

Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3)

Issue: Intercultural awareness as a means of combating the threats of populism

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INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the surge of populist parties is more than considerable. The threat of terrorist attacks and the disarray brought by the influx of immigrants from the Muslim world, in combination with the widespread belief that the European Union hinders more than helps the situation, have created a turmoil that strengthens the standing of right-wing populists.

Accordingly, during the last two decades, parties led by populist leaders have grown in popularity, gaining legislative seats and taking the reins of government. Notable are the gains for the Swiss People’s Party, Latvia’s National Alliance, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Swedish Democrats, Greece’s Golden Dawn, the Slovak National Party and the Danish People’s Party. Record popularity is also enjoyed by Marine Le Pen’s Front

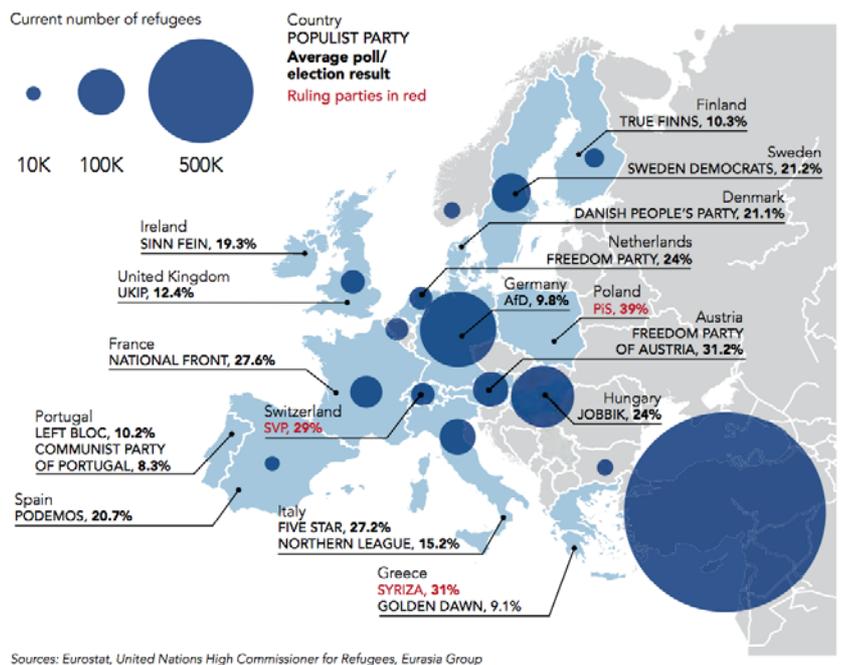


Figure 1: Populist parties in European countries and the number of refugees they host

Nationale, Britain’s UK Independence Party, Matteo Salvini’s Northern League, Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland and Geert Wilders’ Party for Freedom.

Indeed, the democratic system has no barriers against populism, simply because its objective is the revival of the rawest form of democracy and the direct rule of the people. Consequently, democracy easily becomes susceptible to populist propaganda and is unable to fight its extremism. The only way we can combat its black and white views is through the

cultivation of open-mindedness, intercultural awareness and empathy in the world's citizens.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Culture

"The way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time".¹

Intercultural

"Relating to or involving more than one culture".²

Intercultural awareness

"Intercultural awareness is the ability to empathize and to decentre. More specifically, in a communication situation, it is the ability to take on the perspective of a conversational partner from another culture or with another nationality, and of their cultural background and thus, to be able to understand and take into consideration interlocutors' different perspectives simultaneously."³

Cultural relativism

Cultural relativism is "the view that all beliefs, customs, and ethics are relative to the individual within his own social context. In other words, "right" and "wrong" are culture-specific; what is considered moral in one society may be considered immoral in another, and, since no universal standard of morality exists, no one has the right to judge another society's customs".⁴

Populism

The term "populism" originates from the Latin word "populus", which means "the people" and therefore, the term refers to the concerns of the people.

