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## **DONALD TRUMP VS. THE LIBERAL GLOBAL CONSENSUS. INTRODUCTION**

Donald Trump's victory in 2016 shattered a complacency of the global liberal consensus, already shaking in Europe in the wake of the immigration crisis in 2015 and its political consequences. His victory was quickly defined by the liberal-left elites, because of the United States superpower status among modern democracies, as the most consequential and disruptive populist phenomenon among other already visible in Europe, subverting not only the post-Soviet liberal consensus of the "end of history" shaped after 1989, but more generally questioning the principles of the post-1945 model of social and political development of liberal democracy. We may also risk an opinion that Trump's victory, together with other victories of the so called "populist movements" in such countries as Great Britain, Hungary, Poland or Italy with a corresponding breaking of the consensual politics in many European countries, including the most, so it seemed, stable Germany, are truly important milestones in western political history for reasons not necessarily connected with the immediate changes in so far unquestionable concrete liberal policies taken for granted. They are also important because they suddenly deepened political divisions and stirred passions inside of particular societies leveling them to a nearly quasi-religious dimension.

In this context, the conflict between global liberal elites and the most so far stabile middle classes in Western democracies erupted with a vicious force. For the

first time this elite, which consists of the international of the particular liberal elites in particular western democracies, has refused to accept results of democratic elections and continue to consider peoples' verdicts as not only partial disruptions of the only legitimate course of western democracies' policies dictated by the liberal elites, but as virtually an illegal usurpation of power. The most powerful liberal centers of power in the political, economic, media and academic establishments simply decided that they could not accept the democratic verdict of the people, mobilizing all resources in their possessions to morally compromise the chosen politicians, define their voters as ignorant and manipulated "deplorables", undo the elections results or even undermine them by mobilizing opponents into all kinds of actions and dubbing their efforts as, the United States' case, "Resistance". The liberal-left opponents have lost the opportunity to answer themselves the most basic question, which should have been considered from the very beginning, namely what caused such a decisive, even if legitimate rejection of the liberal policies, so far considered to be without any viable alternatives, and whether any corrections of such policies could be contemplated if they have not been considered acceptable by a growing number of the people in the name of which and for the good of which they have allegedly been pursued.

None of this, not even a trace of reflection, has ever occurred after more than three years of Trump's presidency with efforts to oust him by baseless accusations leading to an ill-fated impeachment trial initiated by his Democratic Party opponents, who have majority in the House of Representatives. As one of the commentators remarked:

[...] instead of accepting the votes and trying to learn from them, elites have expended almost all their available energies trying to pretend that the voters in 2016 were bad or duped. The past two years could have been spent trying to learn something or build something. Instead, the best minds of Left and Right have spent their time making claims of "racism", "Russia," and "Cambridge Analytica" [...] to undo or at least undermine the judgment of the people. [...] [Traditionally] after the verdict is in, public-minded men and women put themselves forward to help the country in whatever way they can. People in the commentariat make criticisms where they are founded and (less commonly) extol successes. Around their dinner tables and social gatherings, members of the public argue the merits or pitfalls of different people and policies. [...] this act of commingling become all but impossible. [...] If you praise a particular policy of Donald Trump's, you are not praising that policy but legitimizing racism, or misogyny, or Russian influence, or [...] you were encouraging hate crime, homophobia, and the hacking of your elections by foreign powers. Instead of just inhabiting what should be the normal terrain of political acceptance, you have become an accessory to a crime. Offer the merest hint of an ameliorative or conciliatory position in public or private and the snowplow will be driven at you with the intention of flinging you back onto whatever side of the road you started out on. American pundits and politicians cannot even celebrate the current success of the economy or job market without the snowplow coming at them. Britain's best pro-EU minds, including statesmen and negotiators with decades of experience, did not rally around and spend the past two years helping their country. Instead they waited for the occasional TV opportunity and then used spittle-inflected fury to denounce anyone who had accepted a reality they could not [...]. [...] Elites [...]

