

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

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STSM title: Populist parties and secessionist issues – the case of Spain and Serbia

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PURPOSE OF THE STSM/

The main research focus of this STSM is related to the development of ideological position of populist parties in Spain and Serbia and tactics they employ in relation to secession issue. Those tactics are different when looking at some basics issues – if parties are giving advantage to identity or to interest-based aspects of secessionism, to what extent are they insisting on secessionist issues or are they trying to avoid the issue and how are they combining standpoint on secession with other elements of ideological profiles. In most general terms, our research focus deals with the effect of populism on the quality of democracy in two states, by comparing the understanding of democracy and democratic rule between different populist parties.

Serbian and Spanish case have some intriguing similarities that are important determinants for populist tactics, their ideological development and understanding of democratic governing. Both countries have historical characteristics that influence current democratic development: (1) authoritarian past and non-democratic regimes in the recent past and (2) experience of civil war(s) in recent history that are still influential topics in political and public life. In contrast to Serbian case and violent breakup of Yugoslavia that ended by unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia in 2008, during post-Franco period Spain was established as decentralized state and reached significant level of democratization and become EU member state during “the southern enlargement”. However, regardless of their different trajectories, both countries have similar configurations of political cleavages and similar dualism of populist actors in relation to main political issues.

The main goal of the short terms scientific mission is to design common theoretical framework that would serve as a basis for future comparative studies not be limited to two countries under observation. The framework will be discussed with colleagues from the host institution. STSM will be also used for conducting of several interviews with representatives of populist parties, journalists and scholars researching populism.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

During the STSM in Madrid I have conducted all proposed activities. As this was STSM attached to MC meeting and the conference, I have used them as an introduction phase for the STSM – some of the issues have been discussed as a part of WG 1 and with colleagues from Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

and it provide me with the insight regarding potential inclusion of more cases into this research.

Also, open panel 'Politics in an age of populist communication: a view from Spain' that was organized as a part of COST Action conference was of great importance for me. This panel included a discussion about current Spanish political developments and the role of populism. It also provided me with follow up consultations with Oriol Bartomeus (Political scientist and analyst from University of Barcelona) whose understandings on position of Podemos regarding the Catalan issues were immensely important and useful.

I have conducted two additional interviews with two experts related to the STSM topic, but also the background and experience linked with both Serbia and Spain. The first interviewee was PhD Miljana Mićović, a member of Spanish (Asociación de Comunicación Política). Her field of expertise is political communication and she provided me with an understanding of the main arguments and tools of communication used in current Catalan crisis. Her Serbian (academic) background and her professional career in Spain for almost 10 years were very important for the ability to compare the significance of Kosovo and Catalonia issues for citizens of the involved countries.

The second interviewee was Ana Mendez de Andes, Advisor in the City Council of Madrid, a professor of Urbanism, an activists/member of Ahora Madrid and many other initiatives. The focus of this interview was on understanding of Podemos ideological profile and their response to Catalan issue. This also included internal relations between factions within Podemos, between Spanish/Madrid and Catalan/Barcelona groups of Podemos and their internal debate and dilemmas, but also between Podemos and other civil society groups that supported them in the last years. Ana's experience and insight into history of Podemos was very helpful for comparative dimension; she was also involved to some extent with Serbian left populist initiative Ne davimo Beograd (Do not drown Belgrade) which enable her to understand my research angle in full complexity.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

(max. 500 words)

Main findings of STSM showed significant similarities between the structure of political competition between two countries, but significant differences between position of populist actors in Serbia and Spain. Primarily, this refers to lack of ability/decreased ability of Podemos to influence the agenda setting process in Spain in contrast to Serbian SNS that has full control. This is the crucial difference because in the case of Podemos political space for manoeuvres was narrowed once Catalan issue reach the top of political agenda. It caused the return of the old divisions and debates and eroded the foundation of Podemos' support. In contrast, Serbian ruling party SNS (as well as Hungarian Fidesz or Polish PiS) is in position to limit the level of identity politics and to steer the direction of political debate.

Additional dimension can be related to the difference between identity and interest policies – although two cases are not enough for conclusions, it seems that populist who are driven by identity issues (or at least primarily driven by those) have much more success in comparison to those driven by the interest based issues. Of course, Spanish and Serbian cases are quite similar because there are both kinds of issues at the top of the political agenda, while in some other cases (e.g. Greece) it might not be the case.

Some of the findings show similarities between two countries. For example, the rise of Ciudadanos can also be interpreted as the outcome of populist and/or anti-party stances. This is similar to Serbian case where almost all new parties share some populist and antiparty attitudes.

An interesting part of findings was related to the roots of populist movements. As interviewees pointed out,

Podemos success was an outcome of long lasting process and the outcome of many local, decentralized initiatives across the Spain. Therefore, in the case of Podemos failure, there would still be a solid foundation for future political activity. This can be important finding regarding the sustainability of current populist wave across the Europe. However, even if Podemos success was well founded to some extent, the transformation movement into party was not going that easy which means that even initial success does not provide party with “grace period” for institutionalization. Serbian case of Dosta je bilo (antiparty party, similar to Ciudadanos) is quite similar example.

In summary, presented findings will help us to design theoretical framework that would depart from the social cleavage theory; it will be expanded by introduction of identity vs. Interest based politics dualism and usage of populist/non-populist scale. Framework should also provide opportunity for understanding of both kinds of populism – national/unitary and regional/autonomous.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

(max.500 words)

STSM findings could serve as the basis for the future collaboration or the follow up activities of the members of the working group 1. Spanish/Serbian comparison could be potentially expanded by inclusion of other countries which has strong identity politics and/or non-democratic recent history, on one side and plurality of populist actors (mainstream and anti-systematic one), on the other side.