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Between Contextual Opportunities and Discursive Resources. Understanding the Politics of the Enemy in Central and Eastern Europe

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Social dissatisfaction and the corresponding political backlash is one of the central concerns of contemporary political and scholarly debate. From the sovereign debt crisis and unrelenting economic hardships throughout the European space (either Western and Central and Eastern Europe), to increasingly strong Eurosceptic, right-wing and anti-establishment political forces, from the debate and increasing pressures surrounding immigration and refugees, there has never been a more challenging time for Europe and the European states and a more important time for the question of legitimacy and the democratic deficit of representative institutions and traditional political actors. And Central and Eastern Europe is not an exception. In recent years, Europe has experienced the rise of politics based on antagonism, which – as correctly noticed by some authors of this special issue (see the article, 'Understanding the Usage of Enemy Images in Central and Eastern European Politics. Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach') – is often discussed from the perspectives of *populism and mainstreaming the radical right* ideologies.

A particular focus of scholarly attention has therefore been on the support expressed for *populists and radical right nationalistic parties and movements, as well as their antagonists* (i.e. various 'others' from the establishment to minorities, as well as to counter movements), which has been increasing rapidly in recent decades. Although the case that citizens increasingly give their support to parties and movements that promote xenophobia, ethno-nationalism, and anti-system populism (Rydgren, 2007) and in general the emphasis on some common 'enemies' can reinforce a collective identity and give meaning to political actions, this may not be the cause for any comfort. The election of Donald Trump as President of the USA has been taken as further evidence of the 'mainstreaming of radical right politics', which has affected other democracies beyond Europe (Mudde, 2016). Recently, in fact, growing concerns over EU austerity programmes, the current economic crisis and the national and European responses to that the crisis, immigration and multiculturalism issues, combined with disillusion with mainstream politics and representative democracy (Caiani and della Porta, 2011), have all fuelled sharp criticism from the populist far right (e.g. Kriesi and Pappas, 2016), as well as, it is argued in many contributions in the present special issue, the 'enemization' of politics and debate. European integration and globalization, as argued by the first article of this special issue (Gerő et al., 2017.), play a role in these developments in CEE countries as well. They have restructured social and cultural cleavages, developing an opposition between the positions of trans-and supranational integration on the one hand, and those of national demarcation, with radical right parties and movements standing on the side of the defense of positions of 'demarcation' through economic and cultural

protectionism on the other (Kriesi et al., 2008). However, reactions to European integration and globalization generally take various forms: the radical left's opposition to the opening up of the border is mainly an opposition to economic liberalization and to the threat it poses to the left's achievements at the national level. The populist right's opposition to the opening up of the borders is first of all an opposition to the social and cultural forms of competition and the threat they pose to national identity (ibid., 2008: 18; see also: Wodak, 2015) and the 'We'.

Whether one agrees or not on the definitions of the phenomenon, what is certain is that it is widely accepted that at present there is a clear and widespread trend towards an increase in support for populist parties and discourses, which are based as core aspect on the antagonistic relation between an 'us' and various 'others' (from the political corrupt elites to minorities) (Caiani and Graziano, 2016) and an increase in the 'appeal' of this ideology everywhere (Kriesi and Papas, 2016).

As testified also by the electoral overview offered in the article of Kovarek et al. and Gerő et al., the populist right-wing re-vitalization has been particularly strong in Southern and Central-Eastern Europe. However, as has been pointed out, the two types of surges show different patterns:

> While Southern Europe populism is generally highly polarizing and often anti-systemic, the more recent wave of CEE populism and anti-establishment mobilization more generally is partly (but certainly not exclusively) related to the emergence of 'purifier' parties promising better and scandal-free governance (Kriesi and Pappas, 2016: 323).

Moreover, most CEE countries, as for example, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic are experiencing heavy unrest in the form of right-wing extremist incidents targeting Roma people (TE-SAT, 2012: 30). Alongside the growing importance of radical right populist actors and politics, new forms of right-wing social movements, as underlined by the articles of this special issue, emerge that function as incubators of new political and organizational ideas. The current resurgence of the radical right in the East-Central European countries has extensively been covered (see, for example: Minkenberg 2011). However the studies of *cultural aspects* of radical right wing groups and populism are sporadic and anecdotal.

