

Moderator's introduction to the forum

In recent years, various types of populism and right-wing forces have risen in Europe, and the future of Europe has never been as uncertain as it is today. What is the meaning of populism? What is the relationship between populism and democracy? What characteristics does populism present in Europe? What are the reasons for the rise of European populist parties? These problems have attracted the attention of not only academic circles at home and abroad, but also of ordinary people in European countries and even in other countries and regions in the world.

A conference addressing these questions called “Populism, right-wing politics and the future of Europe” was attended by approximately 30 well-known Chinese and foreign experts coming from prestigious universities or academic organizations. They expressed their ideas about topics including the concept and characteristics of populism, European right-wing politics, populism and European political changes, and democracy and populism.

Prof. Jan-Werner Müller from Princeton University shared his views about the definition of populism. He pointed out that not everyone who criticizes elites is automatically a populist. The important thing to grasp about populism is that it is not some vague “anti-establishment sentiment.” Rather, the key element is populists’ opposition to pluralism. Populists always claim that they are the only legitimate representatives of the people. But populists cannot reveal to us the ultimate objective truth about society.

From the perspective of the conceptual history of democracy, Prof. Li Qiang, director of the Center for European Studies at PKU, pointed out that modern “democracy” is a regime which both inherits the classical ideal of democracy and combines some important non-democratic or anti-democratic elements. Such a fundamentalist idea of democracy has been more or less responsible for the failure of many newly established democracies. It is also related to the current emergence of populism in Western democracies. The nature of populism is to pursue pure direct democracy by rejecting the elitist, liberal, and constitutional elements in modern democracy.

In terms of the relationship between populism and democracy, Prof. Jürgen Gebhardt from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg opined that the “people” and the “nation” constitute the modern principle of democratic political order. As the potential meanings of “popular sovereignty” are realized within the framework of the nation-state, democratic elites display an inherent tendency toward self-referential populism and nationalism. That’s why Max Weber spoke of the plebiscitarian-Caesarist features of modern mass democracy.

The political practice of populism in Europe, in addition to theoretical analysis, was a focus of the participants’ discussions. Prof. Feng Zhongping, a research fellow from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, gave a speech titled “Will Populism Lead to the Collapse of the European Union?” He pointed out that the current European populism is mainly in opposition to the arrival of economic globalization, European integration and the acceptance of refugees and immigrants of different religious beliefs. It has

changed the political ecology and political party structure in Europe. Populist parties have become pragmatic after they took office. European integration is currently in a stagnation period. Although the EU is facing difficulties, it will not collapse, Feng said.

Cui Hongjian, a research fellow from the Department for European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, tried to address whether European populism was a solution or a political degeneration. He believes that populism is the result of the liquidation of neoliberalism, and the questioning of the traditional path of European integration. Populism, with the decline of the traditional left-wing as its background, may be a solution to people's dissatisfaction, insecurity, and unhappiness, but it may also indicate that Europe will enter a new track of political differentiation.

Prof. Yves Sintomer, a political scientist from Paris 8 University, and Prof. Marco Tarchi from the University of Florence, analyzed the political practice of European populism from the perspectives of the left-wing and the right-wing. Prof. Sintomer said the most common definitions of populism do not fit well with the theory and practice of some left-wing parties. But Prof. Sintomer suggested a conceptual shift from "the working class" to "the people" potentially allows for a more pragmatic left-wing politics.

Prof. Tarchi pointed out that populism and the extreme right are often considered as two faces of the same phenomenon, and are frequently labeled as the re-birth of fascism in the "post-industrial" era. However, populists and extreme rightists show major differences in various areas, including

political culture, communication style, potential electoral base, and organizational models.

