reasons, we can discuss this later on. I would like to come to visions. I was asked to give you some ideas, some theses, some points on visions. My conclusion. Up to now, I think populism is a surface phenomenon. It's a result of divided societies, over-taxed political systems and disunited EU member states. Countermeasures, we should be more on the offensive – I mean the so-called established parties – attack and offensive, not to let them argue or not to let them agitate, not to let them mobilise. Also, we need a kind of willingness to openly discuss taboo topics, and the development of argumentative and communicative counter strategies. And also, it's important to demonstrate problem-solving competence by the governing parties.

And then also it's important to mobilise the indifferent and passive voters. So, practical politics with problem-solving capacity. Let's come to some perspectives with a view to visions. First, I said, I'm a historian. German political culture

has so far been relatively resistant to xenophobia and populism, and the party structure is more or less, I would argue, stable. No previous government coalitions from 1949, with the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany, till today, have included extremist or populist parties, never. With the exception of the AfD, all other extremist and populist parties – the Sozialistische Reichspartei, the Deutsche Reichspartei, the NPD, the DVU and the Republikaner – at the federal level were short-term phenomena without sustainability, a flash in the pan. We say in German Eintagsfliege. There was and is a red line in leading political culture and media with regard to antisemitism, xenophobia and racism. Media, I would like to say, I exclude Bild-Zeitung.

That's a special case. So, fifth, public statements à la Jörg Haider, Jean-Marie and Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni or Matteo Salvini would be immediately associated with a political resignation in Germany. If one leading politician would argue like Meloni, like Salvini, like Le Pen, he had to leave the office. That's for clear. That's for very clear. And this is demonstrating the red line, which I mentioned before. So, my last points. Sometimes exaggerated political correctness, which is very highly developed in Germany, which can be politically counterproductive, sometimes also applies in Germany. Germany remains the key country for avoiding governmental populism as a guide for political communication and practice in Europe. That was what Anna said in her introduction, it's really the key issue. What happens in Germany has a lot of consequences. However, Germany is already, as you know, surrounded by increasing populist political cultures.

Take France, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary and Italy. So, if the German political leadership moves away from its anti-populist line, it can be become very problematic and even threatening for the existence of the European Union. The last thing is looking a bit to the autumn and the winter. Despite the energy crisis, inflation and price increases with possible social upheavals, the German government, I think, will stick to its anti-populist European cores. It has hardly any other alternative in order to remain credible. And this is for historical responsibility. I thank you very much for paying attention.

Anna Balletbò:

Well now we have our last speaker of this table, which is Piero Ignazi. As I have told you, Piero Ignazi, it's not the first time that he is a speaker at one of

our programmes. And I think I got, as we sent a mail with information on the seminar, we got a lot of people saying that it's a very good moment to bring an Italian now to Barcelona. So now he's going to demonstrate that it is a very good moment because he's very good. He has several – all of them have a lot of books. They have some honours, they have some condecorations, everything – but Piero has *Il triangolo rotto – Partiti, società e Stato*, which in some ways is like the announcement of what was coming. Which year was this written?

(...)

Well, you can see where it's going, he already saw where all this was going, well we also have Fernando who has the famous six volumes that are immediately mentioned, six volumes on the history of political theory. In other words, it's your dictionary if you want to graduate in that subject, and then, of course, Michel, I didn't want to read the whole profile because he has several honours that don't fit on the pages. In other words, they will all have done a lot of things well. Piero, you have the floor.

Piero Ignazi (01:48:36):

Thank you very much. That's quite easy. It's quite easy. Thank you very much for your invitation. I was saying that it is quite easy and difficult at the same time to speak now, because first of all, the two speakers, for me, present such a very clear and compassionate analysis of populism in general and populist right-wing, extreme right-wing tendencies in Germany. And therefore, many of the topics I could have discussed with you are already well described and analysed, especially in general terms about populism. Nothing to say, actually. I think we really share the same understanding of the phenomenon in practically the same words. And in fact, I really appreciated the introduction of the moral aspect of populism, of populism as an intrinsic moral aspect that leads populists to despise the others, not just to fight the others, all the other components of the society, of the politics, of the political system, but that rather to despise them, to consider them absolutely unfit, not for the ideas, but for what they are.

And they are corrupted. And in fact, I would stress that the origin of populism, in my analysis, in my own perception, lies in the French Revolution, and especially in the Jacobin and Robespierrian, in particular, interpretation, where vir-

tue was at the top of the concerns of the French Revolution. So, the revolution should lead virtue to a system that was corrupted by monarchy, by the church, by this and this and that, and so on. And so, that moral aspect is very important because when you introduce this aspect, you enter a new field where it is not competition around different visions, among different issues, interests, but there is something that is not allowed to be in that field, excluded by itself. So that's a danger, the real danger of the populist approach. I don't know if populism is still as relevant as it was a couple of years ago all over Europe. I think that maybe this kind of way is declining, but that might be another topic, another question to be discussed.

I've been asked to deal with what the situation is now in Italy and what the perspectives are on the Italian political system after the general election we had a week ago. So, it's a very fresh interpretation on what happen. Let me start, however, by projecting these two very simple slides. And the first one, okay, comes from an international analysis carried out by Ipsos, and thanks to Ipsos for the possibility to present it publicly, that involves more than 40 countries all over the world. And if you look at these items, all these arguments refer to anti-establishment attitudes. The economy is rigid to the advance and the rich and the powerful, the traditional party politicians don't care about people like me.