This special issue will address these topics by providing an overview of the mobilization and the image of the enemy in Central and Eastern Europe. More specifically it investigates the transformation of civil societies of Central European countries, including recent developments such as the rising of populist and radical right nationalist parties, as well as the intensification of discourses against several minorities, by focusing, from different angles and different perspectives, on one particular technique of mobilization: the usage of narratives about an enemy.

From the empirical point of view, this type of mobilization has been generally associated with far-right or radical populist parties that treat immigrants and ethnic or sexual minorities as enemies of their own imagined communities. The strategy of antagonizing is, however, employed by actors from all across the political spectrum. This special issue therefore empirically analyses and discusses (similarities and differences in) the usage of the image of enemy in processes of political mobilization

made by various political actors in CEE countries: nationalists radical right organizations (as in the article of Kajta), but also political elites and parties (as in the paper of Gerő et al.; Susánszky et al.; and Kovarek et al.), as well as the entire society (article of Hrubeš and Navrátil). In turn, the 'enemies' might be immigrants, other minorities, or any distinct social group portrayed as 'enemy' in political communication (as communists, foreign agents etc.). The focus is therefore on strategies and practices employed by different political actors, including parties, social movements and civil society organizations. In fact, as explained by the first article of this volume, with prolonging economic crisis, such type of 'antagonizing' politics creeps more and more into mainstream politics. Despite claims that populism is just a 'flash in the pan' and will disintegrate before long, antagonizing politics have continued to prosper and in some countries have achieved a remarkable level of influence.

From the theoretical point of view, this special issue adopts an interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional approach (see: Gerő et al. and Kovarek et al.) paying attention to the cultural, historical, but also economic and political aspects of the construction and usage of the enemy/ies in Central and Eastern Europe. More specifically, in order to investigate the politics of enemy and populist-radical right traits in Eastern and Central Europe, the articles of this special issue, building mostly on a constructivist perspective, pay particular attention to a concept developed especially (but not exclusively) in social movement studies: the interpretative frame. Frames, as duly described in the article of Hrubeš and Navrátil (2017) in this special issue, are defined as cognitive instruments that allow one to make sense of the external reality (Snow and Benford, 1992). They seem a particularly useful approach to study the transformation of civil societies in CEE countries and the increasing politics of antagonism ('enemization'), since they are very often produced by organizational leadership, which provides the necessary background within which individual activists can locate their actions (Snow et al., 1986; Gamson, 1988; Snow and Benford, 1988).

In fact, any type of collective actor (including radical right and populist nationalist organizations and governments, e.g. the Orbán government as is shown carefully by Susánszky et al. in this volume), have to motivate individuals to action, providing followers and potential followers with rationales for participating and supporting their organizations and political action. This seems particularly crucial in time of crises, characterized – also in Central and Eastern Europe as in the West – by party systems' de-alignment, the emergence of new political actors, the decrease in traditional political loyalties and the increase in institutional and social mistrust. As has been argued: '[C]ompared to Western Europe, most of the newer, as well as poorer European democracies score far below in institutional and interpersonal trust. These findings suggest that there may be a complex, probably circular, self-reinforcing causal mechanism between the level of economic development and the general level of interpersonal and institutional trust' (Boda, Medve-Bálint, 2014: 15). In addition, 'along with the critique of dominant representations of order and of social patterns, interpretative frames produce new definitions of the foundations of collective solidarity, to transform actors' identity in a way which favours action' (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 79). In doing so, framing processes also allow for the definition of the

self and the opponents, in short for the definition of the 'Us' and the 'Them' categories (Tilly, 2003: 139).

In particular the contributions in this special issue pay special attention to interpretative frames and discourses through which the image of the enemy is constructed, conveyed and propagated. What do such images owe to anti-Semitism, fascism or national chauvinism, how do past ideologies shape contemporary politics, but also what are the differences? What are the roots of the emergence and continuing success of antagonizing politics? Does it pose a threat to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe? These are some of the empirical questions that will lead the studies in this special issue, which – as one of its main merits – tries to capture the dynamics of the discourse or the operation of movements built on 'the picture of the enemy'.

