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POPULISM REPORT



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STATE OF POPULISM IN EUROPE: POPULISTS ON HOLIDAY

The silly season of the summer had a clear impact on the political landscape of Europe, therefore we can't observe huge shifts in the support for populist parties in the third quarter of 2017. The situation is more or less similar to the developments of the second quarter of the year: in the majority of the member states the populist scene is stagnant, but there are a few exceptions, mainly in central Europe. To better understand the processes, this study is analysing not only the events of the last quarter but expand the focus to the entire year.

Ambivalent developments in the West

In western Europe, the picture of populism is mixed: AfD's recovery in Germany is a unanimous sign of headway of non-mainstream powers, but in other countries we can notice the exact opposite. Furthermore, it should be clarified that **the decline of certain populist powers is generally the result of the appropriation of their proposals and rhetoric by establishment powers.**

Regarding Germany, **there was a significant growth in the support for AfD in the last three months**, it almost doubled its voters. At the German federal election, held in mid-September, **Alternative für Deutschland received 13% of the votes and has become the second largest political power of the opposition.** From the beginning of the year until the end of August, the sup-

port for AfD was stagnating between 7-10%, and it has only started to expand in the last two weeks before the election.

The far left Die Linke's popularity didn't change during the summer, but there is a tendency which can be disappointing to its leadership: **in the federal election, the AfD achieved its greatest successes in those eastern regions of the country where traditionally Die Linke had performed outstandingly.**

In Austria, we couldn't detect a huge shift in the support for the FPÖ in the third quarter of the year. After a significant drop in late spring, its support stayed on the same level, **but with its current 27% FPÖ is still the strongest populist party in western Europe.** FPÖ was on a much higher level at the beginning of the year when they were heading the polls, but with Kurz's assumption of the leadership of the party, the ÖVP could retrieve the conservative voters, and they have been waiting the legislative election in a less comfortable position. **The conservative ÖVP successfully adapted to the expectations of right-wing voters with Kurz's strict proposals regarding refugees,** and it has been waiting the election as the most potential winner. Because of the Austrian centre right's refusal to form another grand coalition, **FPÖ has the chance to become the conservatives' partner in government.**

The United Kingdom's only populist party, UKIP is still in bleakness: in the last three months, its support has not changed significantly, and **only 4% of voters would choose Niger Farage's former party.** In the course of 2017, UKIP has lost 10 points in the polls, and the party, which has been ridden by splits, is far away from its political successes of the last few years. **The strengthening of Labour and the hard-Brexit politics of the Tories give only an extremely narrow room for manoeuvre to the far-right party,** and its new leader, former soldier Henry Bolton doesn't seem to be the right politician to give a boost to them.

Populists in Ireland are also not increasing, however, the support for the left-wing Sinn Féin is still considerably high. After reaching record-level support in early spring, **Sinn Féin's actual opinion poll result of 19% made them the strongest opposition party in the country**. On the other side, the Anti-Austerity Alliance–People Before Profit stands at only 2%, which means that they lost 3 points since the beginning of the year.

In Belgium, the support of Flemish Interest dropped 4 points in the summer, and only 8% of Belgians back the nationalist party. In the first half of the year, they were just above 10%, but it should be noted that the political crisis in Catalonia could have a substantial impact on Belgium's political map, **and hence shifts can be expected in the last quarter of the year: Flemings are always paying special attention to Catalonia due to their common objective – declaration of independence -, and a potential political success by the Catalans could strengthen the Flemish Interest**.

In the Netherlands, the aggregate support for populist parties has increased by more than the standard of the margin of error. At the end of September 2017, 23% of Dutch society backs populist political powers vis-à-vis the 20% of Q2. **The main factor in this growth was the Forum for Democracy's (FvD) rise, which tripled its support**: the small Eurosceptic group got only 2 seats in the Parliament in the March elections, but in September it stood at 6% in the opinion polls. Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) had only 11% of the total support, which means that it lost 8 points in 2017. Nevertheless, **the PVV is still the second largest political force in the country and the most potent opposition force against the newly formed government**. But the emergence of the leader of the FvD, Thierry Baudet, could be a reason of serious concerns for Wilders, because the FvD could be an alternative

for those right-wing voters who are seeking new political faces instead of the PVV. Netherlands' Socialist Party is at 6%, which means there was no major shift in its popularity.

We can't observe significant changes in the support for populist parties in Scandinavia in Q3 2017. In Denmark, the **Danish People's Party** is currently at 19%, however, in 2017 they gained 3 points. Regarding **Finland's populist parties**, neither the right-wing Finns Party, nor the democratic socialist Left Alliance could expand their electorate. They are at a level of 10% and 8% of the total support, respectively. The **situation is similar in Sweden**, where populist parties' support has remained unchanged, not only in Q3 but throughout the year. Regarding the right wing, Sweden Democrats has stabilised its support at a level of 18%, and on the other side of the political spectrum, the Left Party still stands at a level of 7%, like it has in every quarter of the year.

The situation has remained unchanged in the South

Unlike in the previous quarter, the populists' camp in the Mediterranean has frozen during the hot summer: we can't observe neither an expanding, nor a declining tendency in South Europe.

In the third quarter of the year, Spain hasn't experienced a significant shift in the social receptiveness towards non-mainstream parties, but it should be noted that **these opinion poll results have not shown us yet the impact of the political and constitutional crisis that happened in the very last days of September.** This means that we present the situation before political hell has broken loose in Catalonia.

Podemos is in the same situation as it was in the second quarter of the year, almost every fifth voter in the country supports them. Its support level of 19% means that **they could successfully manage to stop the party's decline experienced in the beginning of the year, and they stabilised their social base.** As mentioned before, the constitutional crisis in Catalonia may have a huge impact on the political landscape in Spain, and significant shifts can be expected in the last quarter of the year.

