

CHALLENGES TO THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY. THE REBIRTH OF NATIONALISMS IN EUROPE

PREFACE

The following section contains three essays written by young scholars, participants in the course “Challenges to the European Identity. The rebirth of nationalisms in Europe”. The course is a part of the Jean Monnet Module “Internal and External Challenges to the European Union”, which has been running at the Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University in Krakow for the last three years. The main idea behind the module was to foster discussion about the future of the European Union in light of contemporary political, economic and social changes, especially the numerous crises and challenges the EU has been facing. We hoped to attract international students from different cultural and political backgrounds, representing diverse disciplines, with the goal of enriching their knowledge, providing critical perspectives, and most of all creating an environment that allows for deliberation and encourages critical thinking. The module comprises two sections: one, the aforementioned course devoted to socio-cultural transformations, and the other focusing on political aspects, especially on the contestation and legitimization of the EU political order.

The “Challenges...” course has been dedicated to the analysis of the problem of the social transformations of European societies which have responded to the numerous crises by rebuilding national boundaries and voting for populist, right-wing parties. We addressed a number of important issues, such as the socio-psychological implications of European crises, the issue of solidarity in Europe (different strategies of coping with crises – searching for common solutions as opposed to national ones), the problem of values and their perceptions in the light of the crises, the question of radicalization of national and nationalistic sentiments in Europe, and the problem of (post)sovereignty.

The three essays presented in this volume, have been written by participants in this course, and were presented as their final assignments. Their in-depth, fresh and insightful perspectives make them not only the showcases of the course, but more importantly, they provide interesting and valuable insight into our understanding of contemporary changes. They represent divergent techniques and they focus on different aspects, but what unites them is the relevancy of the subjects, the accuracy of the argumentation and the methodological fastidiousness.

The first paper, by Jessica Sofizade, analyses the debate on the “situation of the rule of law and democracy in Poland” held in November 2017 in the European Parliament. The author analyses two speeches delivered during this debate, one given by Janusz Lewandowski and the other by Ryszard Antoni Legutko. The author analyses their rhetoric, arguments, and language, providing an insightful analysis of the speeches from the point of view of degree of populist argumentation.

The second paper, by Jakub Jusko, is an excellent example of the use of a survey experiment in sociological analysis. Jusko, following a studies by Frederik Hjort and by A.-H. Bay, H. Finseraas, and A. W. Pedersen, conducts his own research, targeting the student community in Brno. The question at hand was the problem of welfare chauvinism and the attitudes of native population (here Czech students) towards sharing welfare benefits with incomers. The study is exceptionally well grounded in the literature and very well operationalized, providing much needed addition to the subject.

Finally the last paper, by Kevin Menagie, offers a more anthropological perspective on contemporary national narratives. It focuses on the debate around the highly controversial figure of Zwarte Piet, an important character in the Dutch national “Sinterklaas” festival. While focusing on the Dutch example, the authors analysis and comments go actually far beyond the one case. The paper adds to the general debate over the wider phenomenon of the instrumentalization of traditions, and the contemporary processes of social polarization observed across Europe, which are driven by nationally focused and nationalistic ideologies and politicians.

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