

THE CONTINUITY OF POPULISM IN SERBIA: FROM THE 19th TO THE 21st CENTURY¹

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Abstract

In the second half of the 19th century, Serbian populism became a focal point of the political life of the country and the dominant social model. Established by the Radical Party and relying on the ideas of Russian populism, it was manifested in two forms: as social egalitarianism and ideological nationalism. A monopolistic party, reliance on Russia, an authoritarian leader, essentialisation of the nation and a striving for the establishment of a great state were the basic forms through which it was manifested. In socialist Yugoslavia the predominant form of populism was the leftist one, emanated through resistance to market reforms and the liberalisation of society. At the time of the breakdown of European socialism, Serbia, at the time of the so-called antibureaucratic revolution, turned towards radical populism personified by Slobodan Milošević. That was a time of transformation of leftist and pro-Yugoslav populism into a predominantly right-wing Serbian populism with an ultranationalist content. The pattern established in this way has not significantly changed to the present day.

Keywords: *Serbia, populism, nationalism, socialism, antibureaucratic revolution*

Theories of populism are still at an early stage of development, for it is a phenomenon that is relatively new and controversial in the domain of politics and society in the West. It undoubtedly has to do with the political consequences of the great economic crisis dating from 2008. In the view of Jan-Werner Müller (2017, 14), “we lack coherent criteria on the basis of which we could determine when political actors become populists in a meaningful sense of the term”. Accusations of populism often occur in political struggles as a sort of stigma thrown at political opponents, while there exist theorists who interpret it as “an authentic voice of democracy”,

¹ The paper is the result of the author's work on the project of the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822682. It reflects only the author's view and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

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such as Christopher Lasch. Werner Müller systematises the recognition of populism in the form of several elements. The first, but by no means only one of which, is sharp criticism levelled at the “elites” and “the establishment”. Apart from anti-elitism, an important element of populism is also anti-pluralism. “The ‘people’ are perceived by populists as an indivisible whole that cannot be divided according to one’s political preferences. Such a whole, the essentialised ‘people’, can only be represented by ‘authentic’ political representatives who are capable of understanding it because they possess a special kind of sensibility. On account of this, those who are not supporters of populists, as a rule, are branded as a corrupt elite and an ostracised establishment — those who are not truly a part of the people, which, viewed from the essentialist perspective, is always moral, in the right and uncorrupted (Mudde, Kaltwasser 2017, 11-16).

Due to its anti-pluralist and organicist character, each populism necessarily enters into a pact with authoritarianism and endangers the democratic order, which is essentially a pluralist one. According to Jan-Werner Müller (2017, 15-16), populist regimes are characterised by three central components: they strive to place the apparatus and institutions of the state under strict control, they demonstrate corruption and widespread clientelism that presupposes material benefits or political “shortcuts” to the citizens’ support, and finally they aim to systematically smother the voice of any critically-inclined media and civil society. This is a generic model, within which there exist different variants, but all populists justify their conduct by claiming that it is only them who represent the people, in the name of which they are allowed to implement undemocratic and authoritarian methods in practice. Even though it denies the crucial postulates of democratic governance, populism speaks in the name of the highest democratic ideals — the model according to which “the people rules”. Populists come to power in elections, using the mechanisms of liberal democracy, which they subsequently call into question or abolish altogether. Each populism is closely connected to the politics of identity — to nationalism as the key legitimising determinant of the populist policy, for the “people” is the essentialised and reified form of the identity narrative.

The foundations of populism in Serbia were laid down in the 19th century by Nikola Pašić and the People’s Radical Party, headed by him. Proceeding from the egalitarian traditions of the socialist doctrine of Svetozar Marković and relying on the ideological concept of Russian populism, Pašić laid the basis of the ideology of the social, national and political unity of the Serbs, denying the need for social differentiation and political pluralisation. Towards the end of the 19th century, Russian populists, acting under the influence of Nikolay Chernyshevsky, were recognised as strong opponents of the capitalist development of Russia, arguing in favour of pre-capitalist forms of production that predominated in rural regions of Russia. Their