In addition to the overall situation in Europe, the participants' discussions also involved the reasons for the rise of European right-wing populist political parties, the development of European populism after the financial crisis, and the multicultural policy that was the backdrop for the rise of populism. Prof. Kong Tianping, a research fellow from the Institute of European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, analyzed the situation in Hungary and Poland after their populist parties took power, and discussed their conflicts with the EU from the perspectives of ideology, systems and policy. He believes that the situation in Hungary and Poland will have a major impact on the future of European integration.

Prof. Wang Yingjin from the School of International Relations at Renmin University of China analyzed the independence referendum of Catalonia from the perspectives of law, theory and practice, and discussed Catalonia's separatist movement, which is one of the populist manifestations in Europe. In addition, discussions were held on Brexit, the rise of the German far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Italian Five Stars Movement, and the impact of the rise of populism in Central and Eastern Europe on China's One Belt and One Road initiative.

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Prof. Li Qiang, director of the Center for European Studies at Peking University, gave a welcome speech at the opening ceremony of the forum. He said that in recent years, the influence of populism, especially right-wing populism, has continued to increase in many European countries. This has impacted the traditional political ecology of these countries, and has also brought uncertainty to the future of Europe. For this reason, the discussion of related issues has both theoretical and practical significance. Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS), sent a congratulatory letter to the forum. He said that PKUIAS is an international academic platform and ideological space, and is also a young academic institution. It has as its main tasks conducting academic research, cultivating talent, serving as a think tank, and hosting international academic exchanges. He expressed hope this forum would gather wisdom and promote the academic richness of area studies on Europe.

I What is populism?

Prof. Jan-Werner Müller of the Department of Politics from Princeton University gave a speech titled “How to Think and How Not to Think about Populism.” He opined that first, we should avoid equating populism with anti-elitism. The core of populism is not anti-elitism but anti-pluralism. Second, contrary to many beliefs that populism is primarily a “protest

movement,” populists can become rulers. Finally, when considering a populist movement, we should not simply regard it as a reflection of a certain social darkness or irrationality. Instead, we should take the topics embraced by populists seriously, and talk to the populist supporters. But we cannot talk in the way they do.

Not everyone who criticizes elites is automatically a populist. The important thing to understand about populism is that it is not some vague “anti-establishment sentiment.” Rather, the key point is populists’ anti-pluralism. They adopt an exclusionary (or monist) stance at two levels: at the level of party politics, where they claim they are the only legitimate representatives of the people and hence all others are at least morally excluded; and, less obviously, at the level of the people themselves, where those who do not conform to the populists’ symbolic construction of the “real people” are also shut out. Populists cannot reveal to us the ultimate objective truth about society. They are just shaping the way people see themselves.

From the perspective of the conceptual history of democracy, Prof. Li Qiang said that populism and fundamentalist ideas of democracy have no essential differences in nature. He pointed out that democracy both as a political system and a political idea originates in Ancient Greece. The meaning of democracy is rule of or by the *demos*—the people as a whole, or more strictly, the common or non-noble people. Most political thinkers in Ancient Greece and in fact in the West until the modern period regarded democracy as one of the worst regimes. Modern “democracy” is a regime which both inherits the classical ideal of democracy and combines some important

non-democratic or anti-democratic elements.

The first non-democratic element is the elitist element, which includes the idea of a mixed constitution as reflected in the design of the president and the senate in the original American Constitution. The idea of representation, which was the core element of the republic, was regarded by Madison as a remedy for democracy. Political parties served as an intermediate organization for people's participation in politics. The elite controlled the press as a means of information distribution.

Second, modern democracy reflects a marriage between democracy and liberalism. Liberal principles of equal individual rights, religious toleration, and some degree of cultural pluralism become intrinsic elements of modern democracy. Those liberal elements play an important role to counterbalance the tyranny of the majority.

Third, modern democracy pursues the principle of constitutionalism, which puts a check on the arbitrary will of the majority.