To fix the country we need a strong leader, willing to break the rules, willing to break the rules. The country needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and the powerful, and experts in the country do not understand the lives of people like me. The numbers you see are the percentage of Italians who agree with these statements. It's not only the percentages themselves that are important, even if they are quite scary in a way. But the point is that the international mean is below this value in all these items. Italian public opinion has a stronger anti-establishment attitude vis-à-vis all the other public opinions all over the world in terms as a mean. So, this is the context that we describe: Italy as a democracy with 70 years of uninterrupted democratic rule, with institutions that more or less work. But nevertheless, the public opinion is quite turned toward this anti-establishment and slightly liberal views.

And if we go to another passage, I think I should... Okay, this is focused only on Italy. There are no international comparisons. So, and... then analysts prepare two sorts of scales. I don't present it in detail, I mean the scale of conventionalism, how you follow the mainstream. How you follow the gene-

ral discourse and you follow what has been considered good, traditional and so on. And the other one is much more scientifically loaded, let's say – the authoritarian – and refers to the authoritarian syndrome that was developed in the late forties by Adorno and his colleagues in the famous book *The Authoritarian Personality*, a very important book, very solidly grounded, even if, as has been discussed after, some refinement would be necessary in order to present it again in the contemporary world. As you see, it's not...

On this issue, such a majority of people, all conventionalists, they want to have their traditions, traditional customs, in a way, preserved. But when you ask them, "what do you think about the traditional family, man and woman; that is, are you in favour of this kind of traditional family? Or would you accept also other kinds of family that is gay marriage and so on?" Then the majority is in favour and is also not in favour of the traditional family. So, they accept different ways of organising the family. And on the role of the Church – such an important institution in the history of Italy and Italian politics for so long – well, only 30% would agree that the Church should have a more important role than today. Also, the Pope has played a role in this, in distancing the Church from current affairs.

And that is the result also of a rampant secularisation in Italy in the last 30 years. And also, authoritarianism is a sort of black and white picture, especially when it does not reach the majority. And just to remember, to take a very famous example, in the presidential election in France in 1981, Socialist candidate Mitterrand, when he was interviewed in the last week, just before the first ballot of the presidential election, was asked what his eventual government would do with the death penalty that still existed in France at the time. In 1981, there was still the death penalty in France. It was not used for many, many years, but it was still there. And irrespective of the polls, they were in favour of the death penalty in France at the time. Mitterrand said, astonishing, of course, the journalist, that "it would be one of my first initiatives. My first initiative would be to abolish the death penalty." To remind you that the death penalty is always underlying – underneath, if you want – but underneath the political discourse in every county, Well, in Italy, the death penalty no longer has the majority, it has been for long a majority of consensus. But there is – look at this data – an advocacy of a strong leader, but without limiting freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is considered of utmost importance for 78% of the people.

So, the landscape, the attitudinal landscape in Italy is, I mean, it is like the Tuscany hills. So, with ups and downs, ups and downs. You see some dark aspect, but you also see some lights, as this one, of the concern for the freedom of expression. So, this is the premise, the context. Now, let's go to Italy, Fratelli d'Italia. The last elections, as you may know, we may remember, in Italy we had an election with the competition of many parties divided into fronts: the leftist front, where at least three main people competed; and a right-wing front, with another three main parties. Three main parties competed on the left and three main parties competed on the right. The three parties of the right got 44.6, if I remember, 44% of the vote. A bit more than 44% of the vote – not the majority of the voters.

However, this right-wing front got more than 55% of the seats because of an electoral system which favoured the parties that made an alliance rather than the parties that competed separately. And on the left-wing front, actually, the three main parties plus other minor parties competed separately, and that's the reason they were defeated. So, first point, there is not an overall majority of people in Italy which supports the right-wing front and the incoming right-wing government. A large minority but not a majority. If the left-wing – according to some simulation – if the left-wing front had competed together, of course, we never know if the voters would've chosen this front if they were united, maybe they abstain or something, we cannot say of course. But this analysis shows that the left-wing front would've had a very small majority. Nevertheless, the question is that the right wing won, and it won with a percentage, 44%, which is the lowest percentage the right-wing parties have got in Italy since 1994.

Again, this is not a sort of snowfall of right-wing sentiment, but we should keep it in mind. Since 1994, when the coalition became a bi-polar coalition between left and right, with many parties on the right and many parties on the left, basically three parties on the right – Berlusconi's Forza Italia; the Northern League, now the League, led by Umberto Bossi at the time, and now by Matteo Salvini; and the third party that was the offspring of the neo-fascist party that had existed in Italy since 1946, and was transformed for the election in 1994 – it changed its name basically, not much more than that change of name and maquillage, a very superficial maquillage – and took the name of National Alliance. It was led by a leader of the former, the former neo-fascist party, who was called Gianfranco Fini. These three parties always competed together, and most of the time they also had a tiny conservative Catholic party, but very small – 4%, I'd imagine, four or five, never more than 5%. I mean, a very tiny

Catholic conservative party.

But these three parties were the pillars of the right-wing front. And again, the right-wing front always got more than the 44% that the right-wing front got in the last elections. So again, this right-wing front had a main party, a dominant party, that was Berlusconi's Forza Italia. It's been, since 1994, the dominant party of the right. Then there was, for two elections, a change in the party system because the Five Star Movement of Beppe Grillo came out. Suddenly, it erupted in the political arena and it got, in 2013, 25% of the vote, and in 2018, 33% of the vote, the first party. So, for those two elections, we had the change between the traditional bi-power competition between left and right, with a tri-power competition between left, right and the Five Star Movement, which declared to be beyond left and right. We are not right, we are not left, we are beyond left or right.