Even though there is no consensus in the academic world regarding the definition and description of the phenomenon of populism, most approaches have one aspect in common: the distinction between the "common people" and the "others/enemies of the people".

¹ "Culture Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary | Free English Dictionary, Translations and Thesaurus*. Web. <<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture> >

² "Intercultural Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary | Free English Dictionary, Translations and Thesaurus*. Web.

<<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/intercultural?q=intercultural>>.

³ Definition proposed by Korzilius, Hooft and Planken (2007), "Intercultural Awareness via Improvements in Intercultural Communication." Web. <<http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr32/zhang.html>>.

⁴ "What is cultural relativism?" *Bible Questions Answered*. Web. <<http://www.gotquestions.org/cultural-relativism.html>>.

The term is best explicated by the political scientist Cas Mudde, according to whom populism is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte general* (general will) of the people”.

That being so, populism holds the simple, pure people, in opposition to the privileged, corrupt elite. It represents the masses, favoring public sentiment and not Special Interests (e.g. political factions, minorities).

Populism has been approached and viewed as a political doctrine, program and sociopolitical movement.

General will

In political philosophy, the general will (*volonté générale*) is “a collectively held will that aims at the common good or common interest”. The term was explained and elaborated by the French political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book “The Social Contract” and it lays the cornerstone for the modern political and social thought.⁵

Liberal democracy

“A democratic system of government in which individual rights and freedoms are officially recognized and protected, and the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law”.⁶

In liberal democracy, a constitution “places constraints on the leaders and on the extent to which the will of the majority can be exercised against the rights of minorities”.⁷

It should also be noted that the term “liberal” in the phrase “liberal democracy” does not imply that the democratic system of government must abide by the political ideology of liberalism.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is “a policy model of social studies and economics that transfers control of economic factors to the private sector from the public sector. It takes from the basic principles of neoclassical economics, suggesting that governments must limit subsidies, make reforms to tax law in order to expand the tax base, reduce deficit spending, limit protectionism, and open markets up to trade. It also seeks to abolish fixed exchange

⁵ "General will | philosophy of Rousseau | Britannica.com." *Encyclopedia Britannica | Britannica.com*. Web. <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/general-will>>.

⁶ "Oxford Dictionaries." Web. 11 Jun 2017. <http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/liberal_democracy>.

⁷ "Liberal democracy." *McGill School Of Computer Science*. Web. <http://cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/l/Liberal_democracy.htm>.

rates, back deregulation, permit private property, and privatize businesses run by the state. Neoliberal policies aim for a laissez-faire approach to economic development”.⁸

Ethocentrism

Ethocentrism is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture”.⁹

Eurocepticism

Eurocepticism (deriving from the from the Greek word *scepsis*, meaning doubt) is a “european political doctrine that advocates disengagement from the European Union (EU)”. The academic works of Szczerbiak and Taggart, separate "soft" and "hard" eurocepticism in an effort to distinguish the support for total rejection or europhobia; soft eurocepticism “accepts the principle of European integration while criticising certain public policies”, whereas the proponents of hard eurocepticism “campaign for a total rejection of belonging to the Union and express their desire to leave it”.¹⁰

Islamophobia

According to the British Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Runnymede Trust, Islamophobia is “the dread or hatred of Islam and therefore lead to the dislike of all Muslims and discrimination by excluding them from the economic, social and public life. It includes the perception that Islam has no values in common with other cultures, is inferior to the West and is a violent political ideology rather than a religion”.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Populism’s ideology and principals

Its basic principal being “we against them”, populism proposes “the class fight of the ‘ordinary people’ versus the ‘ruling establishment’ and/or the ‘privileged elite’”. The concept of populism relies on the “imagined unity of the people against defamed political and cultural elites, but also against groups that are supposedly protected by these elites” and opposes to their business and financial interests.

Furthermore, populism does not seek to abolish democracy and introduce dictatorship, but merely runs counter to the representative nature that democracy has

⁸ "Neoliberalism." *Investopedia - Sharper Insight. Smarter Investing.* Web. <<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/neoliberalism.asp#ixzz4kArr1Jjt>>.

