

Round Table - New Political Populism and the Defence of Christian Democratic Values

The session was opened by Jan Olbrycht MEP, Chairman of the EPP Working Group on 'Values and Liberties', who reminded that Europe is experiencing a mounting, new brand of populism which is fueled by objective circumstances of uneasiness and discomfort *vis à vis* the growing immigration on the one hand and by the heavy crisis of the last years on the other hand. Both the social phenomena are worsened by the decreasing role (sometimes close to incapacity) of States, lacking resources to promote social policies for citizens and integration policies for immigrants. Populistic and xenophobic movements exploit and instrumentalize legitimate feelings of identity and aspiration to recovery among citizens proposing easy solutions of “social refolding” and closure, while igniting feelings of fear, of localism and short-termism. This social refolding produces a growing distrust to the future, and, as a result distrust on institutions embodied by a low turnout in political consultations and a constant decrease in demographic trends.

But politics is about governing the fear and not governing through fear. Populism consists, in fact, in a distortion of the truth and the denial of the genuine European vision of reality (enshrined in the EPP values), which is a vision based on confidence in the future and the attitude of openness and to discover and explore what is different and unknown. It's not by coincidence that Europe has given the world for centuries explorers, sailormen, inventors. The EPP family sometimes doesn't make sufficiently clear its message thus leaving an open field to populistic movements.

Valeriu Stoica, from the Institute for Popular Studies, underlined that populism constitutes a demagogic distortion of reality as much as fundamentalism constitutes a distortion of real beliefs. A strong European answer would be needed, but European families are still succumbing *vis a vis* national parties who very often are driven by short term policies.

Mario Mauro MEP, Member of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, Head of the Italian Delegation, underlined that EPP has traditionally, since the age of the founding fathers, inspired Europe on confidence and not on fear and transformed peaceful relations between European states from an exception to the rule. Populism, on the contrary, gives an answer based on short term messages and politics and exploits feeling of an electorate

whose “sensus communis” is very similar to the EPP family. That’s why it’s time for a strong leadership by the EU. If we continue postponing this answer there is the risk that public opinion points the EU as the scapegoat and looks at the Populistic-xenophobic movements as the answer to potential threats (especially from rising powers in international relations). Now the EPP family has to give a strong message against this crisis of confidence and focus on the strengthening of the European project, with the perspective of the United States of Europe. It is a vision for the future, for the Europe to come. But as De Gasperi used to remember “a common politician thinks to next elections while a real statesman thinks to next generations”.

Adrian Papahagi, State Advisor from Romania, in his reach presentation started with a quotation in Latin (very much linked to his country’s history): “*Nolite timere*”, “fear not” that is rooted in the Christian tradition both from the old and the new testament. On the contrary the mounting feeling of fear inspires solutions based on Charisma (a real shortcut to consensus based on emotions) while parliamentarism and the classical rules of democratic debate and ruling based on procedures, appear more and more as a boring liturgy. Again it’s time for Europe to show its original vocation to ending fear, as demonstrated by the decision - that originated the Community - to put in common coal and steel (elements of war) to govern fear.

Jos Van Gennip, Rapporteur for the new EPP-Platform, pointed alienation, dissatisfaction and bureaucratization as the elements that created a gap between institutions and citizens. The answers, according to the deepest values of the Popular tradition is based on Person, community and common good.

Luca Volonte’, Chairman of the EPP-CD Group at the Council of Europe, added an important element: fears, among our traditional popular electorate, are coming not only from crisis, immigration and globalization but also from our non-answer to relativistic threat. Sometimes the fact that we appear shy and reluctant to get engaged in battles for values, *in primis* life and family, create frustration in our electorate who turns to populist movements.

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