ideological concept was opposed to the liberal political reforms that were unfolding in Western Europe around the middle of the 19th century. They were also opposed to any change of Russian society that would not take into consideration the value-based aspirations of the Russian peasant masses (Kolakovski 1983, 377-392). Strongly influenced by Russian socialist thought, Svetozar Marković returned to Serbia after studying in St Petersburg and Zurich convinced of the resoluteness and originality of the ideas of Russian populism, which, in his view, led to the economic and social emancipation of the people. Marković's ideas about the "non-capitalist development" of Serbia and rejecting the development of bourgeois society presupposed creating an alternative, embodied in a kind of "people's self-governance", liberated from the constraints of bureaucracy and relying on the idea of "common property". As a true "phenomenon that duly appeared in Serbian society", through his theoretical work, Svetozar Marković levelled a strong criticism at liberalism and established the basic ideological foundations of the future People's Radical Party, always demanding of his political brothers-in-arms to manifest a true revolutionary dedication of authentic "representatives of the people's thought" (Perović 1985, 274-278). As the leader of the populist radicals, Nikola Pašić strove in his political work to provide continuity and institutionalisation to Marković's fundamental idea of creating an egalitarian "people's state", close to the interests of Serbia's peasant society and opposed to the much-reviled capitalist development of the Western world (Perović 2019, 350-351; Stojanović 2017, 43-66).

The basis of Serbia's 19th-century populism was resistance to the modernisation of society, striving not to follow the path taken by Western Europe, and faith in the ideological and political power of Russian autocracy and Orthodox Christianity. That is why the radical populists' slogan in the second half of the 19th century in Serbia was: God, the people, Russia. The basic means of political activity was the socially undifferentiated "people", which could be represented solely by the Radical Party and the only goals were said to be national liberation and unification. Collective freedom had to be above individual freedoms. In terms of social egalitarianism, Serbian populism was leftist but in terms of its nationalist essence, it was right-wing. This dichotomy would be retained throughout the 20th century. The central controversies of Serbian populism in the 19th century were manifold. Instead of the notions of rule of law and division of power, it promoted the principle of the people's and party state as the embodiment of "national characteristics", whereas instead of the idea of the market economy, the model that was adopted was that of a state-controlled economy for the purpose of preserving egalitarianism, distribution and implementation of the "national" aims. From the 19th century onwards, Serbian populism, both in terms of form and content, has been manifested as nationalism, and this constant has remained to the present day. Just as the basis

of the programme has not changed — the presence of an authoritarian leader, reliance on Russia, avoidance of Western models, a monopolistic party identified with “the people”, a leader who is the only authentic interpreter of “the will” of the people, unity instead of division of power and the idea of creating a large and ethnically homogeneous state — as the central point of the programme (Perović 1985, 23-38; Perović 1993, 104-131; Brubejker 2017, 325-364).

The creation of the Yugoslav state changed the context in which Serbian populism developed, placing it in surroundings made up of different political traditions of Yugoslavia’s constituent countries and confronting it with the very Yugoslav idea, which was linked to liberal-democratic traditions. The crisis of liberal democracy in Europe in the period between the great wars favoured a further development of the cultural and the ideological matrix of the anti-Western and the anti-liberal model in Serbia. The complex experience in the equally complex Yugoslav state contributed to the strengthening of the right-wing spectrum of Serbian politics, which could be identified with the dominant spirit of the times until the Second World War, which favoured autocratic and fascist regimes in Eastern Europe. Serbian fascism was a marginal phenomenon on the political scene, but with the increase of the anti-democratic discourse towards the end of the 1930’s and the seeking an alternative, it was successful when it came to expressing the key items on its populist agenda: nationalism as the only tradition and reigning ideological paradigm; an anti-Western attitude, manifested not only through resistance to Western values but also through the striving to avoid following the Western development path; collectivism instead of individualism; collective freedom from “the other” instead of the individual freedoms of citizens; authoritarianism instead of strengthening the role of institutions; negation of the rule of law; the people’s state instead of a modern state; a state-controlled not a market-oriented economy; russophilia, as opposed to adherence to Western values; striving for a national liberation and union of all Serbs instead of developing a state along realistic lines; sacrificing the freedom of the individual for the freedom of the collective; etc. (Perović 2015, 1528; Stojanović 2017, 12-17; Perović, 2019, 348-423; Hobsbaum 2002, 5-26)