⁹ "Ethnocentrism | Define Ethnocentrism at Dictionary.com." *Dictionary.com | Meanings and Definitions of Words at Dictionary.com.* Web. <<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/ethnocentrism>>.

¹⁰ "Eurocepticism | politics | Britannica.com." *Encyclopedia Britannica | Britannica.com.* Web. <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Eurocepticism>>, "Eurocepticism and Europhobia: the threat of Populism." Web. 13 Jun 2017. <[http://, www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0375-eurocepticism-and-europhobia-europe-under-the-test-of-populism](http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0375-eurocepticism-and-europhobia-europe-under-the-test-of-populism)>.

espoused and “rejects all limitations on the expression of popular will, such as protection of minorities’ rights and independence of key institutions”, as Mudde has written.

Populists accuse the ruling establishment of schemes and corruption, and find them reproachable for the distancing of the people from the political control. Therefore, populists’ aim is the restoration of the democratic system in such a way that will revive the rudimentary principal of its existence: the “direct rule of sovereign will of people”. They want to replace the elites with a charismatic populist leader that ostensibly understands the needs and embodies the will of the people.

Therefore, populism is viewed by its opponents as demagoguery, suggesting unrealistic proposals with the sole aim of appealing to the public’s desires and, thus, widening the range of its supporters. With this in mind, populism builds its basis on the fears, concerns and generally the emotions of the majority, exploiting popular stereotypes, clichés and prejudices to create an attractive, and ‘proper’ to the eyes of the people, policy that offers simple solutions.

Noteworthy are the two forms of populism: the right-wing and the left-wing. Although both parties apply the same principal – are “anti-elite” movements trying to shape an “‘us’ against a ‘them’” policy that promotes collective participation- they are different in terms of social issues. Specifically, right-wing populism represents the “fear for the foreigner” and favours inequality, which can manifest as nationalistic sentiments and xenophobia, whereas left-wing populism promotes equality and reflects the hope for a better future, which can be expressed through socially minded globalisation and justice.

The threat of populist ideologies

Populism tries to shape the political identity of the people, in terms of the political power they hold, and in doing so, underlines the negative features of all the other parties that may pose an obstacle to this effort. Thus, right-wing populism for example criticizes the European Union, condemns the phenomenon of globalization, opposes to immigration – deeming them responsible for the political malaise- and promotes strong patriotism, ethnocentrism, nativism, prejudice and anti-globalisation.

Consequently, the reason why populism’s opponents consider it as a threat to today’s liberal democracies is that it wants to weaken minorities’ rights and minimize the existence of big social groups, creating an isolated society, that turns inward and that has no considerable communication with the other social parties and their cultures. Allowing majoritarian extremism and the accentuation of the popular stereotypes, populism will create a homogenised and polarized society.

The causes of populism

There are three main factors that explain the mass support and the surge in votes for populist parties today.

Firstly, from the perspective of economics, there are profound changes transforming the workforce and society in post-industrial economies, such as the rise of the knowledge economy, the collapse of manufacturing industry and the technological automation. According to this account, populists exploit the deteriorating economic conditions and the income inequality, especially in Western countries, transforming economic anxiety into political advantage.

Secondly, the populism is popular due to the fact that it is widely seen as the only alternative to the liberal mainstream. Given that in the name of reducing government spending, neoliberalism encourages cutting public expenditure for social services (such as education and health), the reduction of safety nets for the poor, the centralization of enterprises (which results in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and in the public paying even further for its needs) and the replacement of the concept of “the public good” with the “individual responsibility” to the government, the people feel pressured and are suffocating. These main points of neoliberalism urge the public to turn towards the populists, who not only provide simple solutions, but also allow their voices to be heard.