In fact, the voters came either from the front, the right-wing front or from the left-wing front. So, it collected voters from everywhere. And that's the reason for its success in 2013 and especially in 2018. Then now we are again into the bi-power competition, because the Five Star Movement moved to the left, basically greatly reduced its size and went to the left. So, the bi-power competition between left and right is still there. The only remarkable difference in the right-wing front is the main party of that front because Berlusconi is no longer the leader.

Now it is the minor party of the right-wing front, and the major party, the dominant party of this front, is this party, Brothers of Italy. Where does this party come from? Well, this party was the offspring of the former neo post-fascist National Alliance. It was very, very weak when it was reconstructed in the ashes of National Alliance. It had only 3% at the last election, 4.6% in 2018, only 4.6%, but now more than 25%. So, it grew in a dramatic way. How come? How is that possible? Very simple, because the other two parties, the League of Salvini and Berlusconi collapsed, and to the voters in the right-wing front it doesn't make any difference, they don't have any problem with shifting from one party to another. And in fact, the post-voting analysis demonstrated that 40% of the previous voters of Forza Italia and 40% of the previous voters of the League of Salvini went to Fratelli d'Italia. It was just a change of cards within the same front, with a shift toward the more radical party. That's the point. When a party has its inspiration from God, the motherland and family, the programme is already there.

A programme of traditionalism, of nationalism, opposition to the European Union, even if now in government this is probably something we change because opposition to the European Union, because national identity should be preserved, defended, juxtaposed to the other countries. Not to integrate with the other countries, but to juxtapose to the other countries in a confrontational aptitude. That is their inspiration. And in all the realm of civil rights, the position is false: it is not liberal, it is quite restrictive, in principle, in their programme. So, nativism, authoritarianism, anti-Europeanism, anti-EU are all elements of this party. That doesn't mean that all these elements will be translated into governmental action, because probably, on one side, with some concern by the other, especially by Forza Italia, and on the other side, because the leader of this party, Giorgia Meloni, is quite attentive not to be attacked by all the other European countries for an anti-Europe attitude.

Probably we see a government that is quite cautious in the first steps not to touch any sensitive questions, especially on abortion, where the attack against abortion by Giorgia Meloni herself and other people of the party has raised a lot of attention. And in fact, she declared that “no, no, no, no, we'll just try to implement, in a better way, the present law on abortion.” Let us see. I don't want to go into depth on this aspect, but I have some doubts whether this implementation will go in favour of women, or not. I can go over and over on the topic, of course, but unfortunately I was too long giving the, let's say, the background of Italian public opinion sentiment. But if there is a discussion and any questions, I'd be happy to answer. Thank you for your attention.

Reactions and debate between all attenders

Anna Balletbò:

Okay, let's start with the second round of interventions. We have two speakers over here: Mr Joaquim Llimona, former Director of International Affairs and International Corporation of the Catalan Government, as well as the former Director of International Affairs of the municipality of Barcelona, and currently a private consultant and partner in a law firm; and then to his left, Mrs Lurdes Vidal, who you all know, who's, in addition to a professor over here at Blanquerna, she's the Director of the Mediterranean Affairs area at the European Institute of the Mediterranean. As we agreed with Lourdes and with Joaquim, both of them would react to the interventions by the distinguished experts this morning, and then we would open, if we have time, a round of questions and answers, to which we would also take on board, of course, the specialists who have just preceded us in the previous round of interventions. And they can respond via the microphone that we have over here. So, Joaquim, do you want to start?

Joaquim Llimona:

Thank you. Let me start by telling you a story. I was, like 10 years ago on a meeting of the international liberal, and we were analysing the situation in Venezuela. By that time, the head of state was Chávez, and there was a kind of recognition that the appearance of phenomena like Chávez, in part, were a consequence of the fact that the traditional politics – and in that case, they were talking about liberal parties in Latin America – did not concern, did not worry about the real problems of the population. Maybe this is one of the reasons why this kind of political options appear. I'm not justifying populism at all, but I'm trying to understand. Maybe that's a bit different in Europe, where the level of welfare is quite higher than in Venezuela. But regarding what Fernando Vallespín has said, it's relatively easy to tell what populism is, but it's difficult to understand why it appears. Maybe that that's one of the reasons. I

will try to stress just one point.

Everything which has been said has been very, very interesting. For instance, in Germany, that kind of self-imposed limit to the most horrible aspects of populism – because of its history, of course – and in Italy, where the percentage of anti-systemic people is higher than in other European Union countries. But I have to read an article of the Treaty on European Union, which is Article Two, which contains the values of the European Union. It says, “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.” That's the very heart of the philosophy of the European Union.

And let me go back to the past. The European Union was founded after the Second World War, and somehow it was a result – not a result, a reaction – against the horrors of the war. Europe in the forties, in the early fifties was a continent that was physically destroyed and morally devastated because of what had happened in Europe, and particularly the horrors of the Third Reich regime. In that scenario, two things could have happened. The first one is to the strength of populism. Germans are the enemies, of France and from Belgium and so on, so we have to keep fighting. It's interesting and worrying what is happening now in Bosnia with the elections, its first republic. The fight against the ethnic groups in Bosnia is not finished yet. Europe reacted on the contrary way, and it was not easy.

