

## Криза неолібералізму у Східній Європі та світі

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### Modern Democracy and Populism: related opponents

The article considers populism as an offspring of and at the same time, a danger to democracy; briefly outlines its historical evolution and the main features of its radically manipulative, modern form. The author considers the roots of contemporary populist waves, its connection with the crisis of liberal democracy and changes in the political spectrum, formulates suggestions on how to alleviate the danger of populists' offensives on democratic institutions.

*Keywords: democracy, promise of democracy, imperfections of real democracy, liberal democracy crisis, post-democracy, populism, definitions of populism, populism as political strategy, two historical types of populism, contemporary populism's basic traits.*

У статті розглядається популізм як породження і водночас загроза демократії, коротко викладена його історична еволюція та основні риси його нинішньої радикально-маніпулятивної форми. Автор порушує питання про корені сучасної хвилі популізму, її зв'язок із кризою ліберальної демократії та змінами у політичному спектрі, формулює деякі пропозиції щодо того, як зменшити загрози від наступу популістів на демократичні інститути.

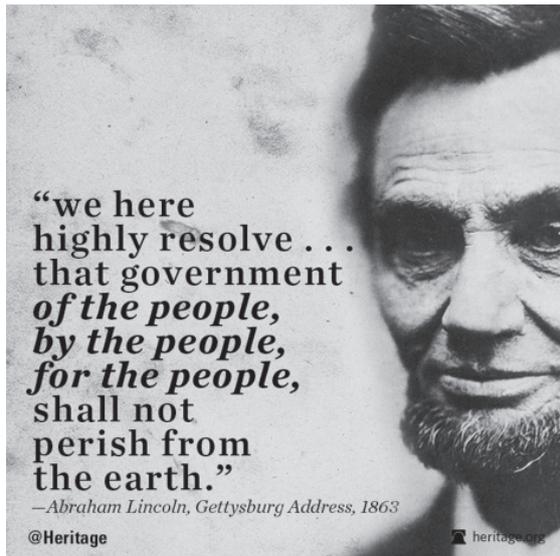
*Ключові слова: демократія, обіцянка демократії, недосконалість реальної демократії, криза ліберальної демократії, пост-демократія, популізм, визначення популізму, популізм як політична стратегія, два історичні типи популізму, основні риси сучасного популізму.*

#### Historical background of populism in democracies

Democracy is about the rule of the people, though its historical forms differ with regard to the measure and mechanisms of achieving this ultimate goal. In

ancient times democracy meant direct expression of the people's will. The people participated in the adoption of important policy decisions through shouting, drawing lots or voting. The main role in that process was assigned to demagogues – the speakers, able to

rile up a crowd and direct it to a common decision. Such a procedure often led to the common people, including the most underprivileged part of the free population, making incompetent, irrationally motivated decisions. It is no surprise that Plato and Aristotle qualified the democracy of their time as an incorrect (distorted) form of government. According to classical philosophers' views, a much better system (actually, the best) was polity, ruled by the more competent and still numerous middle stratum, a kind of "golden mean"<sup>1</sup>, that was very rare in practice.



Formation and further progress of representative democracy in modern times were also associated with the search for this golden mean: achieving the maximum expression of the people's will without losing the proper level of competence and rationality of government. That is not an easy job, however. Since early democracy was predominantly an elitist system, which had many defenders in theory and practice, thinkers and social groups dissatisfied with its quality looked for countervailing mechanisms capable of making the voice of the people audible and restricting the arbitrary possibilities of elites.

In America, the most egalitarian of the liberal states in the XIX century<sup>2</sup> but having only two major political parties, both elitist, the claim for "real democracy" was connected with the populist and "third party" movements during the XIX–XX centuries and up to the pres-

<sup>1</sup> Golden mean – the ideal moderate position between two extremes.

<sup>2</sup> The classical portrait of American egalitarianism may be found in Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" (See: Alexis de Tocqueville. Democracy in America. Penguin Classics. 2003. 992 p. or a shortened version: Alexis de Tocqueville. Democracy in America: Abridged with an Introduction by Michael Kammen. 2008. 208 p. In Ukrainian the book was published in 1999: Алексіс де Токвіль. Про демократію в Америці. – К.: Всесвіт, 1999. – 587 с.

ent day<sup>3</sup>. In Europe with its more class-differentiated and hierarchical society, for a long time the role of the major countervailing power was played by social-democratic and other leftist parties. It is the "political swing" – alternating center-right and left-wing political forces coming to power, the political mechanism of searching for a "golden mean", which made it possible to achieve a certain measure of social consensus.