Thirdly, it is argued that “the rise of populist parties reflects a reaction against a wide range of rapid cultural changes that seem to be eroding the basic values and customs of Western societies”.¹¹ More specifically, according to the political scientists Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan and Pippa Norris of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, populism is the result of a “burgeoning cultural backlash against modern values of globalism, multicultural tolerance, and openness to diversity”. Populism is the reaction against the progressive cultural change, which is indirectly responsible for the high levels of existential insecurity that many citizens of the immigrant host countries experience.

Effects of populism

From the latter view, populism’s critics can deduce that, populism, focusing too much on raising the voice of the majority of the people of the country –the native homogenous people- and on the saving the country’s ‘own identity’, has reached the point of representing strong patriotism. The identity of the nation is considered to be threatened

¹¹ "Where's Populism Coming From? - CityLab." *CityLab*. Web. 13 Jun 2017.
<<http://www.citylab.com/politics/2017/03/what-is-really-behind-the-populist-surge/519921/>>.

by the ideas spread by globalisation and the heterogeneous people that migrate to the country and influence its culture with additions from their own traditions.

Furthermore, the desire to be loyal to the country turns into passion that breeds nationalistic sentiments. Though, given that the lines between nationalism and ethnocentrism are rather blurry for the ignorant people, extreme behaviours emerge. Mostly right-wing extremists, use popular stereotypes and prejudices not only to create, but also to sustain the picture of the 'public enemy'. The criminalization of minorities' groups and communities takes place, because their guilt for the major sociopolitical issues is a solution believable by the uneducated majority. Hence, unfounded fears and tremendous racist attitudes, such as islamophobia and romaphobia are on the rise, making the Roma and Islam the scapegoats in the situation.

Efforts to give populism a positive intonation

It is argued that populism, by eradicating all limitations on the expression of popular will, is going to keep the democracy alive. Indeed, populists want more than just having representatives whose goals are allegedly aligned to those of the people; they fight for the right of the common men to vote on every issue themselves and want to ensure that they do not feel powerless and excluded from the political decision-making.

Moreover, populists seem to respect the cultural diversity of the different countries if they follow the legal and political system of the country. Characteristically, AfD has entered into its manifesto that "an Islam that does not respect our legal system and even fights against it and claims to be the only valid religion is incompatible with our legal system and culture. Many Muslims live according to our laws and are integrated and are accepted as valued members of our society. However, the AfD wants to prevent the emergence of Islamic parallel societies with Sharia judges". Furthermore, it should be noted that the AfD wishes to impose bans on both Islamic and Jewish traditions including burkas and calls to prayer, since, according to Markus Egg, a professor at the Humboldt University of Berlin who worked on the AfD party's education platform, claims that "the issue about burkas is whether or not people are wearing them willingly, as well as the security implications about people covering their faces. And the ban on the call to prayer is a response to the claim to universality it makes, which negates other religions".

Lastly, the fact that populism vastly focuses on the prosperity and the development of a nation is rather positive. For example, the party program of the Danish People's Party acts in favour of the whole nation's population, aiming at a collective growth; it acknowledges that nursing and care of the elderly and the disabled is a public responsibility

it underlines the importance of the Danish cultural heritage, declaring that “outside Denmark's borders we would like to give financial, political and moral support to Danish minorities” and it also remarks the necessity of an education system of the highest standard. The program further supports that “society must be organised so as to let people know that hard work and ability pay”.

The significance of intercultural awareness on the issue

Intercultural awareness is the condition of having the ability to perceive the similarities and the differences between two or more cultures, including your own, in terms of values, beliefs and behaviour, after having understood the importance of these values and beliefs that lead to the behaviour. It involves the willingness to stand back from our own point of view and try to take into consideration the different perspectives that emerge from the existence of different cultures. It calls for the open-mindedness and critical thought necessary to connect the sociopolitical background of a country with its culture and compare and contrast the conclusions with those of another country.

The significance of intercultural awareness can only be grasped if one understands its role in the vicious circle of unsuccessful communication.