If you read Jean Monnet, the book of his life, he said how difficult it was to make the Germans and French agree, to make those people forget the horrors of the war. But the reaction, and Europe was built upon a kind of great agreement, opposing populism, a great agreement of trying – because populism, and I think Judith, who has said so, populism is rejecting the opinions of the other. There is us and the rest, and the rest are always wrong, we are always right. Well, Europe, the philosophy of the European Union, which has, of course, problems and mistakes and sometimes is wrong, is precisely to put together the points we have in common. And that's why it is particularly worrying that in our day populism is in government.

Some forms of populism are in government. Two plus one governments in the European Union. And the results of populous parties, usually of extreme-right

parties, are extremely worrying. What's happening in France, for instance. And my theory is that fortunately the National Front is not governing France because Macron did not represent the traditional political parties. Macron is not a populist, but somehow, he's someone out of the traditional political party system. And so, he was able to build a discourse which was not at all populist, because he's attached to European Union values, but apart from traditional political values. So, it is, for me, key and fundamental that we keep attached and that we strongly defend the values upon which the European Union is based.

Sometimes it's not easy, because it's easier to say, "well the origin of your problem is that migrant who has come from abroad and is taking your job." This is the easiest solution. The only advantage we have is that, as I was commenting to you, populism in general, intellectually has no basis. So, at the end, the truth prevails. And populist political parties make strong promises, which they cannot, of course, accomplish. And sometimes it's good that they cannot accomplish. Thank you very much. I don't know if I have spoken for more than five minutes.

Lurdes Vidal:

Okay. Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be in this seminar again. I'm going to just make a reflection on some ideas that came to my mind when I was listening to our previous speakers. I think that the most important thing is to ask ourselves, and I think it has already been said before, why? Why there is this rise of populism? And in Spanish, and I'm coming from a very strong Catholic tradition, they say that you need to do "examen de conciencia, dolor de los pecados y propósito de enmienda". I'm sorry for the translators. That that might be something like first listing your sins, then feeling sorry for your sins, and then having the real proposal to amend your life. Okay? So, in that way, we need to try to find out why there is this rise of populism, besides the poll factors, so the elements that... they are very proficient.

The populist parties are very proficient to master, to attract people. Why there are certain push factors, why there are certain elements that lead people to embrace these ideas. And the gap between the rulers and the ruled is something that needs to be very much taken into account, not only the, what we said, the crisis of democracy, but also how much of a strong mistrust there

is regarding political elites, regarding the media. This is also what feeds, in a certain way, this idea of populous narratives. I mean, when you mistrust any kind of media, mistrust any kind of argumentation that comes in the mainstream media, then you start to search for explanations in other ways. And this is why, for example, these last years, we have seen how conspiracy theories have become so popular and so widespread.

Or, for example, why now we are seeing, not only the vaccinal negationism in vaccination, or in the virus, but for example, how the idea, the issue of the sabotage of the North Sea pipeline is being questioned. Okay? And everything is possible. So, in this kind of a scenario it's very difficult to fight against these narratives when we have this very strong mistrust. Then, also, we have to understand how extremism in a certain way, like populism, is reshaping itself. And it's not far right, jihadism, white supremacism. It's not trends that are all absolutely separated. There's this idea of fringe extremism, the idea that the fringes feed themselves, feed each other. In that way, for example, the more far-right discourses, the more Islamophobic the discourses are, the more capacity to recruit jihadi movements will have.

And on the contrary, if jihadi movements are very successful in carrying out terrorist attacks, far-right movements with a xenophobic, Islamophobic narrative will recruit more people, will find more followers. Also, the overlapping narratives. All these kinds of narratives are very much binary. So, it's either us or them. It's either the West or Islam. It's either the good or the evil. So, this ignores a huge range of shades of grey that explain, might explain reality much better. For example, also, we have been very obsessed with trying to combat, to refrain certain forms of extremism while ignoring, in the last decade, the rise of far-right movements in Europe. In 2014, while in Europe we were absolutely focused on combating the spread of violent extreme Islamist ideas, in Europe there was a flow of far-right foreign fighters going to fight in Ukrainian, in the Donbas, on both sides, on the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian.

These were foreign fighters, never considered as foreign terrorist fighters. On the contrary, all the flow of people fighting in the Middle East, even if they were with ISIS or with the Kurdish movement, or whatever, were considered foreign terrorist fighters. This, I mean, was somehow showing a double standard in approaching this kind of extremism. And this is true even at an official level, there is much more reluctance to treat far-right movements as a threat than other kind of extremist movements. For example, at that time, we did not pay

attention. Now we find how far-right movements in, for example, the Western Balkans are embracing notions of Islamic brotherhood, are embracing notions of essentialist identity of orthodox Christianity. All these kinds of overlapping narratives. Okay, that's my five minutes.

I can finish my argument. So, the idea is not only how, I mean understanding them and understanding that in this reshaping of extremism and populist narratives, we need to adapt, okay? But the idea also is how to phase them, okay? How to counter these ideas. For example, also, it's very interesting in the case of Islamophobia – which is one of the elements of xenophobia, racism, Islamophobia is one of the central core elements of far-right movements – but take into account, for example, that there are other narratives that are convergent, that are shared by diverse extremist movements. For example, anti-gender agendas, anti-LGBT rights, this idea that it's either us or them. This sort of binary reflection of the world is very much popular among populist movements and also among extremist movements.