Indeed in academic literature, explanations for the development of populism and the radical right (as well as, we could argue, the 'politics' of 'enem' [...] or the 'othernization' of the political adversaries) have stressed the negative consequences of economic globalization, in terms of the mobilization of the 'losers' as well as ethnic competition (Rydgren, 2005). This implies political discontent towards liberal democracies that have emphasized constitutional counterweights over electoral accountability (Mény and Surel, 2002), but also a mix of modernization crisis, insecurity and authoritarian legacy (Mudde, 2007). Without denying the presence of grievances, the papers in this special issue (in line with social movement studies), analytically speaking, tend to give more leverage to the capacity of political actors to adapt to contextual resources and constraints, or, as has been said with specific references to extreme right movements, 'to take advantage of the available opportunities' (Rydgren, 2003: 49). In sum, the studies in this special issue underline the importance, in order to understand the recent developments in CEE politics, to look at the social and symbolic construction of the political and social reality made by various actors, which operate within those political systems and societies, and to look at their capacity to construct their own opportunities and resources. Indeed, as has been underlined, discontent, resources and opportunities have to be constructed, communicated and shared, in order to become a basis for collective action (Caiani et al., 2012).

Beyond the descriptive aim, the contributions in this special issue also attempt to develop some *explanations* for the presence and forms of 'enemy politics' and discourses in CEE countries. In this sense particular attention is paid to the role of context and the 'political and cultural' (historically determined) opportunities (in the words of social movement studies) provided by the country in which the various political actors mobilize. Studies on collective political action have emphasized that levels and forms of mobilization by social movements, interest groups and citizens' initiatives are strongly influenced by so-called political and cultural opportunity structures (POS and COS), namely the set of opportunities and constraints offered by the institutional structure and political culture of the political systems in which these groups operate (Kriesi, 2004; Koopmans et al., 2005). Most importantly, the papers in the present special issue underline that the analysis of political opportunities available for political actors has to take into account another important aspect of the context: the political culture. Political culture refers 'to the pattern of beliefs and assumptions

ordinary people have towards the world, as these pertain to politics' (Tepperman and Bell, 1979). The concept, introduced for the first time by Almond and Verba in the late 1950s to address the values (i.e. the 'civic culture') that are at the basis of a stable and wealthy democratic regime (Almond and Verba, 1963), is made up of cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations towards the political system. If the political culture of a country is relatively stable over time and reproduced by political socialization, influenced by this aspect are the more contingent *cultural and discursive opportunities* that determine what kinds of ideas become visible to the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be 'legitimate by the audience' (Kriesi, 2004: 72). For example, of interest for this special issue, a favorable political culture (e.g. discursive opportunities created by the political elites in defining migrants and asylum seekers as a social problem) is recognized as a fundamental factor for the success of the extreme right and populism both in terms of electoral outcomes and persistence (Mudde, 2007; Koopmans et al., 2005). Also this special issue considers the importance of the context (and in particular its discursive opportunities, e.g. see: Kaita and Susánsky et al.) as a crucial variable for the (construction and) mobilization of 'the enemy', since it can affect the degree of acceptability or stigmatization of various actors (e.g. the extreme right, immigrants, the communist past elites, etc.). As shown by Gerő et al. (2017) for example, the use of 'enmification' by political actors is more likely in contexts, as in the CEE countries, where the social structure is more hierarchical and members of society are constantly exposed to uncertainty and to relative deprivation. These historically embedded factors are strengthened by more recent developments, as a transnational, Europeanized political context, or the economic crisis in 2008. Similarly, in the article by Hrubeš and Navrátil (2017), the Communist era and its legacy is shown to be an important part of Czech (political) culture and identity after 1989, since it offers models of or for (political) behavior and thinking to different actors (political parties, social movements or individual agents), when seeking public support or legitimacy. Finally, the paper by Kovarek et al. also underlines the importance of the local scale context and that by Susánszky et al. speaks of the repressive action of government.