To begin with, due to the fact that people see and interpret things and concepts in different ways, what is considered as appropriate in one culture is likely to be unacceptable in another, and therefore, misunderstandings arise when people from different cultural backgrounds communicate. Intercultural awareness combats this problem, as it allows us to understand the reasons behind their behavioural rules and traditions. Hence, intercultural awareness can be considered as the foundation of proper communication.

Subsequently, communication is linked with globalisation, with the latter having its basis on the successful interaction and integration of heterogeneous people into the international community. Indeed, the movement of ideas, concepts and even people demands a high level of communicative ability and empathy. In fact, the worldwide transnational and transcultural integration that represents the process of globalisation has left its mark on European societies.

The European Union is the most successful offspring of the bid for global interconnection, as it aims for a united, “without internal

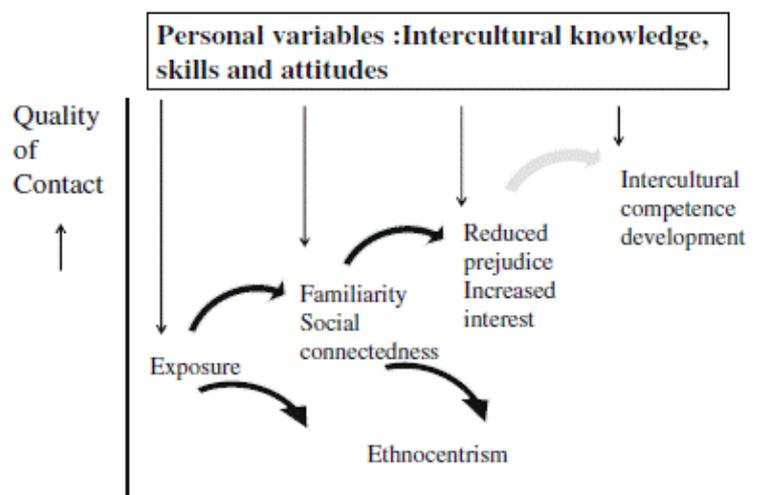


Figure 2: The extended contact hypothesis model for intercultural competence development

frontiers”, Europe.¹² Moreover, another consequence of globalisation is the influx of migrants, firstly into Europe and then into other continents as well. The recent refugee crisis incites xenophobia, chiefly exacerbating the historical prejudice against Islam, the Romani people and Muslims, causing islamophobia and romaphobia.

Having said that, it becomes evident that patriotism is the likely successor in this domino effect. Now, populism exploits this sentiment and transforms it into a threat as shown above.

In the final analysis, intercultural awareness provides the solution that can eradicate the roots of the threats of populism. It is only through the realisation that ethnic groups, despite their different customs and traditions, can have common cultural ground, that stereotypes and prejudice can be belied and the creation of a narrow-minded populist society can be prevented.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America

In the United States, populism dates back in the 19th century. In 1892, the Kansas Farmers Alliance joined hands with the Knights of Labour and the main workers’ organisation, to form the People’s Party. The Party, although short-lived, managed to challenge the values that guided the Republicans and the Democrats in Washington, establishing the basis for populism both in the United States and in Europe.

Donald Trump won the general election in November 2016, commencing his presidency on January 20, 2017. His campaign, under the banner Make America Great Again, was “built on promises to strengthen the American economy, build a wall on the border of Mexico and the US, and to temporarily ban immigration by Muslims”¹³. Trump portrays himself as a proponent of the “silent majority”, willing to provide its members with good manufacturing jobs, and an enemy of immigration and free trade treaties, who repudiates the economic globalisation. That being said, his political positions have been characterised as populist, protectionist and nationalist by numerous scholars.

¹² "Objectives of the EU - EUabc." *EUABC A dictionary on words related to the EU*. Web. 13 Jun 2017. <<http://en.euabc.com/word/743>>.

¹³ "US elections 2016 results: Donald Trump's life story - BBC News." *BBC - Home*. 20 Jan 2017. Web. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-35318432>>.