Preserving the content, the populist form changed somewhat in the second half of the 20th century. In socialist Yugoslavia, populism was manifested in the policy of the ruling Communist Party. The anti-fascist winners of the war established a monopolistic and undivided rule, with an authoritarian model of a party state and reliance on Soviet Russia. From such a position of power, they dealt harshly with the perpetrators of the Quisling terror campaign, and also with their ideological opponents. The new powers-that-be referred to the people as the source of their authority, court decisions were passed “in the name of the people”, and an important slogan of the new victors’ populism was: “Death to fascism, freedom to the peo-

ple”, while the political nomenclature often used the term “the working people” as a political-ideological and constitutional category. Another pillar of socialist populism in Yugoslavia was the demand for economic and social egalitarianism. For the sake of egalitarianism, all reforms and attempts at democratising the system were obstructed, as were all tendencies towards social differentiation (Popov 1993, 3-34; Stojanović 2010, 125-157).

When analysing the above-mentioned attitudes, it is logical to take into consideration the period from the early 1960's, when fundamental reform processes were initiated and started being resolved, to the early 1970's, when reform-oriented attempts at democratising the system in Yugoslavia were brought to a close by relieving a number of prominent figures of duty, first of all in Croatia and Serbia. During the course of that period, the authoritarian Yugoslav President Tito delivered three speeches, which, at moments of crises, expressed very similar views — this occurred in 1962, 1968 and 1972 respectively. Each of these speeches reflected the continuity of Tito's successful technique of maintaining his central authoritarian role in Yugoslav society by means of frequent appearances at mass rallies and in the media, as a direct and very effective method of populist mobilisation of the Yugoslav public (that is, “the working class”, whose interests he represented though the Party) for ideological purposes. The first of the speeches referred to above was delivered by the Yugoslav President in Split on 6th May 1962, and for years afterwards it made Party hardliners feel nostalgic. In this speech, Tito invited not only the Communists but the people as a whole to struggle against getting rich and the usurpation of power, and he found the causes for the majority of the country's problems within the Party and its leadership. He urged that the influence of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia be increased, that the Communists, in the name of the people, assume responsibility for the development of socialism in Yugoslavia more directly. He demanded that those wishing to get rich be condemned and exposed to more severe measures, and that the same treatment be applied against speculators who travelled abroad and squandered foreign currency, as he put it. Tito also warned of the increase of bribery and corruption in companies, especially among managerial staff, saying that he was in favour of closing down and reducing the number of foreign trade companies. On this occasion, the Yugoslav President also condemned the “striving for making quick earnings” that had manifested itself in Yugoslav economy, and he commended the restrictive measure of banning the import of cars to Yugoslavia. He sharply criticised those managers who “only cared about profit and paid no mind to what their collective had decided”, saying that the distribution of funds and determining the level of workers' income had to be equitable. After this speech, the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses increased, people chanted Tito's name and swore allegiance to him throughout the

country — so much so that it was even claimed that the Yugoslav leader, bypassing the Party and the state institutions, “held a Party meeting with the entire people”. During the radically leftist rebellion of 1968, Yugoslav students occasionally referred to this speech of Tito’s as a positive example, compatible with their demands (Petranović, Zečević 1988, 1085-1088; Bešlin 2019, 261).