According to S. M. Lipset populism, understood as "political principles that support the rights and powers of the common people in their resistance to the privileged elite"<sup>4</sup>, became a component of the American creed – along with egalitarianism, individualism, freedom of enterprise and traditionalism. This early populist disposition treats populism as "support for the concerns of ordinary people"<sup>5</sup>.

As a set of political principles and a significant movement, populism was born in the USA and existed there in different forms, the detailed analysis of which goes beyond the scope of this article. But what is important for us here is to stress that populism is an off-spring of democratic society and that in its early forms it was primarily connected with the honest intentions of politicians or other public figures (like public intellectuals or the intelligentsia, as we say in Ukraine and Russia) to help ordinary people, albeit proposing sometimes inadequate, simplistic methods. This sort of populism reflected the early (immature) understanding of democracy by unsophisticated masses and their grass-roots leaders.

<sup>3</sup> In the first quarter of the XX century there were the Greenback (Labor) Party of the 1870-80s, the Populist Party of the 1890s, the Progressive Party of 1912 (led by Theodore Roosevelt), the Progressive Party of 1924 (led by Robert M. La Follette). During and after the Great Depression, the character of populism radically changed. In the 1930s it became more ultra-right and demagogic, as Huey Long's "Share Our Wealth" movement (1933–35), Union party (1936) and Charles Coughlin's activities have shown. After the WWII the populist surge became extremely diverse and heterogeneous and deserves special analysis – from George Wallace to Donald Trump. The main peculiarity of Donald Trump's strategy was based on the lessons of his predecessors. They unsuccessfully tried to win the presidential elections with populist promises, as nominees of the third parties or as self-nominating candidates. Unlike them, Trump managed to penetrate one of the major parties and become its nominee. Doing this, "an outrageous billionaire managed to seize and reflect the mood of an impoverished hard worker from the American outback, managed to become their own for millions of such voters" (citation from В. Фесенко. Заметки о 14-м форуме «Ялтинской европейской стратегии» // Українська правда. – 18 вересня 2017. – URL: <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/fesenko/59bf6c0bbba17/>).

<sup>4</sup> The American's Creed. – URL: <http://www.spangledwithstars.com/national-symbols/american-creed.htm>. (Attended Oct.1, 2017)

<sup>5</sup> Cowley, Matthew. Populism Doesn't Mean What You Think. – URL: <https://matcow7.wordpress.com/2017/02/03/populism-doesnt-mean-what-you-think/>. (Posted on February 3, 2017; Attended Oct.1, 2017).

Over time everything changes. Understanding of democratic rules becomes more complex and refined while populism turned into a less genuine and more instrumental political phenomenon. The direction of change ranges from giving support to ordinary people to getting the support of ordinary people (mostly, during the election). The Cambridge dictionary encapsulated this modification in the definition of populism as “political ideas and activities that are intended to *get* the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want <sup>1</sup>”.

Thus, instead of supporting ordinary people with the aim of changing their lives for the better, contemporary populists appeal to the masses with the purpose of recruiting them just for the sake of coming to power. The rhetoric of politicians does not always coincide with their real intentions. The Oxford Dictionary defines populism as “the quality of appealing to or being aimed at ordinary people <sup>2</sup>”. “Appealing to” is different from “being aimed at”, but it is difficult, sometimes, to separate one kind of political behavior from another.

### Contemporary populist surge and its features

Contemporary populism has a variety of forms. Some of them are ideologically colored, others – are not. But despite the broad range and multiplicity of the phenomenon, it is important to distinguish two types of populism rooted in history. They exploit the same anti-elitist slogans but differ in their essence: people-oriented populism (sincere, really populist, growing out of an honest desire to help the people, *narodnytskiy*) and demagogical populism (technologically manipulative, using the dissatisfaction of the unsophisticated masses to gain power, which can then be used for completely different purposes). For certain reasons (they will be examined below) the second type of populism dominates in present-day politics. More than that, the term ‘populism’ is used now to characterize this particular *manipulative and deceitful political strategy of obtaining power*, which is an end in itself. The strategic aim of contemporary populists is mobilization of all dissatisfied social groups and individuals and using their support for gaining or retaining power. Their tactic is based on different ideological clichés (if needed) and maneuvers, including a supply of knowingly unfulfilled promises that are different from their real intentions and motives.

