

Preface and acknowledgement

Demagogues and demagoguery are every day phenomena in many spheres of public life. They are, of course, very much present in politics. I am writing this introduction in the early summer of 2018, after the first one-and-half years of Donald J. Trump presidency in the United States. From this vantage point it looks like politics has once again become a perch for populist demagogues. In a way, this is quite simply a general lesson from the history of twentieth and early twenty-first century Europe. Though currently there is a resurgence of populism in Europe, populists have also suffered defeats in recent national elections in the Netherlands, France, and Germany. They are still present, quite a few of them are in power in Southern and Central Europe, others have emerged victorious in Austria and some, in spite of their electoral defeats, have only grown stronger, as in Germany.

The topic of this book is a very personal one for me. I was born and lived in Europe when dangerous demagogues ruled the continent, and I barely survived their rule. I experienced the impact of demagoguery, the relatively frequent regime changes, and the introduction of different types of authoritarian rules. I enthusiastically welcomed the foundation and development of the European Union and consider it a personal insult that various populist demagogues are seeking to destroy it.

This book tells the story of eighteen fascist, communist, left-wing, right-wing, and liberal-conservative populist demagogues from eleven European countries: Britain, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Romania. There were many more all over the continent during the last century. In a book

twice as large as this, one could discuss the story of twice as many populist demagogues. Nevertheless, the selected ones are very representative of the phenomenon of populist demagoguery. Some of these demagogues caused the death of hundreds of thousands or even millions of people; others committed no major crimes against humanity. All were harmful to their countries and to Europe.

I wanted to write a popular book for the wider public in order to characterize populist demagogues, what they have preached, whom they called their “enemies,” and the lies and false promises they offered. I broadly quote their speeches and writings to introduce them and their demagoguery as it was. That is the main goal of the book. I also try to explain the situation in which they were able to act and even gain power, and to confront what they said with what, in reality, they did. The case studies on populist demagogues discuss this phenomenon and the way it has flooded Europe. In a relatively lengthy introduction I will analyze this phenomenon with the help of a great deal of scholarly works on the topic.

I am very grateful for Kati, my wife, with whom I’ve talked endlessly about the new age of demagogues, and who played a key role in writing about this topic. She, as always, has helped me immensely with her library expertise, and critical and editorial skills. Without her, this book would not have been written. I am also thankful for Dr. Robert Levy, my former student and old friend, who, as quite a few times before, masterfully edited and polished my manuscript. Last but not least, I am also thankful to József Litkei and the Central European University Press for copy editing and publishing this work.

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