The speech that brought the students’ 1968 rebellion to a close was delivered on 9th June; in it, he agreed with the students that there was a huge backlog of problems, and that the events of June that year had occurred before the Party got around to resolving those problems. He, too, was of the opinion that the major problems were “issues pertaining to self-management in work organisations and workers’ collectives, which had to be urgently resolved.” He said that he completely understood the students, accusing the Party that “its hearing had not been acute enough” when the students previously warned the powers-that-be that the amassed problems should be resolved more quickly. It was, he thought, high time that slowness and inefficiency were eliminated when it came to resolving the problems. The Party was unified only when problems were observed and conclusions drawn but not when it came to their implementation, for there were always problems and “separate views”, Tito said. Economic and social reform required a much speedier and more efficient resolution of the problems, “so that the people might be given a sense of being able to improve their lives in the future”. Each kind of populism always refers to “efficiency”, in the name of which it is allowed to derogate the role of institutions. Tito urged that measures be taken “in order to improve the living and working conditions of the working class”. It was necessary, Tito reiterated, to improve the position of the producers, who should not be made to carry the burden of the reform, to deal with the issue of employment and, in particular, to eliminate “major anti-socialist phenomena”, which were becoming increasingly manifest and violated the egalitarian character of society and the system. In his egalitarian enthusiasm, he very energetically condemned “unwarranted riches” and “various anti-socialist phenomena”, first of all the opening of privately owned factories, stressing that such things would not be allowed. He singled out the following issues as being key and most urgent to resolve — “the issue of the working class, that is, making the situation easier for producers in their companies, the problem of the distribution of funds, eliminating the huge discrepancy between people’s salaries which were glaringly obvious, which is something I do not at all approve of”. He also criticised the Party for allowing itself to be overly impressed by “various investments” and for forgetting to care about the working man, as he put it. Tito urged the students to monitor the realisation of the goals, and “whenever they are not clear about something, whenever something needs to be explained, let them come to me, let them send a delegation” (Đukić, 1989).

Tito's third turning-point-type speech, derived from the same ideological arsenal was an interview given to the daily *Vjesnik* and the well-known "Pismo [Letter]", within which he initiated the campaign for ousting the liberal Party leadership in Serbia in 1972. He reiterated the same arguments used before, thus nipping reform-oriented tendencies in society in the bud. By addressing the students in 1968, Tito basically called into question and disciplined the Party, turning the students' demands against it. This process strengthened the patrimonial and populist characteristics of society, as well as the autocratic contours of the political system. Still, the Yugoslav President did not address the students as his brothers-in-arms — he addressed them from the position of the leader of the "revolution", promising them that their egalitarian and anti-capitalist ideals would be fulfilled. Tito's personal authority was very much increased, "overshadowing all the state and Party institutions, Tito directly communicated with the students... A new revolution with the old leader", Latinka Perović wrote (1991, 57). Detecting unwanted changes that were changing the Bolshevik character of the Communist Party and its leading role based on firm unity, Tito resorted to more frequent direct contact with the masses, following his idea that the role of a leader becomes important only if "he represents the will of the people" as the decisive moving spirit, which he uses to organise and "formulate the thoughts of the people" (Dedijer 1986, 656). The idea of a charismatic Balkan leader who acts over and above institutions fit in with the Serbian political tradition of the 19th century and the basic contours of the political culture and populist policy in the 20th century (Kuljić 2005, 49; Urbinati 2019, 131-132).

The termination of the reform-oriented ideas of the Party liberals in the early 1970's in Yugoslavia strengthened the position of the neoconservative Party ideological matrix, which, by resorting to repressive methods, prevented the legalisation of pluralist phenomena and the democratic forms of Yugoslav socialism. One of the ousted liberal protagonists of the Serbian Party leadership, Marko Nikezić (2003, 126-131), warned of the dangers that threatened Serbian society through the ideological combination of "state socialism" and nationalism. As a reaction to the accelerated process of the transformation of Yugoslavia towards the end of the 1960s — specifically in Serbia, which was a part of the Yugoslav federation — nationalism and populism prevailed and became dominant among the intellectual elite and also among a number of politicians. Reacting to the decentralisation of the state and the democratisation of society that presupposed reforms leading to political liberalisation, they vehemently condemned the ongoing processes and voiced the dilemma: either Yugoslavia was to conform to the Serbs and Serbia, or there was to be a homogeneous Serbian state in the entire ethnic space populated by Serbs. The populist wave formed on these foundations in Serbian society exploded in the second half of the 1980s. As the new leader of Serbia with an almost consensual sup-