<sup>1</sup> See: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/populism>.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/populism>.

After the triumph of this trend, democracy and populism became related rivals. Although derived of a democratic outlook and behavior, populism, in many cases, paves the way to authoritarian rule.

There are many large and small, scholarly and journalists’ publications about contemporary populism in English <sup>3</sup>, Ukrainian and Russian <sup>4</sup>, which outline its main features. They may be summarized as follows:

- appeal to ordinary people, to their will and interests;
- pay particular attention to the most dissatisfied groups; pick up their demands and intercept their slogans, reflect their political stamps and stereotypes in the pre-electoral rhetoric;
- stress the opposition of ordinary people to elites, underscore their alienation, stimulate hostility;
- avoid formulation of serious programs and proposals based on rational argumentation, operate with “simplistic judgments based on widely-shared prejudices” (M. Minakov);
- support and incite radical sentiments and attitudes;
- appeal to the emotions of the crowd;
- subordinate all performances and actions to one goal: to please voters, using political technologies suitable for this purpose;
- speculations over promises that knowingly cannot be fulfilled;
- broad use of manipulative technologies, including outright lies about opponents and deception about their capabilities.

<sup>3</sup> Populism: its meanings and national characteristics / edited by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner. – London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969; Canovan, Margaret. Populism. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt P, 1981; Müller, Jan-Werner. What Is Populism? University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016; Cowley, Matthew. Populism Doesn't Mean What You Think. – URL: <https://matcow7.wordpress.com/2017/02/03/populism-doesnt-mean-what-you-think/> (February 3, 2017; attended Oct. 1, 2017); Aslanidis, Paris. Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective. Political studies: 2015. – <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/MEDIA279/Populism/is%20populism%20an%20ideology.pdf> (attended Oct. 5, 2017); Stanley, Ben. The thin ideology of populism // Journal of Political Ideologies. – 2008. – Vol. 13. – Issue 1. – Pp. 95–110 and oth.

<sup>4</sup> Баранов Н. А. Эволюция взглядов на популизм в современной политической науке // Viperson/Виперсон. – 12.12.2001. – URL: <http://viperson.ru/wind.php?ID=486463> (attended Oct. 5, 2017); Кіянка І. Б. Популізм в історії та сучасності: ідеологічні течії, рухи та політичні ідеології. – Львів: Простір-М. 2016.; Мінаков М., Палій О. Популізм в українській політиці // Радіо Свобода. – 12.08.2010. – URL: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/2126311.htm> (attended Oct. 1, 2017); Прядко Т. П. Формування популізму як суспільно-політичного руху. – URL: <http://naukajournal.org/index.php/naukajournal/article/download/74/88> (attended Oct. 1, 2017); Популізм вбиває // Тиждень. – 28.01.2016 (a special issue). – URL: <http://tyzhden.ua/Subject/157079> (attended Oct. 1, 2017) and many publications in other issues of this magazine.

All these characteristics are important for defining contemporary populism.

Often populism is said to be a specific political game: a way of ‘buying’ votes and preserving power by using a certain manner of making speeches and behavior by political leaders’, as well as the electorate’s reaction to this conduct. Mykhailo Minakov proposes to define populism as “a specific extra political logic shared by political leaders and voters”. From an epistemological point of view, he says populism is “logic, operating with simplistic judgments, based on widely-shared prejudices that make political institutes excessive”<sup>1</sup>. O. Kramar states, that “populism traditionally means rhetoric that appeals to electorally significant social groups’ dissatisfaction with their lives, fears and hopes, groups who regard their interests as antagonistic to those of the elite”<sup>2</sup>.

It is true, that populism is a two-sided phenomenon that presupposes the presence of not only the subject (certain political actors who are prone to using these technologies), but also the object (the recipients, certain segments of people, ready to accept them and respond to them positively). But what side in this interaction is more responsible for the growing acceptance of populists’ games?