Although modern democracy is a regime which combines the ideal of democracy and elements of non-democracy, in political theory, at least starting from Tocqueville, the American system has been interpreted as "democracy." Its non-democratic elements have been neglected or criticized. Particularly after the Second World War, this fundamentalist understanding of the US system as "democracy" became dominant in political thinking. In the established democratic countries, great emphasis was put on people's direct participation in politics. For non-democratic countries, a transition to democracy became a dominant topic. There is a politically correct doctrine: the more democratic, the

better.

This fundamentalist idea of democracy as represented by the US model has been more or less responsible for the failure of many newly established democracies. This is also related to the emergence of populism in Western democracies. The nature of populism is to pursue pure direct democracy by rejecting the elitist, liberal, and constitutional elements as they exist in modern democracy.

Today, in the face of the emergence of populism, it is important to reflect on the ideas and institutions of democracy. One way to rescue democracy might be rejecting ideas of direct democracy, and return to the ideology which combines elements of democracy and non-democracy.

Prof. Haig Patapan, director of Center for Governance and Public Policy at Australia's Griffith University, gave a speech titled "On Populists and Demagogues." He compares and contrasts the classical demagogue and the modern populist, arguing that both the demagogue and populist address the same phenomenon – individuals who deploy a distinct and divisive rhetoric to exploit weaknesses in democracy to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the people.

But populists are also significantly different from demagogues in two major respects. The first is that modern populists are weaker than demagogues because they face considerable obstacles to their ambitions in the form of rule of law and constitutionalism. The second is that in other respects populists are more powerful than demagogues because in attempting to limit demagogues, modernity armed populists with new weapons, including new concepts or ideologies for

manipulation (such as “the people”; “elites”; “nation”; “race”; “class”), and new rhetorical techniques such as propaganda that exploit modern technology and mass media.

II Populism in Europe

The speech of Prof. Sintomer from Paris 8 University focused on left-wing theoreticians and practitioners in Europe,taking populist parties in Spain and France as examples.

He pointed out that there are two mainstream descriptions of populism. The firststresses that the establishment parties are rational, and populists play on the irrational thinking of the masses. The second holds that whether left- or right-wing, all anti-establishment populists are negatively defined in the same way — anti-elitist and anti-intellectual,with charismatic leadership directly addressing the masses and devaluing intermediary organizations. This definition includes authoritarian tendencies, arejection of pluralism,a distortion of modern values, nostalgia for a unified community,xenophobia, incoherent rhetoric, and so on. However, most of these features do not fit together to create a general definition, at least when also applied to left-wing populism.

A critique by Jacques Rancière states that the word “populism” is not a scientific concept that defines an ideology, but rather represents a political style or a specific political tendency. It is a notion with the function of depreciating the peopleas a non-rational, emotional and potentially dangerous mass of individuals.

Ernesto Laclau’s theory of populism believes that political discourse necessarily rests at least partly on rhetoric and

emotions. Therefore, he uses the words “empty signifiers” to explain the character of populist discourse, which makes it possible to create emotional identification without having a univocal content. This relies on the unavoidable emotional dimension of politics and “chains of equivalence” that are not strictly logical. The use of “empty signifiers” usually makes the evocation of community, values and so on more powerful.

Nowadays, the fact that the ruling system cannot integrate various social demands anymore has further driven social fragmentation, and a polarization against the ruling class has formed worldwide. Left-wing populism opposes financial global capitalism and its elites, and right-wing populism opposes foreign influence and domestic and international elites.

Podemos (Spain) and La France Insoumise (France) are representatives of European left-wing populist parties. Their common features are embodied in a radical social critique of global capitalism and political elites, calling for the development of participatory democracy, democratic innovations and the “plebeian function.”

There are differences between the two parties. Unidos Podemos was created in 2014 in response to the most important social movement of post-Franco Spain in order to address social inequality. La France Insoumise was created from within the political elite, and organized around a charismatic leader. Podemos is pro-refugee while La France Insoumise opposes refugees and has xenophobic tendencies.