port in 1987, Slobodan Milošević, a populist, appeared on the scene. Riding on the wave of populism in the so-called anti-bureaucratic revolution, criticising the “alienated” and “bureaucratised” elites, he won the broadest possible support in Serbia, which he used to initiate the creation of a great state in keeping with the plans of nationalist-populist ideologues. Populism was stoked by means of street rallies entitled “the happening of the people” and “truth rallies”, which were shifted from Serbia to Montenegro in January 1989, when the legally-elected Montenegrin leadership was brought down in the streets. That particular concept had gained consensual support in Serbia. Its ideological foundation was rising nationalism, manifested as political populism. The true character of the movement that elevated Slobodan Milošević to the position of a leader is testified to by the designation of the political structure that became the new dominant force — “the happening of the people”, otherwise known as “the anti-bureaucratic revolution”. The attempt to export the populist course of action to other parts of Yugoslavia by means of “truth rallies” and “happenings of the people” proved to be a failure (Bešlin 2019, 650-765; Dragović Soso 2004, 76-128; Marković 2009, 35; Milosavljević 1995, 1-30; Trkulja 1998, 14-97).

During the course of organising the so-called anti-bureaucratic revolution (1987—1989) and the coming to power of Slobodan Milošević, populism was transformed from a predominantly Yugoslav and egalitarian movement with a leftist and socialist content into a nationalist one with a right-wing agenda. Following the victory of the conservative trend among the Serbian Communists in the course of a Party plenum held in September 1987, the new leader Slobodan Milošević, as early as spring 1988, initiated his nationalist campaign striving to topple the leaderships of the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo in order to establish unity across the entire territory of Serbia. In order to achieve this, he resorted to the mass mobilisation of people in Serbia, who he won over by using nationalist-populist slogans that had been out of use in multinational Yugoslavia during its entire existence (Grdešić 2019, 35-38). Abolishing all attempts at pluralism and stigmatising them as a betrayal of the nation, the new populist regime, relying on a nationalist platform, accused the provincial leaderships of Serbia and Kosovo of “dismembering Serbia, betraying the nation and separatism”. Even though the rhetoric of the new Serbian populism did not yet reject the Yugoslav framework and had a nominally socialist content, these themes were being pushed into the background in favour of the idea of Serbian unity strengthening the Serbian people at the expense of other peoples in multinational Yugoslavia. The mobilisation of the masses on the basis of a right-wing, nationalist populism was carried out fast — mass rallies became increasingly numerous and the Belgrade media, controlled by the regime, stoked up national sentiments, so that, under the pressure of the public opinion and street gatherings

in the course of 1988 and 1989, the provincial leaderships of Vojvodina and Kosovo were deposed as was the republican leadership of Montenegro. Milošević's loyalists took over the key positions in these units of Yugoslavia, whereby the new regime took over half the posts in the federal, parity-based institutions of Yugoslavia. The peak of the transformation of the new leader Slobodan Milošević from a Party apparatchik into a national leader occurred after Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro were placed under control. In June 1989, a hitherto unprecedented public event was held — a commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the mythical Battle of Kosovo, wherein the army of mediaeval Serbia was defeated by the Ottoman army. Deftly manipulating the people's emotions, national sentiments and resorting to a nationalist rhetoric, the regime of Slobodan Milošević gathered over one million people in Kosovo polje in the autonomous province of Kosovo, reportedly the location of the legendary battle fought in 1389 between the Christian and the Ottoman armies. In the historic speech that Milošević delivered there, he established the point of final discontinuity with socialist Yugoslavism and promoted the rhetorical and practical agenda of Serbian national-populism as the new ruling ideological paradigm (Đukić 1992, *passim*; Đukić 1994, *passim*; Čalić 2013, 339). During the course of this turning-point gathering, Milošević was finally promoted from a Party official using a moderately leftist brand of populism to an unassailable, authoritarian national-populist leader whose position was based on right-wing, nationalist populism. Starting from the sentence that he uttered before Kosovo Serbs living in the predominantly Albanian province of Kosovo: "No one can dare to beat you" in 1987 to the greatest mass gathering in modern Serbian history on the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo (St Vitus' Day — 28th June 1989), and during the course of the two years when hundreds of these so-called truth rallies were organised and the disloyal provincial and republican leaderships were deposed, the process of the transformation of Serbian populism from leftist-socialist to right-wing-nationalist was completed. From the latter platform, Slobodan Milošević would go off to wars fought for the sake of realising the national-populist idea of Greater Serbia. The central preoccupation of the new course of action, through the use of violence and due to the impossibility of taking over institutions of the federal state completely, was the creation of an ethnically homogeneous Serbian state on the territory of the greater part of Yugoslavia. If, in terms of form, the rule of Slobodan Milošević and his party (the Socialist Party of Serbia — SPS) was populist in character, in ideological terms, it was a case of syncretism of conservative and dogmatic segments of the League of Communists of Serbia (renamed SPS in 1990) and the conservative and nationalist intellectual alternative gathered around the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) (Popov 1993, 11-34; Milosavljević 2002, 340-374).