So, the idea is how to avoid the dehumanisation of the other, which is what allows violent extremism and what allows hate speech to be addressed to someone else, but also how to deal with this normalisation of certain discourses. The normalization – we have to take into account that there is a responsibility between, in the political arena, in the media arena, and in public opinion. These are three fields that are very much interconnected. In terms of communicating, there are communicating vessels that connect the three of them. As long as we normalise certain speeches, certain assertions that we might say they are not politically correct, but I'm being authentic, I am being real. Okay? This idea of the real person, this is something that we need to be very much aware of, because by naturalising, by normalising this kind of a speech, even for political purposes, certain political parties might be tempted to adopt certain racist or xenophobic arguments. That is extremely dangerous because that normalises it not only in the political sphere, but also in the public opinion. And I will leave it here.

Anna Balletbò:

Thank you, Lurdes. While we're waiting for the arrival of the Secretary of State, I would like to invite our students to put any, if they have a question, to Lurdes, Joaquim or the speakers, the experts who intervened this morning.

Student in audience:

Thank you. All right. So, my question is there's been a lot of well-educated countries, specifically in the Nordic countries, like in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and stuff like that, that have very strong educational systems, but you still find the prevalence of racism, far-right extremism and stuff like that within these countries. So, it's obviously, education is no longer like an easy solution – quote, unquote, easy solution – to these kinds of problems that we're talking about. It's multifaceted with like culture and other stuff. So how can you combat these types of discourses and rising of these movements if it's not just like educational and social welfare, if it's also a lot more universal in people's lives?

(...)

Fernando Vallespín:

Yeah. Maybe I would have to answer because I think the most interesting thing regarding this new wave of populist movements is what's happening in Scandinavia, right? Because they are the best-functioning democracies in the world. I mean, so they're on top in terms of quality of democracy. And still, in a country such as Sweden, a national populist party has obtained 20% of the vote, which is just six points below what Meloni has achieved in Italy. So, what's going on? And I think it's important not to mix between the different contexts. I think the problem in Sweden might have more to do with the fact that, well, all these last years, probably since 2015, you know, with the big asylum-seeking wave, well, the country has been overcrowded by not just migrants, but also by refugees.

And so, it's a reaction, you know, a defensive reaction on part of a population that starts thinking that they're losing their identity by incorporating so many people from other parts, whereas other countries in Europe don't do it, or don't do it as much as they are doing. So, it's a mix between maybe the breakdown of an idea of fairness. If we all would do the same, then we wouldn't have reasons for complaining. And on the other hand, of course, there's always racial minorities, and I'd like to put this in relation with the Ukraine war and refugees coming from Ukraine into Poland without any problem, any other problems, as compared to those Afghans, you know, that tried the same. There were very few of them, you know, just a couple of years before, right? So, there are

elements of racism and I think we should say it out clearly, you know, that we live in societies that are still racist. That's not just, you know... But still this is far more complicated because what we see is that populist parties are being mainly voted in rural areas, whereas in big cities, they don't have any success at all.

Look at the case of Paris. Le Pen doesn't exist in Paris, practically, as compared to other parts of France. How come when, if you go to Paris, you realise it's absolutely multicultural. So, if you take the metro and it's filled with, I would say even a –majority of non-white races. So, this probably has to do with getting accustomed to diversity. And you know and searching for a way of life where diversity is the norm. The same happens in London, for instance. Or in other large European cities. Whereas if you go to the country, absolutely different. So, too many, too many factors. Then my question to you both would be – not an answer, I know, but I'm trying to approach an answer. I do have an answer, which it's, you know, if we think about the why, I think there's absolutely a key issue, which is the changes in political communication that have been introduced by social media, right?

Because social media... First, simplification. There is either total agreement or total refusal. And it's unavoidable, you know, because that kind of communication also takes place within different communities on the net who fight each other, right? So, and it also explains what Lurdes referred to as the conspiracy theories. I mean, conspiracy theories wouldn't exist, you know, in that measure, outside of the internet. I mean, so in that sense, I think we've lost a lot of our capacity for analysis when, well, the traditional media, and particularly, you know, the newspapers, traditional newspapers disappeared or practically disappeared in favour of first, radio, then television, and now, internet and social media. And I think we cannot talk about populism without mentioning social media. Just imagine what it means that a populist leader can communicate directly to each and every one of their followers. That was the success of someone like Donald Trump. So, I mean, through his account on Twitter, he could reach everyone. So, suddenly there's a message from Donald Trump that arrives you at two o'clock in the morning, and you think he has sent it to me personally. And that's, I mean, you cannot fight that. I mean, it's difficult to fight. And in that sense, it's... I'm sorry, I'm being too long.

Piero Ignazi:

Very briefly. You know, that to answer the question more directly, you should look at the sociodemographic connotation of the voters for these parties beyond the fact as you, the student, has underlined that this country has a high level of quality, high level of education, and so on and so on. But if you look at the voters of this party, you see that there are people with a low level of education, and they're in the low level of social stratification, and they are especially concentrated not in the largest cities, but in the smaller cities. So, all these demographic elements are common. Every kind of party of this family. So don't look only at the general, then if you look more particularly to these kinds of features of voters, and then the question is why these supporters are no longer voting for left-wing parties, but for right-wing parties. And that's a very big question.

Lurdes Vidal:

It's very interesting because obviously education, it needs to be there. Social welfare. Roger Albinyana said it at the beginning, okay? When there is competition for resources, there will always be a scapegoat. And in this case, the normal scapegoat is the migrant. So, it's education, it's social welfare, but also having clear in mind what the concept means. What is radical? What is being a radical? What is being an extremist? What is hate speech? What is not hate speech? What is freedom of expression? These are blurred concepts that make our task as experts, as researchers, but also from the legal point of view, very difficult to fight against certain phenomena. Then the strategies we need to take into account, for example, we think of social media's impact, particularly on young people. But there is a very strong component of voters of far-right movements among older people.