In my view, there are and always will be plenty of people who turn to demagoguery and manipulation to gain power. But the problem lies in *the extent* to which their efforts find a response among the common people they turn to. Today the number of the latter increases rapidly and universally. And this is the problem: why has the positive response of the masses to the populists’ appeals became so overwhelming? Why does a superficial view of serious problems dominate today and help insincere demagogues attain high political positions even in old democracies with seemingly experienced voters?

On the surface it really looks like a cultural (or, even, epistemological) problem, a problem of perception and understanding. And I do not reject educational and cultural-psychological causes of this phenomenon, especially those that appear as a result of the growing role of mediators in political communication and their poisonous influence on voters. The information era, with its broad mass media manipulative possibilities, wide public consumerism which also extends to politics, creates fertile conditions for the successful activities of all kinds of demagogues. But on the other hand, the current rise of populism

throughout the world cannot be explained only by these technological and cultural factors. The causes of this populism surge are more complex and include many social-economic and political factors.

### Some imperfections of liberal democracy and its current crisis

My intention is to emphasize the unsatisfactory state of *liberal democracy*: not only of neo-liberal ideology and policies, but also of the old, often obsolete and to date dysfunctional institutional mechanisms of representative democracy in general. Their present condition is often characterized by such terms as “*crisis of liberal democracy*”, “*deficit of democracy*” or as a stage of “*post-democracy*”. These characteristics point to the deeper roots and more fundamental causes of the rapid spread of populism in the West, as well as in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe.

What is at the core of this crisis?

Colin Crouch, the inventor of the term “post-democracy” has demonstrated that contemporary “global capitalism” has produced a self-referential political class more concerned with forging links with wealthy business interests than with pursuing political programs which meet the concerns of ordinary people. Almost exclusively concerned with the global race for economic growth, political elites tend to turn to neo-liberal concepts which deepen the gap between them and ordinary people<sup>3</sup>.

Meanwhile class politics and mass ideological parties declined because of structural reasons. During recent decades the transition to a new model of public politics took place: from a partisan, ideological, party oriented model to a valence model of so-called “*competent voting*”. The last term means that electoral choices are now based not on ideologies or other traditional bases of political loyalty, but on “people’s judgements of the overall competence of rival political parties”<sup>4</sup>. This task is very difficult in itself, and it became even more complicated because of contemporary mass media’s manipulative possibilities on the one hand, and on the other, by the work of various kinds of consultants, experts and other intermediaries, included in the core staff of most parties.

“Modern politics is in crisis”, says British expert Matthew Taylor. “It turned 100 percent into competition and sports, when all thoughts are about struggle

<sup>1</sup> See: Мінаков М., Палій О. Популізм в українській політиці...

<sup>2</sup> Крамар О. Вирватись із порочного кола [про соціал-популізм в Україні] // Тиждень. – 21.01.2016. – URL: <http://tyzhden.ua/Society/156531> (attended Oct. 1, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> See: Crouch, Colin. *Post-Democracy*. – London: Polity Press, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Stoker, Gerry. *The Rise of Political Disenchantment // New Directions in Political Science. Responding to the Challenges of an Interdependent World*. Edited by Colin Hay. – Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. – P. 60–63.

and victory, not ideas”<sup>1</sup>. It became too easy for parties to promise but very hard for voters to judge, which promise is more reliable. As a result, the time in between elections became periods of general disappointment that created a basis for distrust, further enhanced by media.

To some extent, populism is always present in democratic societies, but it becomes more powerful under certain conditions. Its attractiveness (and aggressiveness) grows quickly during a time of democracy crisis, because it now serves as a surrogate of some important democratic qualities that have been lost in old democracies and not yet acquired by new and weak democratic regimes.

Democracy requires a sense of “OUR Government”. If it is absent, the alienation of ordinary citizens from elite grows. Present-day populism is a consequence of this increasing gap between the promise and reality of democratic society. Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address plainly expressed this promise, saying: “Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth”<sup>2</sup>. Reality is different in different countries. In transitional societies, we have under-developed, immature democracy with a number of pathologies that cause disappointment with moderate politicians, on one hand, and expectations for quick and radical change of the situation with radical populists, on the other. In well-established democracies we have overripe representative democracy which failed to respond in a timely fashion to the information age challenges and the decline of class-oriented, ideological politics. The growing influence of populists here has also become a result and a symptom of the crisis of democracy.