Netherlands

In the Netherlands, on March 15, 2017 the Dutch general election took place. The Prime Minister Mark Rutte with his center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) made a resounding victory over Geert Wilders and his Party for Freedom (PVV).

Wilders, being an anti-immigration, islamophobic, eurosceptic, far-right populist, had policies encouraging a ban on the Quran, mosques, Islamic schools and asylum centers and promoting the halt of immigration from Muslim majority countries. The next most popular party was Sybrand Buma's CDA, winning 12,4% of the votes and 19 seats. Buma wanted to introduce the Dutch national anthem at schools and minimize immigration. Another right-wing populist, anti-European, nativist party that won traction in the elections was the Forum for Democracy (FvD). Its leader Thierry Baudet, talked about the "homeopathic dilution of the Dutch people" due to immigration and still got 190,000 votes and two seats.

Denmark

Denmark has also seen a significant rise in the support of populism. Its main right-wing populist party is the Danish People's Party, whose ideology includes Danish nationalism, euroscepticism, and which seeks to limit non-Western immigration, oppose islamisation and promote cultural assimilation of immigrants.

Since 2004, the Danish People's Party has been increasing in terms of popularity, with 2015 reaching 21% of the votes, becoming Denmark's second largest party. Now, in 2017, the Party is demanding that "immigrants celebrate Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter if they want to call themselves 'Danish'".¹⁴

Germany

The rising tide of right-wing populism has touched Germany, where the forthcoming federal elections in September might further the dawn of right-wing populism in Europe. Angela Merkel, leader of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union of Germany and

proponent of the open-door migrant policy and burqa, will compete with the Alternative for Germany (AfD) Party.



Local." The Local - Denmark's News in
immigrants-must-celebrate-christmas-to-be-

The AfD was founded in 2013, as an anti-euro party that firmly opposed bail-outs of indebted European Union member states, like Greece. Now, AfD has turned its focus to immigration and Islam. The Party not only wants to seal the EU's borders, institute identity checks along the country's borders and encourage financially foreigners to return to their

Figure 3: AfD has given expression to widespread anti-Islamic sentiment

home countries, but it also underlines the supremacy of the German language, traditional German culture and denies the idea that Islam is by any means part of the German society. Moreover, if the EU continues centralising, the AfD has said that it will seek to halt the membership of Germany in EU.

Today, the AfD, appealing both to proponents of right-wing extremism and to those dissatisfied with the status quo, has MPs in nine of Germany's 16 state parliaments, and might get nearly twice as much votes as it did in the last federal election according to recent polls.

International Cultural Diversity Organisation (ICDO)¹⁵

The International Cultural Diversity Organisation was established in Vienna, Austria with the aim of “closing the cultural gap between people, through research, workshops, events, social and development projects”. First and foremost, the organisation raises public and political awareness on the cultural values and traditions migrants convey travelling, that will or can enrich the culture of the host country. Similarly, it develops programs to educate people about multiple cultures, their differences and promotes the belief that nobody is inferior but every person is equal in every society, advocating for multiculturalism and acknowledging “any form of diversity as an enhancing factor of society”.

International Baccalaureate (IB)¹⁶

Founded in 1968, the International Baccalaureate is a “non-profit educational foundation offering highly respected programmes of international education that develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills needed to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world”. International Baccalaureate's goal is to develop knowledgeable and caring young people who will help to create a better, more united and peaceful world through intercultural understanding, awareness, empathy and respect. To this end, the organization “works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education, that encourage students across the

¹⁵ "About ICDO – International Cultural Diversity Organization." *International Cultural Diversity Organization – International Cultural Diversity Organization*. Web. 14 Jun 2017. <http://icdo.at/about-icdo/#about_us>

¹⁶ "About the IB - International Baccalaureate®." *International education - International Baccalaureate®*. Web. <<http://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/>>.