The wars fought during the break-up of Yugoslavia and the erasure of the borderlines between the republics, then, were the collective endeavour of a dominant part of the Serbian intellectual elite — as well as the highest point of its influence on state policy and the broader public in the past two centuries. The national-populist project, the crimes planned and systematically carried out — first of all in Bosnia and Herzegovina — were the result of a well thought-out plan of the dominant part of the Serbian intellectual elite, converging with the newly established populist and authoritarian establishment. The intellectual populism of social scientists — first of all historians and writers — served to “prove” the moral purity and righteousness of their own people and the “malignant nature” or the “criminal character” of all the others, convincing their followers of their role as eternal victims of their “ungrateful” neighbours, and doing so to such an extent that each act of theirs would become easily acceptable and morally justified in advance, as Dubravka Stojanović writes. Thus, at the outset of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and before and during the armed conflicts, a major part of the political, intellectual and media elite of Serbia, using populist rhetoric for the purpose of spreading nationalism, carried out the necessary ideological and mental preparation of society for war, presenting it as “inevitable”, “just” and “liberating” (Stojanović 2010, 126-128).

The intellectual platform for internal Yugoslav antagonism and the dissemination of nationalist narratives in the second half of the 1980s, was identified by researchers within the framework of: SANU, the Writers' Association of Serbia and other cultural-ideological institutions. SANU first came out with a Memorandum (in 1986) — a *sui generis* Serbian national programme — which carried out the structural ideological and intellectual preparations for war. The influence of the central scientific and cultural institution on the formation of public opinion, on “the widespread belief that the crisis of Yugoslav society could only be resolved by resorting to radical measures — by causing a political crisis, defining the Serbian national programme, and *if need be*, alternatives to the Yugoslav state — can be considered to have been immeasurable”. Similarly, even more radical views could also be heard in the public discourse from other parts of society or from individuals but “none of them had the authority of the institution whose members, during the course of its history of one hundred years, had included the greatest names of Serbian science and culture” (Milosavljević 1995, 52). Researchers have quite rightly observed that the period between 1986 and 1999 can be defined as one of an intense ideological preparation and homogenisation of the national-populist matrix. One of the most influential disseminators of the new ideological paradigm, with which the wars for the Yugoslav heritage and territorial expansion towards the end of the 20th century were initiated, Mihailo Marković, wrote *post factum*: “The spirit of Serbia was magnificent. The reputation of SANU was at its highest point in history.” (*Memoran-*

dum SANU 1989, 128-136; Đurić Bosnić 2016, 111-120; Milosavljević 1995, 52; Marković 2009, 209)

Following the breakdown of populist authoritarianism in Serbia, the wars and crimes, international isolation, defeats and economic ruin, Serbia deposed the personal bearers of power, but the ideological matrix and the national-populist platform survived. The idea of Greater Serbia was reshaped, having acquired new protagonists within the framework of the intellectual and political hotbed formed around Vojislav Koštunica. After the change of power in Serbia in October 2000 and the extradition of Slobodan Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague, the essential characteristics of the ideology of his rule and the dominant value orientation of society were not changed. On the contrary, through the erroneous interpretation of the political changes as a turning point in the dismantling of “socialism”, preconditions were created for the condensation and reaffirmation of the defeated Serbian national-populism. Through the ousting of Milošević — who, through violence and crimes, compromised the dominant ideological and practical matrices in society —, within the nationalist political and intellectual circles that formed around the new President Vojislav Koštunica, a consensus was established to the effect that the time had come for a rehabilitation and a reaffirmation of Serbian national-populism and for preserving it by building it into the very foundations of the identity of society. For that purpose, relevant intellectual forces were engaged, so that nationalism should be redefined and given a positive content. “It was perceived that the easiest way to achieve the set goal was to permute causes and effects, that is, to deny that nationalism was the ideology of the politics of power in the name of the nation, but that, on the contrary, it represented its very identity”, as Olivera Milosavljević wrote (2007). Thus Koštunica’s intellectual and political nationalist-populist movement, especially after the assassination of the liberal Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić (2003), not only reaffirmed the values of Milošević’s epoch, but also prevented the liberalisation of Serbia, which was initiated in the year 2000. At the time, the aim was to disseminate theses about “good” and “democratic” nationalism, which led to intensive attempts at the reaffirmation and homogenisation of the compromised ideological concept that provided the platform on which the war conflicts in the post-Yugoslav area unfolded. A successor of Slobodan Milošević, Koštunica took the statement “the people knows” as his central slogan. This created the preconditions for a new Serbian populism, which, following the breakdown of a liberal orientation, would be established by the ultra-right-wing Radicals (Milosavljević 2007; Nikolić, Popović 2006, 104 et passim).