If we look at the research, we will see that those that buy more fake news are the older generations rather than the young generations, while far-right movements have a strong impact on certain social media like TikTok, okay? So, we also need to adapt to the new channels and the strategies, to the new methods that they have in order to spread certain narratives. But take into account that all these conversions at the end, because against the migrants, you will have the white supremacists that will be racist. You will have the far-right that will say that we are being invaded and we are losing our identity, but you

have the insults, okay, saying that they do not have a relationship because there is a migrant coming and stealing the women from them. So, in that sense, at the end, there's always a scapegoat and there's always a narrative built around this scapegoat, okay? And this is where we also have to adapt these strategies to fight these kinds of narratives.

Anna Balletbò:

Okay. Thank you all for your contributions. And then we go to the closing ceremony and with the Secretary of State.

Closing

Pau Solanilla:

Okay. So, we are arriving at the closing of this seminar, this interesting seminar. And we have with us Mr Pascual Navarro, who is the Secretary of State for the European Union affairs of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the Spanish Government. And we would like to thank him for the effort to join us in this seminar. Also, for the support for the seminars, thanks to a small financial support, we managed to bring some European experts from Italy, from Germany. So, Mr Secretary, this seminar is already a tradition in Barcelona. It's a seminar that is already the 15th edition. So, we are really – the institutions and the organisations that are behind it, with Anna Terrón and Professor Umut, and from the Fundació Rafael Campalans – we are activists militants in reflecting, in thinking how to combat populism and radicalism and xenophobia in Europe.

We consider it important to bring closer decision-makers into universities like Blanquerna, and we would like you to have the opportunity to share with us and with the students a little bit, what is said, what is thought, what is done in the European institutions regarding this issue. And if you also agree, maybe after your intervention, to have the opportunity to open the floor to a few questions, a few comments from the students, because we think it's interesting to interact with them. I had the honour to work personally with Pascual Navarro a few years ago, preparing the Spanish presidency in 2010, and now he has the responsibility to prepare, to coordinate, to lead this Spanish presidency in 2023. And we thank you for being here and the floor is yours.

Pascual Navarro:

Thank you very much, Pau, as you said, we worked together, we had that honor. Intensely, they were three very intense years, and it is a pleasure for me to work with you again, the presidency is approaching and you are now here

at the Campalans Foundation with which the secretariat has always had an excellent relationship and it is a pleasure. Well, before saying a few words in English that I've been asked to do, I can't resist reading, like a good Murcian, a few words in Catalan.

For me it is a pleasure to participate in a seminar with such illustrious speakers and which touches on a topical issue such as populism, xenophobia, conflict and communication as threats to democracy in Europe. It is clear that in recent years we are increasingly aware in the EU of threats to our values and principles. Perhaps, because of the conviction in our soft power, because of the security in our unique integration model in the world, because of the attractive power of the European market and even because of the success of the response to the COVID and POST-COVID we had believed, wrongly, until relatively recently, that we had definitively overcome the ghosts of the past, that the EU was already an impregnable watchtower for hate speech and skepticism about our common future. I will dedicate the first part of my speech to what I believe the EU can do and to a large extent is already doing to combat the new threats to democratic values. In a second part, I cannot fail to refer to the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2023.

As I said earlier, in recent years, there has been a growing awareness in the EU of the threats to our values and principles. This is by no means a unique phenomenon to Europe. The world seems to be divided along a growing ideological divide between democracy and authoritarianism. What is important is that the Russian aggression in Ukraine has made us reflect even more on the threats to our democracy. Russia's aggression in Ukraine is undoubtedly a frontal attack to the values of freedom, pluralism and welfare that inspire the European project for the EU. Let us not forget that it is a community of values. They are enshrined in Article Two of the Treaty of the European Union which, as you will recall, states that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. From the very beginning, democracy has inspired the European project. Outside this concept, it is not possible to understand the European Union from the very beginnings of the European project, the community treaties proposed, the democratic system, and the strong states based on the rule of law.

I think that you have, during this seminar, thinking about what is at stake

during this strong crisis of the war in Ukraine. It is not only the construction of Europe, but the values of Europe and the construction of Europe based on those values. That is why the answer of everybody in Europe is this show of unity, and even countries that are far from the conflict, like Spain, have joined this effort. We are in exceptional times. First the pandemic, and now they war in Ukraine. Those crises are pushing the foundations of the European Union to the limit. Precisely in the face of these two crises, the European Union has shown itself at its best when it acts in unity, with unity.

In the face of the pandemic, in just a few months, we agreed on such substantial steps as the Next Generation instrument, or the joint purchase and equitable distribution of vaccines. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Union took just days to take the appropriate measures to support Ukraine and to face the difficulties, the economic difficulties that we are suffering in our countries. Now, the EU has shown resolution and unity, but let's face it, we have to admit that this crisis is going to last. Most probably it is going to be a long war. And the important thing, and this is the core of this seminar, as I have understood from the words of Pau, these consequences of war have a direct impact on the lives of Europeans, who after two years of pandemic now have to face a scenario of energy insecurity, inflation and other economic problems like supply change.

And here is where we feel that there is a danger to our democracy, obviously, because it is well known how populism uses economic and social difficulties to its advantage. It is inevitable to recall the darkest moments of recent European history. The crises of '29 of the last century. So, it is obvious that what is at stake, how populist movements are using this crisis to undermine not just the policies of the government – this is case in our country or in many of the countries. You have already seen it in different elections, those in recent months – but they are undermining the basic values, principles and policies of the European Union, for example. It's not just that they're using the crisis to undermine a antitaliban government, for example; they're using the crisis to undermine the policies of climate change, fighting against climate change.

