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MODERN POPULISM AND THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF UKRAINE

Populism is a way of simplified explanation of the essence of complex problems. In politics (political populism) – is a manipulation technology used by political players to influence the consciousness of voters in order to achieve victory in the struggle for power. As populism is increasingly intertwined with political processes, it is being examined quite carefully from the point of view of its ideological nature. Populism is not an ideology in the usual sense, as it does not have a clearly systematized system of views. However, it carries an ideological coloring and is always combined with ideologies that are relevant in a certain environment at the moment – right, left, as well as centrist, which provides it with a reliable place in any socio-political process.

An important aspect of the phenomenon of populism is its role in shaping the vector of development of a political system – democratic or authoritarian. The bipolarity of this problem is due to the dual nature of populism. On the one hand, the core of the populist idea is democratic in nature and origin, which makes it a companion of political freedom and democracy. On the other hand, there is another side to populism. Thus, due to the inherent contradiction between the form of direct democracy and representative institutions in liberal democracy, populism is capable of contributing to the erosion of democratic institutions and procedures, and pose a threat to the values of the rule of law and the Western model of

democracy as a whole. In addition, populism is characterized by internal transformational processes. After all, populist movements, as a rule, come to power in a democratic way, but subsequently necessarily create a collective identity based on principles characteristic of authoritarian systems. And yet, populist movements are most often led by a charismatic leader, whose role is usually exaggerated. However, the failure to fulfill programmatic promises due to a complex of objective and subjective reasons ultimately implies a certain responsibility of the new political force and in particular its leader. Attempts to avoid such responsibility necessitate the abandonment of democratic approaches to organizing political life and the application of authoritarian or even totalitarian methods of governance [3, p. 257].

Populism has been gaining momentum in Ukraine since the late 1980s, when the national-democratic (anti-communist) movement formed on the wave of liberalization of public life criticized the foundations of the Soviet authoritarian-totalitarian system, setting as its goal its dismantling [5]. Since the declaration of Ukraine's independence, populism, taking into account the presence of complex social problems, the lack of effective mechanisms for solving them and cultivating the principles of democracy, has become a permanent component of socio-political processes in the country, which reflect the struggle between two trends - authoritarianism and democracy. It can be said that the controversy over the definition of the form of political government in Ukraine – parliamentary-presidential or presidential-parliamentary – can be considered as a theoretical and methodological basis for proving the superiority of one of the trends. In reality, this clearly correlated with the political course of each stage of presidential rule in the country.

The 2019 presidential elections in Ukraine, which were held under populist slogans using new manipulation technologies, brought to power a new political force, «Servants of the People», led by Volodymyr Zelensky. Over the past 5 years, the government has changed the ideological basis of its own policy three times – from libertarianism (2019) to Ukrainian centrism (2020), and from there to an authoritarian model of government similar to the PRC (2021) [4, p. 97]. In the final version, Ukraine received a form of government with clear signs of an authoritarian mafia-oligarchic political model, and in the Russian version. Its establishment was facilitated by a number of objective and subjective factors: the coming to power of the followers of the Party of Regions with its clan-oligarchic essence and pro-Russian value orientation; the request for «strong-arm power» with a single decision-making center in emergency situations (the Covid-19 epidemic (2020-2021), the active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war (February 2022), the destruction of the country's economic potential (2022-2025); the obvious tendency of the new government leadership towards authoritarianism in the system of state governance; the normalization of purposeful and impunity for

non-compliance with the norms of the Constitution and Laws of Ukraine; a significant decrease in the level of mass political culture; the authorities' attempts to avoid responsibility for failure to fulfill pre-election promises, as well as for participation in corruption schemes; the fusion of power and crime.

The manifestation of the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in Ukraine was: the authorities' interpretation of the norms of Articles 5 and 6 of the Basic Law regarding the form of political government in the country in favor of a presidential-parliamentary republic; an attack on democracy and its basic principles; monopolization of power, rejection of the system of independent functioning and mutual control of the executive, judicial and legislative branches of power; the destruction of Ukrainian parliamentarism, the attack on decentralization; the targeted and systematic persecution of the opposition, of all those who become dangerous to the current government in its struggle for political leadership in the state; improvement of repressive technologies and means to fight against their opponents and citizens; systematic cover-up of corruption schemes by the authorities; distancing the authorities from the people, destruction of the foundations of civil society, oppression of the middle class as a guarantee of social stability in society, promotion of further polarization of society by standard of living [2].

Speaking about the prospects for the development of the political system in Ukraine and the choice of its further course - authoritarian or democratic, one should take into account several important factors that influence this process and which, in one way or another, are a component of popularization technologies.

First. The choice between democracy and authoritarianism in Ukraine is part of the global process of struggle between Democracy and Authoritarianism. Within the framework of this process, today there is an expansion of the zone of authoritarian regimes and improvement of methods of manipulation of public consciousness using popular slogans. At the same time, as a reaction to the expansionist military threat from the Russian fascist regime, the democratic West is consolidating and becoming more active, and its interest in the existence of a democratic system in Ukraine is growing. At the same time, there is an increasingly close interaction between the two systems in various spheres, including economic, technological, informational, etc., which requires the search for compromises between the two forms of political rule and may become a reason for the formation of different value positions regarding authoritarianism and democracy.

Secondly. The dependence of the political process in Ukraine on the upcoming political elections. Of course, the current government is oriented towards an authoritarian model and in the event of its victory, we should expect further authoritarianization of the political system in the country. To do this, the authorities have a wide arsenal of influence on the results of the elections,

including through the use of appropriate population technologies, the use of security forces, influence on the organizational means of holding elections, their financing, legal support, etc. However, despite significant restrictions on democratic rights under current conditions, certain signs of democracy are still observed in the state. Yes, Ukraine actually has a valid Constitution, which records the status of the state as democratic, and all the main democratic institutions are preserved – a functioning Parliament, Government, judicial branch, local self-government, media pluralism, active civil society, etc., which can be used by opposition forces.

Thirdly. The state of Ukrainian civil society. Taking into account the traditional value orientations formed by the entire previous history of Ukrainians, which have generally been preserved even despite the significant mental trauma received from the totalitarian regime of the Soviet era, Ukrainians have a negative attitude towards authoritarianism and demonstrate a commitment to a democratic form of government. Sociological surveys conducted by international and domestic centers in 2022, 2023, and 2024 consistently demonstrated a high level of support for democracy among Ukrainian citizens – the vast majority of them [1]. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the vulnerability of public consciousness, the ability of citizens to react uncritically to populist targeted manipulation technologies, which can actively use such factors as social fatigue during the war, significant human losses, primarily among the most patriotic category of citizens, to speculate on the complex of problems generated by the war, to exploit the insufficient level of development of civil society, the ineffectiveness of methods of struggle of democracy with populism. The model of militant democracy can be considered an effective means of struggle against political populism. It offers ways to protect democracy from political actors who seek to weaken it by abusing democratic institutions and procedures. Within its framework, it is possible to combat radical movements and political parties that aim to change the democratic constitutional order. However, this model of democracy needs significant improvement.

Thus, the struggle between authoritarianism and democracy in Ukraine is not over. It is entering a new stage and its outcome depends on many factors, including the level of populist technologies and the availability of effective means of combating them.

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