In sum, I would stress three directions of change in the nature of political processes that have produced the present-day surge of populism throughout the world:

- 1) The distancing of political elites from the people in the context of economic globalization and the domination of neoliberal individualistic approaches to social problems;
- 2) The excessive mediation of political space (too many pragmatic, even cynical mediators working between people and political actors; their activity is entirely directed at serving the needs and requests of the latter, not the former);

- 3) The decline of classical political parties (along with an ideologically grounded division of the political spectrum into right-wing and left-wing political forces).

The first and second factors generate distrust, which is amplified by the endless promises of all politicians, looking at politics as a kind of sport and trying to win, rather than to solve problems. They promise more and more and fulfill less and less (because of objective, as well as subjective reasons). As Edward Lucas rightly observes, populists of various suits “proclaim different messages, but they draw their strength from one source: distrust”<sup>3</sup>. Distrust becomes the all-embracing sentiment due to the overly critical position of the media. So, in the eyes of ordinary people, there is no big difference between the established parties, who do not fulfill their promises, and the new actors, who are just beginning to strive for high political positions and make their bold, populist assurances. Moreover, the latter have an advantage because they propose radical solutions to enduring problems.

The third factor – the decline of classical political parties, and especially, the weakening positions of left-wing political forces, enhance the sense of separation between the top and bottom of the social-political ladder. Previously, left-wing parties proceeded from the position of protecting the interests of labor and other working classes. Faith in their commitment to common people’s interests was based on ideological clichés and loyalty to a social class. The political “swing” – the alternate coming to power of political parties opposed to each other, which, effectively or poorly, but nevertheless represented the interests of different social groups and classes – was the mechanism of smoothing the contradictions between the interests of the rulers and the ruled. Now these factors have disappeared or been weakened. As a result, populists potentially may capture all citizens, who are searching for social protections. Finally, disappointed people endorse all antisystem solutions.

### Populism and changes in the political spectrum

Antisystem positions mean that everything has gone wrong and requires radical actions. The radicalization of attitudes and expectations with the simultaneous decline of the role of political ideologies has led to a situation when the horizontal axis of right-

<sup>1</sup> Тейлор Метью: «Сучасна політика перетворилася на спорт, коли всі думки лише про перемогу, а не про ідеї» (Інтерв'ю) // Тиждень. – 1 вересня 2013. – URL: <http://tyzhden.ua/Politics/87620> (attended Oct. 1, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Lincoln. Gettysburg Address. – URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg\\_Address/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg_Address/) (attended Oct. 1, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> On this ground, according to Lucas, antisystem attitudes grow, and they are successfully exploited at present by Putin. See: Едвард Лукас. Популізм у головах // Тиждень. – 11 травня 2016. – URL: <http://tyzhden.ua/Columns/50/164041> (attended Oct. 1, 2017).

wing – left-wing divisions of political forces loses its importance, and is replaced by a vertical division of moderate politicians and radicals (extremists). French political analyst Nicolas Henin rightly observes, that conflict between liberals and populists is now more important than the struggle between the right and the left <sup>1</sup>. In the eyes of common people all *moderate centrists*, collectively called “liberals”, represent the establishment. Thus, “*extreme radicals* (far right, far left or simply populists with the mixture of ideological slogans) have a good chance to present themselves as true defenders of the people (see fig.1).

Alienation and radicalization of ordinary citizens has led to significant changes in the weight of different political spectrum positions. Several decades ago, the confrontation took place on a class-ideological basis between political actors representing the right and the left hemisphere (horizontal dimension). Today the struggle of radicals, embracing anti-system positions against centrists, as representatives of the establishment, has become a decisive alignment (vertical dimension). Furthermore, most of the radicals are populists, that very often seamlessly merge with radical nationalists.

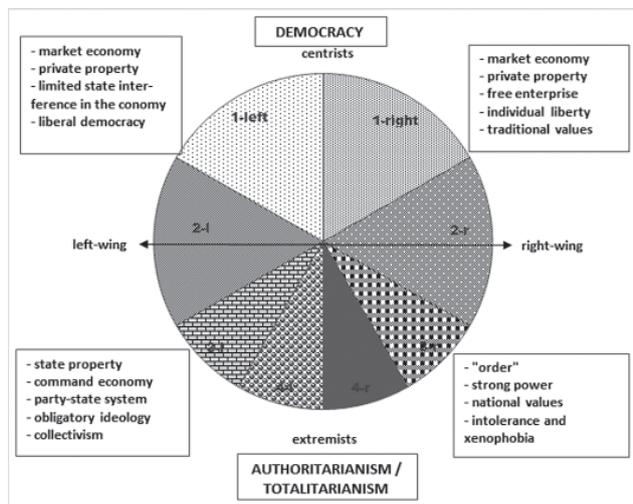


Fig. 1. Political spectrum: its horizontal and vertical divisions and their relative weight