They are saying – this is obviously ideological – that it's old fashioned and it doesn't respond to the real demands of the people, which are to get energy at lower prices with paramount importance. So, there's no question of other policies. And from that, it's the beginning of a very strong ideological discussion in Europe. What are we doing in Europe to face this, this ideological struggle?

This is an ideological struggle. Particularly important in the European Parliament, but also in every single Member State, first, is to reaffirm the social pact. In the face of these difficulties we need, once again, more Europe. It is clear, and we invite you to imagine what would we do, where we would be without the joint European solutions to the crises, to the Covid crisis, or to the economic crisis. Where would we be without Next Generation, for example?

It's very difficult to understand single European Member State solutions, obviously. As I said, the social pact is extremely important because it's just one sentence: no one is left behind in the European Union, which is extremely important, that no one is left behind. Liberal or extreme liberal or populist solutions that, okay – no taxation, that's a joke – are the proper solutions. The European Union, the mainstream of the European Union is not there, obviously, for these simple solutions, because the important thing is cohesion – social cohesion and territorial cohesion. The second solution is to defend democratic values. It's the rule of law, I think it's a huge discussion in Europe about rule of law. The last discussion is about the conditionality mechanism. We are in a big ideological discussion in the European Parliament about whether we should go on with the procedures against Hungary, or should we wait and see a little bit like we did with Poland. Okay, that's an important discussion. The second one is what we are going to do with the framework mechanism that we have. And the third discussion is, are we going to push for a definite solution of Article Seven?

As I said the landscape has changed with the recent elections. I hope there is no more in the landscape, because with Sweden and Italy it's enough. We have an imbalanced position now that was pretty much in favour of supporting the values, and now we have a different landscape. And this struggle is particularly pertinent. And, as I said, the main groups, not only the socialist groups, but the main groups in the European Parliament are very much in favour of keeping the rule of law and all the instruments for the rule of law that we have now at the European Union. The third solution, I think that you also mentioned a little bit before, is to fight against disinformation. This is one of the main discussions that we have in the European Union. We are seeing, you know, an increasingly, since the beginning of the Russian aggression, that there is a war of information and it is crucial for defending our values and our global situation in the world.

There is an answer. The Commission has presented, you know, a communi-

cation of the European Democracy Action Plan, which has several initiatives and proposals on the table about the integrity of elections, you know, how it can be easy to intervene in elections; strengthening media freedom and pluralism, which is a problem that we have in some countries of the European Union; and most precisely, combating disinformation. So those are files that are on the table of the General Affairs Council. I am responsible for that General Affairs Council, and I can assure you that they are difficult debates. The second point that I wanted to mention briefly is our presidency of the Council in the second half of next year. You know that it is a very peculiar presidency because it's going to be the last complete one of this legislative period, after our – Roger has already listened to me saying that – it's the end of the present European Parliament.

In March it finishes, and then there are the elections in May 2024. And then we have the main task of finishing this legislative package, this agenda of the Presidential Commission, you know, the green, digital and migration issues and everything. We will try to make a stress in our questions relating with citizen identity, cohesion, social cohesion, of course, climate and energy is going to be important. Of course, everything concerning equality, inclusiveness, and in the global area particularly we're putting a stress on Latin America and cyber-neighbourhoods, which are two issues also here. Particularly where we are trying to advance the cyber-neighbourhood with meetings here in Barcelona, for example. The question of rule of law is going to be high on the agenda.

As I said, we will have to take some decisions during our presidency about the future of the mechanisms that we have with the rule of law. I am pretty much worried about that because it would be up to me as President of the Council to do that. But, like my minister said, and I'll finish with that, in politics we cannot choose the circumstances one faces, but one can choose the attitude one adopts in the face of them. We are strongly committed to the European project. We believe in the European project. We believe that in the European project we have the solutions to the main problems we have. And that is exactly what is at a stake here. The solutions that populist groups or ideas are presenting are not only directed at undermining a certain government but are directed at strongly undermining the European construction.

And this is very clear in the debates in the European Parliament. Perhaps you are not so fully aware of that, but the stake is very much higher than what it seems looking from here, from Barcelona, from Spain. So, thank you very

much for coming to this seminar. It's important for us. We have helped the organisation of this seminar and we will look for the conclusions, the contributions. Thank you very much for you here and everybody on the stream. And as I said, it's the beginning of a contribution to us. It's extremely important. What are we going to do? It's our responsibility. What are we going to do during our presidency in all of these areas? And okay. Any good idea is very much welcome. Thank you very much.

Pau Solanilla:

Okay, so thank you very much, Mr State Secretary. He has a few minutes for us, so if any of you want to ask a question.

(...)

Woman in audience:

Well then if you said that, allow me to give an answer to you from a woman who was precisely a proud member of the extremist far-right. And he she got over that, and then she explained all the help she got. But then the interviewer said to her, "and what keeps you from going back?" Because she was saying how hard it was. And she said, "well, I listened to my son, because he said to me, 'mom, embrace complexity'." And it's what also Professor Vice-Dean said. And the question comes when you said integrity, and if we look for integrity, it means ethical and also it means undiminished. And my question then goes also from when she was saying that there is a risk of the normalisation of certain discourses. By the way, I love the... anyway, and so what is the risk then of the normalisation of the degree of abstentionism we are having in elections? Because maybe as a society, we need to ask what kind of a democracy do we want? What is the thing that we want to agree? And I think that abstentionism plays a big role when political marketing people have to design the speech that politicians are going to talk. And then also it was very relevant, the echo chambers and everything. So, we are really in a very important moment for democracy. But my question would be this, like, how about them normalising abstentionism? What is the risk?