All in all, the mainstream critique of populism is a critique of the irrational people and a defense of the rationality of the elites. It forgets the rhetorical and affective dimension of

politics, and the “normal” relations of domination in society and politics. In addition, there are sharp differences between left-wing and right-wing “populisms” which need to be distinguished. Last but not least, an aspect worth considering is how a party like Podemos can handle a classical challenge of the European left, namely, how to combine the horizontal/critical dimension of new social movements and a credible reform from within the institutions.

Prof. Feng Zhongping, vice president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, gave a speech titled “Will Populism Lead to the Collapse of the European Union?” He opined that the rise of populism stems from serious dissatisfaction and distrust of elite groups and establishment parties, a common feature of all populism. On the other hand, in different periods and different regions populism opposes different things. The current European populism mainly opposes European integration, economic globalization and the presence of foreign refugees and immigrants with different religious beliefs.

European left-wing populism claims to represent the poor, taking aim at the rich. Right-wing populism emphasizes “us” versus “them,” that is, the identity and cultural differences between different cultures and religions. However, no matter whether from the “left” or “right,” populists attribute these problems to the claim that the post-war integration of Europe and economic globalization have gone too far. The main appeals by populists aim to reinforce national sovereignty, oppose openness, and oppose super-national governance. For example, the UK asked for the right to take back its border management,

and the Rassemblement National (former Front National) of France asked for the return of monetary sovereignty and exiting the eurozone.

The development of populism in Europe will not be a flash in the pan, but will continue to be an important force affecting the political and social development of Europe in the coming five to ten years. First, the soil that nurtures populism and populist movements will not disappear quickly, and it is difficult to effectively solve the problems of unemployment, refugees and the polarization of the rich and the poor. Second, although the traditional mainstream parties in Europe have been under tremendous pressure, so far, in the face of the rise of populism, these parties have offered no good ways to solve these problems. Although large countries such as France and Germany are still ruled by traditional mainstream political parties, with populist parties less likely to come to power or form a cabinet, this situation may change in the future depending on the results of the fierce competition between traditional political forces and populist forces.

With the rise of populism, the political ecology and the standing of political parties in Europe have undergone major changes, which impacted the left- and right-wing parties' status quo formed in the industrialized era. Some populist parties have entered parliament to become opposition parties, which means that domestic and foreign policies in European countries and even at the EU-level will be influenced by populism without exception. But in general, European populist claims reflect a change rather than a revolution. Therefore, the EU will not disintegrate in the future. The current Europe can be seen as in a

stagnation period of European integration rather than a period before disintegration. But at the same time, the obstacles and resistance faced by European integrationists will become increasingly large. Conducting cooperation in different fields among different countries will likely become a path for future European integration.

Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, gave a speech titled “European Populism: An Emergency Solution or a Long-term Political Degradation?” He believes that an accumulation of economic, security and social issues in Europe since 2009 has provided fertile ground for populism, with political consequences. Anti-globalists, Eurosceptics and nationalists are regarded by some countries as a political solution to the state of crisis. In the unique political environment of Europe, populism occurs and spreads at the local, national and EU levels. It has partially entered mainstream politics and has been regarded in a more tolerant way.

At present, a trend has appeared in many European countries — an effort to replace representative democracy with direct democracy. The specific phenomenon can be summarized into three “U”s —unsatisfied, unsafe and unhappy. First, Europeans are not satisfied with the status quo. Their dissatisfaction has turned into a distrust of the existing polity and governance, and become public sentiment. Second, Europeans feel unsafe. Some countries have developed a very serious victim mentality in the process of globalization, and they feel they must be protected because they feel unsafe. This phenomenon is reflected in some extreme right-wing politics in

Europe. Third, many young people in Europe are unhappy. For example, the power base of the extreme left in France is mainly young people. The unhappiness of young people is also very strong in Sweden, a country where the left wing has been in power for a long time. Their unhappiness can be transformed into anger. From the perspective of the public's emotions and cognitive ecology, the emergence of populism has a deep social foundation.