world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right”.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1860s -1870s	The Narodniki (or Narodniks) emerged for the first time in Russia, being a relatively small group of urban elites who tried to stir a peasant revolt. ¹⁷ It is considered as the first European populist movement and, although unsuccessful in Russia, it did influence strongly several agrarian populist parties in Eastern Europe.
1891	In in the United States of America, unsatisfied western and southern farmers, who had already created the Farmers’ Alliance, merged with liberal Democrats to form the People’s Party.
1953	Poujadism (named after Pierre Poujade) emerged, a French populist movement that promoted antiparlamentarism, strong anti-intellectualism, xenophobia, and antisemitism.
19 October 2015	The right-wing, anti-immigration Swiss People's Party (SVP) won Switzerland's parliamentary election, with its victory translating into 11 extra seats, giving it 65 out of the total 200 in the lower house. ¹⁸
23 June 2016	A referendum was held in the United Kingdom to decide whether the country should leave or remain in the European Union; leave won by 51.9% to 48.1%. ¹⁹
9 November 2016	Donald J. Trump won the presidential election in the United States of America.
15 March 2017	Mark Rutte's People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) won the Dutch election over Geert Wilders’ populist Party for Freedom (PVV).
May 7, 2017	The second round of the French presidential election took place between the top two candidates Emmanuel Macron of the centrist and liberal political party "En Marche" and Marine Le Pen of the

¹⁷ "Narodnik | Russian social movement | Britannica.com." *Encyclopedia Britannica* |

Britannica.com. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., Web. <<http://www.britannica.com/event/Narodnik>>.

¹⁸ "Anti-immigration SVP wins Swiss election in big swing to right - BBC News." *BBC - Home*. 19 Oct 2015. Web. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34569881>>.

¹⁹ "Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU - BBC News." *BBC - Home*. 13 Jun 2017. Web. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32810887>>.

right-wing populist and nationalist party "National Front" (FN), which Macron won by 66% of the votes.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The United Nations has not directly involved in the issue of populism through resolutions, treaties or events, as it is merely a rhetoric policy and not a tangible issue. It has, however, tried to promote and cultivate to the citizens of the globe respect for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

UNAOC is a High-Level Group of experts formed to “explore the roots of polarization between societies and cultures today, and to recommend a practical programme of action to address this issue”. It was established in 2005, as a political initiative of Mr. Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General and was co-sponsored by the Governments of Spain and Turkey. Its vision is to “work towards a more peaceful, more socially inclusive world, by building mutual respect among people of different cultural and religious identities, and highlighting the will of the world’s majority to reject extremism and embrace diversity.”²⁰

Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted unanimously at the 31st session of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) General Conference. The Universal Declaration “makes it clear that each individual must acknowledge not only otherness in all its forms but also the plurality of his or her own identity, within societies that are themselves plural”²¹.

What is more, the Declaration is accompanied by an Action Plan consisting of “twenty sets of long-term objectives (Main Lines of Action) to be achieved in order to reinforce cultural diversity in



Figure 4: The Human Rights Council chamber in Geneva

²⁰ "Who We Are - United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)." *United Nations Alliance of Civilizations | UNAOC*. Web. <<http://www.unaoc.org/who-we-are/>>.

²¹ "UNESCO UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY." *UNESCO | Building peace in the minds of men and women*. Web. 15 Jun 2017. <http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5_Cultural_Diversity_EN.pdf>.

society". The Plan also includes seven suggestions for the development of intercultural sensitivity and competence.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Unfortunately, there have not been any previous attempts to solve the issue of extreme right-wing populism. Despite the multiple efforts of organizations and educational foundations to foster intercultural awareness in the citizens and the youth, little do they make the connection between the threats posed by populism and the need for transcultural knowledge and understanding to eradicate these threats.