The visible success of present-day populism in many countries is not only a consequence of the radicalization of ordinary citizens in conditions of representative democracy crisis but also a confirmation of the ability of different politicians to catch up with this radicalization. In some cases, present-day populism is

<sup>1</sup> Енен Ніколя: «Конфлікт між лібералами та популістами, на мою думку, значно важливіший, ніж боротьба правих та лівих» (інтерв'ю; Алла Лазарева, Париж) // Тиждень. – 10 листопада 2016. – URL: <http://tyzhden.ua/World/178100/> (attended Oct. 1, 2017).

a substitution of left-wing politics; in others it is a response to neoliberal enthusiasm for economic competition and disregard for the disadvantages of market mechanisms in the realm of distribution and equal opportunities. In any case, populism looks like a consequence of the shift from valuing the horizontal axis to a vertical one in the political game.

The diagram also clarifies why populism is not an ideology. Appealing to ordinary people, populists try to unify them not for or against any political/ideological position along the horizontal dimension of the political spectrum, but attempt to bring them together around their radical, emotionally colored solutions of the most painful problems. Ideology can play an instrumental role or may have no role at all. Everything depends on the issues, which populists emphasize depending on the particular country and the current political situation there.

Some authors such as Cas Mudde and Ben Stanley consider populism a thin ideology (like nationalism), based on the simple idea that democracy must preserve its core feature: government, elected by the people and serving the people <sup>2</sup>). This approach may be acceptable, but only in relation to the early forms of sincere people's movements, but not to contemporary demagogic, manipulative populism.

### Some conclusions and recommendations

From a political science viewpoint, the current form of populism can be understood as a well-grounded political strategy of mass mobilization by antisystem radical politicians under circumstances when ordinary people feel that no other (traditional, solid) political forces deserve their trust and may be considered real defenders of their interests. Such a strategy fits perfectly with the circumstances of crises, economic, political, or both.

This strategy aims to receive the support of all dissatisfied persons and groups to gain or retain political power. It allows the use of different methods and means: honest or dishonest, democratic or nondemocratic, legal or illegal (to the extent that the existing political regime permits). It is accompanied by tactics, able to please the eyes and ears of ordinary, unsophisticated people.

The usual populist methods include non-restrained promises that can hardly be fulfilled under any circumstances and are far from their real intentions and motives (as a result, populism is open to the use of direct or misguided lies). This does not mean, how-

<sup>2</sup> Mudde, Cas. Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. – P. 277–292; Stanley, Ben. The thin ideology of populism // Journal of Political Ideologies. – Vol. 13, Issue 1. – 2008. – P. 95–110.

ever, that every politician, who does not fulfill his or her promises, should be called populist.

Like any other political phenomenon, populism has *positive and negative sides and functions*. It serves as a kind of barometer of the political climate, showing the degrees of dissatisfaction with government policy. The other positive function of populism is attracting attention to the most acute problems and challenges facing society. Populism offers radical, simple, emotionally presented solutions that distract voters from unpleasant realities, help them to overcome distrust and uncertainty. Populism may be regarded as the last resort of the disadvantaged strata, giving them an opportunity to express their frustration.

The negative side of populism, which outweighs all of its positive traits, is connected with demagoguery, deceit, the domination of irrational behavior of different dictators which jeopardizes democratic values and institutions.

Bearing in mind that today's modern worldwide surge of populism is both a symptom and a consequence of the crisis of liberal democracy; I would propose two suggestions for alleviating the dangers of populists' attacks on democracy.

First, the ruling elites, interested in preserving democratic institutions, should take serious steps to reduce the chasm that separates them from the common people. It may be done, first of all, by expanding the scope of citizens' participation in public policy making in forums, which better correspond to the conditions of the information era.

Second, political parties in democratic states should evolve from electoral machines that ensure success for certain individuals into laboratories of joint work of politicians and civil society activists to develop suitable projects for solving pressing social problems.