The re-establishment of the *ancien régime* and politics dating from the 1990s was particularly contributed to through the coalition of the pro-Western Democratic Party (which was the key agent of the democratic changes after 2000) and Mi-

lošević's national-populist and authoritarian Socialist Party. Their "reconciliation" (2008) and, in effect, the exculpation of the main protagonists of nationalist and war-mongering politics, as well as the perpetrators of corruption from the Milošević era, intensified the political breakdown of "the Republic of October 5th" and brought to power radical populists and ultra-nationalists in Serbia (Bieber 2019, 43). The process of solidifying the new, extreme nationalist and more emphatically anti-Western Serbian populism, personified by Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party, has been ongoing since 2012.

The establishment of the new radical populist course of action began immediately after the change of power in 2012. The aim of the dominant populism, soon enough, became the excessive popularisation and aggressive media promotion, to begin with, of the First Deputy Prime Minister — soon to become Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić. The media, institutions, the judiciary, security services... all were harnessed to contribute to the glorification of Vučić's personal rule and accelerated the development of his political authority. The most conspicuous examples of this were the suspicious arrests carried out in the course of the populist anti-corruption campaign, the abuse of the media and the increase of the social and redistributive component of the budget. The methods referred to above were combined with anti-Constitutional extraordinary elections and a never-ending pre-election campaign. Over time, Aleksandar Vučić showed an increasing ambition to concentrate all power in his hands. Security structures were soon placed under his control, which contributed to an impression among the public that he is the most powerful political subject in the state — and this was also contributed to by the forcible breakdown of all opposition parties and suppression of an alternative.

On the domestic front, Vučić's populist politics is characterised, apart from the element of populism, by a pronounced resistance to the Europeanisation and modernisation of Serbia, regardless of its occasional pro-European rhetoric. Populism is but one of the manifestations of Serbian nationalism — which survives as the only ideology — and Aleksandar Vučić is the bearer of that policy (*Populizam: urušavanje demokratskih vrednosti* [Populism: The Breakdown of Democratic Values] 2013, passim.). Although Vučić continues the deep and solid vertical of Serbian populism — reaching as far back as the 19th century —, the foundations of his authoritarian power, consisting of: nationalist homogenisation, xenophobia, authoritarianism, control of the media, destruction of institutions, clientelism, corruption, destruction of the opposition, etc. are not particularly original compared to other populist movements and regimes in Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Venezuela, etc. Vučić's rule, despite its historical roots, is primarily an eclectic combination of *déjà vu* elements of the classical populist system, as opposed to previous Serbian populist movements, which had a considerably higher degree of originality and authenticity (Var-

ga 2018, 89-123; Subotić 2007, 45-72; Stojanović 2010, 125-157). In that respect, the historical constants of Serbian populism have remained essentially unchanged over two centuries of modern history — nationalism and striving to form a great, ethnically homogeneous state; an anti-Western attitude and anti-liberalism; dependence on Russia; a monopolistic party representing a unified “people”; and an authoritarian leader — remain well into the 21st century, the models of social constitution and the dominant state ideological matrix. The ruling value paradigm, whose foundations contain two central pillars of Serbian populism — nationalism and anti-pluralism — have remained unshaken to the present day.

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