Nevertheless, on the 27th of February 2017, the United Nations' Secretary-General António Guterres addressed the opening session of the UN Human Rights Council, urging Member States to take action and uphold the rights of all people in the face of rising populism and extremism. Mr Guterres warned that "disregard for human rights is a disease, and it is a disease that is spreading – North, South, East and West". He also highlighted that "we are increasingly seeing the perverse phenomenon of populism and extremism feeding off each other in a frenzy of growing racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of intolerance" and added that "minorities, indigenous communities and others face discriminations and abuse across the world", noting abuse targeting especially refugees and migrants. According to the Secretary General, "the U.N. must strengthen its human rights operation, push for justice for perpetrators of grave crimes, and invest in education and youth" and "the Human Rights Council must be part of the cure" for rising populism and extremism.²²

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As the title of the topic suggests, intercultural awareness is the solution to the cultural threats of populism, meaning the accentuation of stereotypes, racism, xenophobia, anti-immigration sentiments and euroscepticism. Delegates are strongly advised to make wise use of it, so as to show ways to prevent emergence of these threats as well as try to minimize them. This, however, begs the question of how this awareness is to be spread and used in politics and beyond.

²² "UN chief says populism has triggered a rise in intolerance | Fox News." *Fox News - Breaking News Updates | Latest News Headlines | Photos & News Videos*. Web. <<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/01/27/un-chief-says-populism-has-triggered-rise-in-intolerance.html>>., "United Nations News Centre - In Geneva, UN urges upholding human rights amid rising populism and extremism." *Welcome to the United Nations*. Web. 15 Jun 2017. <<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56246#.WUJy62iGOM8>>.

Noteworthy resolutions should be governed by the concepts of open-mindedness, pluralism, human rights, tolerance, participatory democracy, social cohesion, mutual understanding and justice. First and foremost, intercultural awareness needs to be a part of standard education. School curriculum needs to include cultural projects and activities as well as information about foreign cultures and traditions. In multinational cities students need to get into contact with peers with a different cultural background and get informed about their civilization. Further activities such as trips could enhance the learning process.

Furthermore, intercultural awareness should also be promoted at a university level. Higher education is considered to be the ideal level for building a multicultural personality and this can be achieved by promoting exchange programs in nations other than the traditional western ones. At the same time, intercultural projects such as the ones on the school level should be continued and enriched.

However, one should not only focus on the youth, but also to the adults. Education and information is known to be a life-long experience therefore more steps are necessary to be made in this field. Participation in international seminars and conferences and exchange of ideas with people from other nations would improve the understanding of the employees and allow them to develop a more open-minded mentality. Apart from this, international relations and cooperation of businesses should be brought into focus.

In the second place comes the indirect application of this intercultural awareness, and empathy, in legislative policies and political strategies. More specifically, delegates should suggest ways to create an attractive, transformative and realistic framework that will acknowledge and answer to the people's calls for social security, political participation and cultural recognition via concrete and valid policies.

Another possible solution would be the creation of a good communication strategy for politicians advocating democracy. Given that flawed understanding or a unidirectional communication can provoke negative reactionary frames, delegates are encouraged to research the approach of their government towards populists and propose measures accordingly. To that end, while the direct condemnation of populists should be avoided, as it can backfire, infuriating, even pushing further away their proponents and making the communicator an anti-establishment target, the expression of empathy for the common men is more than welcome as long as it is accompanied with actions.

When it comes to immigration systems, a pivotal matter for all those contemplating to becoming adherents of populism, the delegates must approach them knowledgeably and with critical thinking; already existing immigration legislative and administrative policies are

to be reviewed and flexibly adjusted to the hosting situation of each country and mechanisms to immigrant integration programs are to be strengthened. These integration policies should address healthcare, education and job sectors. Furthermore, objective and actual information about the causes of immigration waves should be provided to the people so as to address their humanity. Also, all immigration policies, regulations and court decisions must be within the boundaries of humanitarian law.

In conclusion, intercultural awareness is the counter strategy required to stop the “infiltration of society by right-wing opinion warriors”.²³ Its successful teaching and usage, in the everyday life and when taking political decisions, can eradicate the cultural threats of populism.

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