



Progressive Governance Symposium 2017

Politics for a New Progressive Era

Thread B: Making Europe and its democracies fit for the future, session I

Confronting the populist threat and strengthening open society and progressive movements

Overview

- **Thread B:** Making Europe and its democracies fit for the future
- **Session I:** Confronting the populist threat and strengthening open society and progressive movements
- **Schedule:** 14:15 – 15:40 in room B

Speakers

Initial inputs:

- **Colin Crouch**, Emeritus Professor, University of Warwick, UK
- **Cas Mudde**, Associate Professor, School of Public and International Affairs, University of Georgia

Brief comments (moderated):

- **Helmut Anheier**, President, Hertie School of Governance, Germany
- **Anna Ascani**, MP, Chamber of Deputies, Democratic Party, Italy
- **Yves Bertoincini**, Director, Jacques Delors Institute, France
- **Sabine Russ-Sattar**, Professor, University of Kassel, Germany
- **Bernard Spitz**, President, Les Gracques, France

Chair:

- **Jeremy Cliffe**, Berlin Bureau Chief, The Economist

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The years 2016 and 2017 have undoubtedly been the most successful ones for populists in the post-World War II era so far. With Donald Trump's election as president, a populist has now taken over office of a consolidated liberal democracy for the first time in this period. At the same time, the Brexit decision has weakened the European integration project considerably. In many European countries populist parties have

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won additional seats in local and national parliaments and thus remain a challenge for the foundations of democracies, traditional parties, the EU's unity and values that are core to progressives.

However, the populist threat may go much further than these most obvious developments: Conservative, as well as leftist, parties often succumb to adapting populist rhetorics and policies in an attempt to get votes from those who are now commonly referred to as 'the left behind'. As a consequence, political and public debates are increasingly poisoned by a dangerously polarising rhetoric, deliberate misinformation, illiberal ideas and deep societal divides.

The overarching question of this breakout session is, how society and progressive actors can successfully re-gain ground and counter the populist surge. More specifically, we will address the following six points:

Suggested framing questions

1. In which of rising populism's many facets lies the greatest danger and how should progressives respond, both in the short and long term?
2. Can and should progressives develop a new political narrative that holds decisive normative appeal for a wide part of the electorate – and, if so, what should this narrative be comprised of?
3. How should democratic actors deal with populist parties – what are the prospects for the respective approaches of ignoring populists or openly debating their ideas?
4. Which democratic inventions might help to engage citizens with politics and restore their trust in political institutions?
5. Should progressives focus more on issues like shared identity or belonging and emotional messages to re-connect with voters?
6. What can European progressives learn from one another's respective fights against populism?

We believe that in order to fight back against populists, we need to debate these fundamental questions openly, controversially, and beyond single sectors and disciplines. Hence, we are glad to have with us representatives from politics, academia, the media, civil society, and the business world.

Contacts

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