Valeria Bello:

Thank you very much. Hello, I'm Valeria Bello, associate professor at Blanquerna. We are developing at the moment in the research line on migration our research with the PhD students about the way the far-right parties and populist parties present an ontological security question to the European Union. So how do far-right parties and populist parties use even a form of Europeanism among them in Europe? So, for example, we've currently seen Giorgia Meloni shaking hands with, not physically, but clearly pointing to Vox as her partner in Spain. So, this kind of Europeanism of the far right in Europe, how does it present a threat to the ontological security of the EU? So, the values that the European Union is based upon. Thank you very much for your intervention. It was an honour to be here today.

Pascual Navarro:

Okay. Thanks a lot. As I said I haven't come here just for you to listen to me, but on the contrary. I am very much interested in your debate and your questions, so I appreciate it very much. The two questions, which are, in a nutshell, the two real ones. The other day, the Monday after the victory of Meloni in Italy, they said, "how is it going to be in the European Union?" And I said, "okay, we have to work", but really it is going to be the same. Now I have to work. And for the third time, the journalist insisted and I said, "Okay, ¿qué quieres que te diga? Lo vamos a tener muy crudo". No, we have a problem. We have a problem and let's fix it. Things are not going to be the same. As I said before, we had a certain balance in the European Union where the populist governments empower a minority, and very precise – there are only two, and the rest, some trends, but not minorities. Now, okay, with Italy and Sweden, and let's see how it will develop in other countries. It's not a minority. It's an important part of the European constitution, which is supporting those countries, those parties.

Two questions. The first, how can we encourage more participation in the elections? I'm going to answer from the European point of view, because obviously the real problem is that most of the citizens, European citizens – Spain is the same – they don't realise how much is at stake in Brussels and in Strasbourg, you know. In Brussels and Strasbourg, 60% of the legislation that your country applies is approved there. An important part of the budget is

decided there. So, most of the policies you apply here at a national, regional and local level are decided in Brussels. So, it is extremely important that the participation, at least the participation in what is going on in Brussels and the participation in the elections, so, the equilibrium in the European Parliament is extremely important because decisions are going to be taken by this equilibrium. You know, Pau has been working for many years with the European Parliament and knows perfectly well also that if suddenly you have you know... so first, in the very beginning, there was a coalition between the popular and the socialist and the liberal.

It's possible to have a different coalition in the future, and they will make a strong disequilibrium in the European policies if we do not participate, and if we let those parties, extreme-right parties, take over the mainstream of the European Parliament, that's not very good. That was for 2024. But it's extremely important to make the population aware, our citizens, of what is at stake in the participation of the European Parliament. Usually participation is very low, but I think that this time there is much more at stake than usual. And, well, it is true that most of those parties – and they always say, “we are not against the European project, obviously.” Meloni, for example, has said that. “We don't want to get out at all from the European Union.

The European Union is just a zero-sum game of budget. So, I don't want to get out of the funds and I don't want to become alone in the world in front of an aggression from outside.” But having said that, they don't participate in what is the European Union. The European Union is not just a budget to be distributed, it's the market. The internal market is the core of the European Union. But it's not just that. It's a kind of market. It's a market which has a cohesion. As I said before, no one is left behind. It's a certain construction of the market. It's not just any market. It's not a liberal market. So, they are pulling aside from this idea of Europe. Values are not important. Citizens are not important. Social issues are not important.

The Swiss has have already said that they are not going to participate anymore in the policies, in the social policies. This is, in my opinion, a very bad development. And I think, what can we do? Keep going like, like that? So, keep thinking about that, expressing that, trying to convince the people and just not let them be so outspoken. And as I said, we cannot validate them because as they said in their speeches, “we are not leaving the European Union.” It's not enough. They have to share what is the core of the European Union. That's how we understand it.

Anna Balletbò:

Thank you very much. We are very grateful to all the panellists, and also to the attendees. And we very much hope to meet you in 12 months. And I mean hope is the last thing we can lose. So, let's hope that by that time some of the present situations will be in a little better moment. I think that the problems will keep on, not only the question of Ukraine and Russia, etc. There is a change of international position meaning that there is a change of hegemony. So, the hegemony now, it never happens that many countries are putting in question the hegemony of the United States. And this is our side, but the population is not on that side. I mean most of the population, because now we are 7.7 billion people.

So, these people at least, you know, if you count China, India, etc., this is the majority. And they want to be in the festival. They want to be at the table and they want their place at the table. So, they put in question many of the rules that we established, and they were – Wilson, before the UN, President Wilson – and we established in a moment when the situation was very different. And of course, China was out of the papers. So, I think we are now in a troubling moment that may take at least 15 years because in international things, 15 years is nothing.

(...)

I mean, I will be very glad you if you say that I am not right, and you are right. That will be the best. But things in international issues take time because it's not a question of the politics, it's a question of the people. The people must feel – as say as you said, we cannot watch everybody. We cannot take care of everybody. But we must establish the sort of rules so that everybody has the same rights and the same opportunities. And this now is very difficult because this means that in some way that we have to go a little bit down, because others must go a little bit up. And this will take a lot of time. Let's see. But I hope to see you next year, that's for sure. And I'm sure I will not be in the elevator for 45 minutes.



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