Traditional social movement and mobilization studies, in order to explain the emergence of collective action and discourses, look at the conditions that enable discontent to be transformed into mobilization. Thus, they are more interested in the material (e.g. organizational) and symbolic resources necessary for collective action than cognitive capacities (see for example: Koopmans et al., 2005; Caiani et al., 2012). Another merit of the contributions in this special issue is that they pay particular attention, in line with the most recent strands of civil society and mobilization literature, to cognitive resources. On the one hand, there has been growing focus on the cultural and symbolic dimension of social movements (Jasper, Goodwin and Polletta, 2001; Flam and King, 2005). On the other, a more relational vision of protest has been promoted, with attention paid to the social mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and macro-effects (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). This special issue locates itself within this track. In an (indirect) critique of the 'structuralist bias' of previous approaches (either the political opportunity approach and resource mobilization theory approach), attention of most of the papers is focused on the relational, cognitive, and affective mechanisms through which contextual input is

filtered and acquires meaning. Indeed, as underlined by Gerő et al., 2017, the role of emotions becomes more important with increasing vagueness of the enemy. The effects of political opportunities depend in fact on the social construction of these opportunities by the relevant actors. Finally Instead of considering only the 'usual suspects' of the construction of the 'Other', namely radical right and populist parties, the papers in this special issue consider the broader field of contention – as populated by many different political actors. The articles in this volume therefore pay a particular attention to processes of interactions between the extreme right, populist and nationalist movements' other actors, both allies and opponents, embracing in that what social movement studies call a 'relational approach'. In social movement studies for example, radical right groups have been addressed under the label of *counter-movements* (della Porta, 2012). Conflicts between social movements (usually identified with left-wing or progressive groups) and counter-movements (right-wing and conservative) might resemble debates to the extent that they are based on an attempt to persuade opponents and authorities. Sometimes, however, their interaction far more resembles a battle in which the objective is to annihilate the 'enemy' (della Porta, 2012). Interactions between movements and counter-movements, as well as between any kind of 'we' and 'them', as shown in most of the articles in the present volume, lead to a strong sense of conflictuality and the prevalence of a Manichean view of politics (della Porta, 1995).

Methodological choices follow, in the articles of this special issue, these analytical approaches. The studies illustrated in this special issue focus in fact on data coming from news reports retrieved from the electronic archives of The Czech News Agency (ČTK) between 1990 and 2010 (Hrubeš and Navrátil); critical discourse analysis of 30 biographical narrative interviews with the members of three main Polish nationalist organizations (Kaita); Viktor Orbán's main speeches before 2015 (Susánszky et al.); and in-depth interviews and content analysis of local sources (Kovarek et al.). Moreover, in terms of research design, whereas usually there is a lack of comparative studies, this special issue tries to analyze those changes not only in the scale of a given country, but also at the regional and European levels.

To conclude, *populism and the extreme right* are increasingly discussed, as also argued in Gerő et al., 2017, as interrelated syndromes in various (academic and political) interpretations of current challenges to liberal democracies (Caiani and della Porta, 2011). This special issue adds another broader concept which is the 'enemization of politics', or the 'construction of the image of the other', which similarly poses a crucial normative problem to Democracies, which is worth of future reflections. We are indeed witnessing a 'Populist momentum'. However, in contrast to the extremist right-wing parties of the 1930s, new populist movements in Europe, as well as beyond, do not aim to abolish democracy: quite the opposite, as they thrive on democratic support. It is a conflict between elites 'that are becoming increasingly suspicious of democracy and angry publics that are becoming increasingly illiberal'.[1] The articles in this special issue contribute to developing this possible future debate. Arguably, the emphasis on the threat that outsider groups presents for the community contradicts principles of pluralism and equal participation in the public sphere. On

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[1] http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-09-18-krastev-en.html.

the other hand, political mobilization can be a source of participation that fuels democracy. Is there any essential difference between mobilization that assumes a homogeneous ethnic community and one that does not presuppose any impassable boundaries between groups? What is the political purpose of invoking an image of the enemy? What are the consequences of such claims? These are some of the questions that arise from the contributions in the present volume.

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