could have accepted the new reality and acted on it with good faith, in the interests of their country. Instead a precedent has been set that will not end in this electoral cycle or any other in the coming years: a situation in which accepting the results of a vote becomes a matter of choice and the idea that the public's decision is final moves from being a convention to a quirk. Our politics has been rancid before. But rarely has a component so toxic been released from such a height as this ongoing failure [...] to accept that 2016 happened at all.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Donald Trump's election, Brexit, as well as elections in many democratic countries in the West during the last several years have constituted an instance of the so called populist politics in the best sense of the word. For once, they identified social problems conventional so far pursued politics "as usual" could not grasp, and for two, they used elections for what they have always been used in democracy, that is, as an old American adage says, "to throw the rascals out", that is to remove from seats of power politicians who ceased to serve the public and have begun to tend to their own interests only, a clear cut instance of oligarchization of any political system, whether in the republican ancient Rome, contemporary Poland or in the United States. In other words, we have encountered for the first time in the post-1945 liberal democratic world an unprecedented situation, when a large part, in fact in one way or another a majority of the public, have become deeply skeptical or distrustful about the merit and legitimacy of the elites in power. What this situation amounts to is a deep crisis of legitimacy.

All democratic societies are especially subject to legitimacy assessments, because elected governments derive their powers from the consent of the governed. And they have to respond to cultural, social, and economic consumer preferences of voters. Consent is a source of legitimacy, not force. Democratic societies are based on egalitarian principles and because of this they are constantly under pressure to prove their legitimacy, also because free and equal society can tolerate only such an elite which can show that its privileged status, and there are always elites in any society, is deserved. A general conviction that wealth and power are gained and distributed according to an unjust standard causes that civic unity and social solidarity unravel, making any effective governance impossible and finally makes a democratic public rebel against that elite, the very essence of the populist upheaval.<sup>2</sup> The worst answer to such a problem which elites can give is to simply defend the *status quo*, claiming that there is no need for any redefinition of the existing rules of operations of governance. This is exactly what happened in the United States and in other liberal democratic states in recent years. The meritocratic system of open elites has degenerated. After the opening of the 60's with an enlarged pool of potential elites the pool has not enlarged, it has become narrower and more tight.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Murray, "Snowplow Politics: Trump, Brexit, and the Divides Deepening Between Us", *National Review* 2019, Vol. 71, No. 1, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> See I. Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, New York 1995, pp. 359–363.

This has been strengthened by growing economic inequality rising over the last decades. The percentage of students at the elitist college, whose families belong to the top 25% of income earners in America, has increased from about 45% to more than 65%, which makes it increasingly resemble classical aristocracy but at the same time losing its legitimate authority.<sup>3</sup> Also, as Yuval Levin pointed out, the homogeneity of this class, except in race, sex, ethnicity – the familiar identity groups in terms of liberal “diversity” obsessions – has dramatically hardened with business, professional, political elites, cultural, media and academic elites until the 90’s were still distinct groups of people belonging to different educational, cultural, political circles, with different experiences which could interact in useful ways but nevertheless did not merge into one hegemonic group setting themselves off from the rest of the American society. But today there is a visible tendency to find the same elites at the helm of these different institutions with the same educational backgrounds, cultural connections and political preferences. There are no separate elites representing different sectors of the American people, the new aristocracy is its own sector and tends to itself, looking increasingly at the rest of their citizens, as Hilary Clinton as “deplorables” while losing its sense of service towards others, deriving their legitimacy of power solely in terms of their merit.

This elite, since it has earned its power by merit, looks at this power as exclusive right, not as a privilege, requiring to fulfill obligations towards those less fortunate on the basis of the classical aristocratic duty of “noblesse oblige”, and restraints which came with this duty. If it devotes its time, money and energy to public service, and there is definitely plenty of this, they consider such an activity not as the fulfillment of noblesse oblige but, as Levin noticed their “own high-mindedness and merit”. The meritocratic elites think that it merits its position, but the ethos of this merit is radically individualistic, antinomian and increasingly technocratic. They claim to have a legitimate power in the society because they proved it by all kinds of exams which they then use in all fields of their professional activities. Levin observed that such an elite substituted “cold intellect”, objective and in fact individualistic, for character which should go with it and which tied this intellect to: noblesse oblige responsibilities. From the general public point of view this situation is perceived as unjust and illegitimate. For the people the elite has power and privilege so to exercise it for the benefit of all, not as a personal privilege. This privilege and power should be treated as tied towards duties, not as personal properties of the meritocratic individuals exercising them, that is they should go with character of taking responsibility for the entire society. But in fact this elite identifies a notion of social justice with strengthening and opening the just channels of access to such an elite, reproducing the same type

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<sup>3</sup> See on that W. Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and a Way to a Meaningful Life*, New York 2015.