Italy's populist powers are still deeply rooted in the country. At the end of September 2017, **42% of Italians were close to a non-mainstream party**, which is the highest level among the western countries. Regardless of this, there were no major changes in these parties' support neither in Q3, nor in the whole year. **The left-wing Five Star Movement polled at 27%**, exactly at the same level as in Q2, and there were also no major shifts in the popularity of the Northern League, which stood at 15% in the polls at the beginning of the fall season of politics. Moreover, **the refugee crisis has remained one of the most important issues on the political agenda of Italian politics, which is vitalizing the populist voices.**

Like in Italy, **Portuguese populists repeated their performance from the previous quarter.** Neither the Left Block, nor the Unitary Democratic Coalition could expand their base of sympathizers: they had a level of popularity in the polls of 9% and 8%, respectively, entirely the same results as in the beginning of the summer. **A few days before the local elections, it should be acknowledged that the governing Socialist Party were soaring in the polls**, and they can attract not only conservative voters but supporters of the far-left parties as well. On the other hand, a new phenomenon has appeared in Portugal which can be distressing for European progressives. A candidate of PSD - the largest party of the Portugal

centre-right - had campaigned against local Roma communities, and according to the Portugal left, it was a rehearsal of the party's new direction toward far-right populism.

As in the other Mediterranean states, the situation in Greece is quite similar to that in the springtime. **The changes in the support for the populists didn't exceed the standard of the margin of error.** Just as throughout the whole year, **Syriza's** popularity among voters was again between 20% and 25%, more precisely, 23% of the Greeks backed the Coalition of the Radical Left in Q3. **With this result, Syriza is still one of the most powerful populist political formations in EU15 countries.** While the Communist Party of Greece - like the far-right Golden Dawn - achieved 7% in the latest polls, the right-wing Independent Greeks got 3%, and the Popular Unity had only 2% of the voters' support.

Populism is prevailing in eastern Europe

In eastern Europe, with a few exceptions, populist political parties are still the decisive political power. Hungary is still the first among European states in highest aggregated level of support for populist powers, far ahead of Poland in the second place. **In Orbán's illiberal democracy almost two thirds of the voters, more precisely 63%, demand populist answers to the country's problems. In Poland, the same indicator is 49%.**

In Hungary, there was no significant movement in the popularity of populist parties in the last quarter of the year. **It's still the ruling Fidesz that has the greatest support among voters, 44% of Hungarians would choose them, while Jobbik is the second largest political power, with the support of almost every fifth**

Hungarian voter. Few months before the next legislative election in Hungary, Fidesz is far ahead in the opinion polls. The ruling party can look forward to the election with a comfortable advantage without a potential challenger from the fragmented left and **Viktor Orbán can prepare for his third term in a row.**

Mostly due to the fact that **Jobbik has been moving from the far right to the center in the last few years**, we can observe a moderate increase in its support. Regarding the whole year, the party gained 3% since January, and stands at 19% at the end of September.

Tempers have cooled down in Poland after the protests of July against the judicial reform of the country, and it didn't have a considerable effect on society's judgement of the ruling party. **PiS is still the largest political power in Poland with its result of 40%**, the second greatest populist political formation in the EU after Fidesz. The libertarian Kukiz'15 performed identically to the previous quarter, **9% of the Polish people back the former musician's party.**

With the partial easing of the migration crisis, Robert Fico, **Slovakia's prime minister turned back from the path of populism and reaffirmed his commitment to a core Europe in his recent statements.** Regardless of this, populist powers in Slovakia are still very strong. **36% of Slovaks are close to a populist party from the right.** In Q3, there were no major changes regarding the support of **Ordinary People** or **People's Party – Our Slovakia** led by extremist Marian Kotleba. Their levels of support are 9% and 10%, respectively. **The party with the greatest losses of the last three months is the nationalist Slovak National Party, which lost 4 points in the latest polls.** By contrast, the right-wing We are Family almost doubled its support in three months, at the beginning of the autumn 9% of Slovaks supported Boris Kollár's party.

A few weeks before the Czech legislative election **the Czech Communist Party, like ANO 2011, lost 3 points in the opinion polls, the communists stood at 11%, the ANO 2011 at 31%, and only the right-wing SPD could expand its electoral base by 3 points.** Nevertheless, the billionaire oligarch Andrej Babiš (ANO 2011) is the most probable candidate for winning the prime ministership in the election scheduled for October, and then **the Czech Republic can be anticipated to join the strongholds of European right-wing populism.**

A counterexample to the dominance of populism in central and eastern Europe is Slovenia, where populist powers became almost irrelevant in the last quarter. Both the Slovenian National Party, and The Left were losing ground during the summer, and dropped 4 points in the opinion polls. **The main reason behind that could be the fact that none of them appointed a candidate to the presidential election of October.**

Croatian people are still resistant to populist temptations, only 10% of the maritime nation back non-mainstream powers. In the last quarter, there was only a slight increase in their support. **Regarding Baltic states, the summer was calm with no major political shifts,** but surveying the whole year we can observe an evident decrease in the support of populists: **in each country, aggregate support for populists dropped at least 5 points during 2017.**



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Populism Reports

The past few years have seen a surge in the public support of populist, euroskeptical and radical parties throughout almost the entire European Union. In several member states, their popularity matches or even exceeds the level of public support of the centre-left. Even though the centre-left parties, think tanks and researchers are aware of this challenge, there is still more that could be done in this field. There is occasional research on individual populist parties in some member states, but there is no regular overview – updated on a quarterly basis – how the popularity of populist parties changes in the EU Member States, where new parties appear and old ones disappear.

That is the reason why FEPS and Policy Solutions have launched this series of reports, entitled 'Populism Report'.

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