of people. The elite coopts people from all walks of life, the same way the old absolutist aristocracy enlarged the pool of people who could support their world. But that notion of justice has not been bought by the American society, it loses legitimacy, not because the criteria of entrance are too tight, this is not a problem, but because the people who enter the world of such meritocratic elites do it simply for themselves, relieved of any obligations towards society, that is a duty to recognize in it other qualities and traits of character worth developing and supporting apart from cold, sterile technocratic merit. The elite is relieved of any obligations and can do whatever it wants because merit excuses everything, even the most outrageous deeds outside of standards of public accountability. Merit of entrance to the elitist institutions has been taken for a basis of its elite legitimacy, which is not so since authority and legitimacy throughout society is not gained by merit but by service and character as well as community ties to people who have no power and no technocratic skills.

It is in response to this radical break of trust in the elites on the part of democratic societies on the one hand and a disdain of the elites towards the rest of the society, in other words a response to a loss of legitimacy that the populist movements in the western democracies have been taking part, despite the fact, that the social problems with which the elites have to cope might differ in particular countries. Donald Trump's presidential candidacy began with bitter and furious attack on both the Democratic and Republican political establishments, and a promise to do something, which was an anathema to the establishment of both the Democrats and the Republicans, to put "America First". In this sense his campaign and then the presidency have been shockingly similar to the nationalistic movements in Great Britain and in the Continental Europe, as in a case of Brexit or in case of governments in Hungary, Poland or Italy, more realistic towards the sometimes utopian and liberal-left ideological European Union's project, with some economic and cultural neocolonial attitudes towards weaker countries, the EU kidnapped by its bureaucratic establishment not subject to a democratic control, with a visible breakdown of the German and French consensus challenged by the neo-nationalist. In each case the "populist" challengers

[...] have claimed that their nation's political and business leaders are really part of, and loyal to, an international elite with its own, self-serving agenda. The elites sacrifice the sovereignty of their home nations in ways – from free trade and open immigration to murky treaties and remote bureaucracies – that harm many of their countrymen. [...] They feel they have been left behind by [their] [...] government, and have now at last found robust political representation in the nationalist movements. Their electoral successes have come as a surprise [...]. The shocked establishments [...] – incumbent politicians of Left and Right, government careerists, mainstream media and entertainers, executives of leading corporations, academics and intellectuals – have responded in striking unison. The political arrivistes, they say, are ill-informed populists, xenophobic at best, racist at worst, inflamed by irrational hatred of immigrants, exhibiting authoritarian tendencies. In Hillary Clinton's incautious term, "deplorables." Europe's leading internationalists, German Chancellor An-

gela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, have coordinated their actions and policies to help each other keep their nationalist movements at bay. The synchronous counterattacks have seemed to validate the charge of an autonomous global elite.<sup>4</sup>

The liberal elites disdain present-day Trump's presidency, Brexit rebellion or the Polish and Hungarian democratic government of Jaroslaw Kaczynski or Victor Orban, since for them any deviation from the allegedly set forever model of Western liberal democracy, a real political "end of history" stage of human evolution is inexcusable backsliding on the road to illiberal dictatorship or even Hitler. But the governments of these countries simply try to do what the democratic governments should do: stand up for their peoples, cultures, and traditions against the more and more impudent meddling of undemocratic institutions which do not have these peoples' interests in mind but the global interests of their own, trying to homogenize these people into a globalized market ruled by technocratic means and cultural oversight by the liberal elite. In other words, such governments challenge the non-democratic imperial and oligarchic tendencies trying to execute a democratic mandate which they got from their own people, that is what a democratic, representative governments are all about.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most visible features of this autonomous global elite and an important cause of the populist-democratic rebellion was a perceived sense that representative government is coming to an end, that elections do not make any real change even if the public wants it, and that the liberal establishment can, in every case, neutralize a political will of the people expressed during such elections and make any laws passed by representative institutions inoperative, blocked by bureaucracies of the "deep state" and the courts. Donald Trump's victory can be understood in the light of this crisis. He brilliantly sensed a huge political potential of the anti-elitist sentiment among the Americans at large, that is why he could get away with all sorts of rude, often bordering on prejudiced, anti-elitist vitriolic attacks. Trump loved to enrage the liberal elites, which he understood very widely as an alienated from the American society class of privileged people more loyal to the global interests of such elites in other countries than to the interests of their own people. And he counted as part of this liberal global elite also the establishment of the Republican Party. Trump could get away with his enraging comments and his anti-elitist twitter remarks because he sensed what the elites of both parties "betrayed" the interests of the American people.

His political intuition and business experience allowed to overthrow the rhetoric of political correctness, dispersed censorship and newspeak dictate. Brutal

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<sup>4</sup> Ch. DeMuth, "Trumpism, Nationalism, and Conservatism. Reshaping the Right", *The Claremont Review of Books* 2019, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 32–33.

<sup>5</sup> See a robust and very thought through defense of such policies as against imperialistic, undemocratic claims of the globalists without any control Y. Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism*, New York 2018.

rhetoric with peculiar sense of humor, combined with sincere optimism of a “self-made man” and entrepreneurial mentality, allowed Trump to survive both ostracism of the liberal elites and ferocious attacks of liberal media. He not only ran against his Democratic opponents, but against his own party establishment, transforming the American right. He simply separated, in the most classical populist fashion, especially loved in America, the conservative voters from the establishment leaders, voicing what is popular and thus electorally possible to mobilize, but prohibited.<sup>6</sup> He burst the hidden problems into the open rearranging the American political scene, demolishing establishment’s control of it and because of this making their members absolutely shocked and enraged that an impudent impostor could successfully dare to do this.

Trump’s policy has thus an essence and this essence is anti-globalism, or nationalism, that is to deal with the American problems through the lenses of the American interests, which in essence is deeply constitutional in a sense that this is exactly what the Constitution requires from its chief magistrate: to work for the interests of his own people. When he repeatedly declared “either we have a state or we don’t”, a response from the electorate was massive, since identity liberalism based on race, ethnic, sexual basis has not created any common American ethos, only private attachments, but not human solidarity as such. Trump attempted to limit the oligarchization of the American political life, with the liberal elite translating this oligarchization into loyalties directed towards global aims at the cost of the large sections of the American people. If he is a populist, then not in a sense that he is a rabid demagogue, even if the liberal-left portrays him as such, but in a sense, probably for the first time seen on such a massive scale, that he knew how to manage crowds by social media. He sensed profound, destabilizing changes within America and the liberal global world, changes which began to work against American national and social interests. Trump focused his rhetoric and policies on social solidarity in a nation state fueled by republican values. Some similarities to Ronald Reagan’s presidency are visible, albeit major differences (business background, massive personal wealth, lack of political experience or administrative career) must be noticed.

Trump’s vision of “Great America” is a construed temporal social phenomenon, based on rhetoric of greatness and power, used however to implement real and profound policy changes, both internally and in the global context. In the latter case, it challenged a prevailing liberal internationalism and its slow reconciliation with a thought of multipolar world, declaring that he wanted the United States to remain power No.1 in the world. Moreover, Trump saved Republicans from political stalemate or even crisis, as they regained a chance to reorient

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<sup>6</sup> See on this R.R. Reno, “In Search of Populism: The Ruling Class Ignored the People; The People Struck Back”, *The American Mind*, 11.05.2018, <https://americanmind.org/features/thinking-about-thinking-about-trump/in-search-of-populism/> [accessed: 3.10.2019].

the American political system in a radical manner. He established himself as a representative and voice of the “Hard America” opposed to paternalistic liberal despise of it as “deplorable”. He identifies himself as a man of action, rough business player and a builder, America to him is also a nation of builders. Trump’s victory is a symbolic ending of the liberal American and Western order established after 1945, the profound world consequences of which cannot be predicted. In foreign policy measures, he attempted to undo the liberal international rules challenging them in the name of the American superpower status, making an impression of his policy being deeply messy and destabilizing. But he decided to change the rules of the liberal political, economic and cultural global game, which does affect every aspect of the post-Cold War international order, sensing its dangerous destabilizing political and cultural tendency. All these policies are not negligible and dire predictions about the egotistic dilettante wreaking havoc to the U.S. have turned out to be unfulfilled. But whether Trump will become a president to be remembered in the pantheon of the American presidents in history it is too early to predict.

Articles in this volume, the first one of the two devoted to Trump’s electoral victory and its implications, deal with all aspects of his policies, with a special stress put on explaining its international consequences. Although Trump’s presidency may be a short lived phenomenon, its legacy seems to have a good chance of outlasting its author.