From the perspective of political governance, the current populism rising in Europe should first be attributed to mistakes made by traditional mainstream politicians. In the decades before 2009 during a period of rapid development, Europe did not solve its integration problem or its economic and social problems. For this reason, hierarchical solidification and policy rigidity appeared. European politics lacks vitality, with Germany taking this trend to the extreme. In addition, the governance structure is flat, with many governments getting increasingly smaller. The boundaries between governments and other fields are becoming increasingly clear. The power of the nation-state is constantly being decentralized, up to the level of integration or down to the local autonomy. This situation has caused the central government to lack governance capacity in the face of many problems.

Seen from a social perspective, the victim mentality generated by some countries in the process of globalization has been manipulated by political elites. These elites have consciously shifted their focus away from the realm of domestic governance, and focused on further exacerbating the victim mentality of voters. In addition, there are deep intergenerational

conflicts in Europe. The “generation of integration” in East Europe began to have voting rights. Some young people in economically troubled countries believe that their countries did not benefit after joining the eurozone. Instead, they believe they lost out. These young people believe that the transfer of sovereignty in the process of integration was a failure and unacceptable.

From a technical perspective, the distribution and dissemination of knowledge and information is now flowing freely, out of control of traditional media, which is the biggest challenge that internet technology has brought to Europe. This has shaken an important foundation of elite politics. Increasing numbers of ordinary people seek to participate more actively in politics, resulting in changes in political participation and the organization of European governments. As a result, traditional methods of political organization have been left behind in the internet age.

Cui Hongjian opined that once populism joins forces with the ruling party to become part of the government, it will definitely have an impact on policy. First, this will bring about short-term behavior or a political impulse to make quick gains. Second, existing ways of communication will change, opening up space for questioning the fairness of the status quo and original procedures in the country. Third, nationalist countries mimic each other. If each country emphasizes putting itself first, conflicts may arise.

Facing a new round of changes at the global or regional level, populism seems to be a solution for many political elites or people to solve the above three “U”s. However, there is a gap

between their desire for change and what political operations can deliver. A typical example is the current conflicts in France amid Emmanuel Macron's reforms. Thus, we should think about whether this wave of populism is only an emergency solution, or an indicator that European politics will move to a new track in the future.

III European right-wing politics

Marco Tarchi, professor of Political Science at the University of Florence, gave a speech titled “Populism and the Extreme Right: Affinities and Differences.” He pointed out that although there are many affinities between populism and the extreme right and they are often considered to be two faces of the same phenomenon, frequently labeled as the rebirth of fascism in the “post-industrial” era, they are still very different in many areas including political culture, communication methods, potential voters and organizational models. As a result, the two should be studied as parts of different political camps.

After the European Parliament elections in May 2014, the election results of some European countries led some scholars to believe that a new wave of populism and a new political force has emerged. But in reality, the lack of a common ideological, strategic and programmatic platform was well-exemplified by the impossibility of gathering the 105 MEPs of the parties generally defined as populist within a single group, which indicates that the so-called new political force has not yet formed. Many of the efforts to integrate these political groups ended in failure, which shows that these political forces' shared positions on certain internal problems of the EU is still not

sufficient to cover up the essential differences and political suspicions among them.

Due to a lack of understanding of the new forms of populism and the accompanying reasons for the election victory of these political parties, many people classify populism as extreme right-wing. In fact, the current populism should not be seen as a variant of the extreme right-wing in the “post-industrial” era. There are five differences between the two.

First, they have divided opinions over the relationship between society and public power. Populism believes that the state should obey the needs of the general public and should be restricted by society, while the extreme right-wing regards the state as an indispensable tool for guiding and leading the people.

Second, the above differences lead the two parties to have different views on the role of national rule. The extreme right-wing believes that the state is the cornerstone for aggression and expansion, while populism takes an isolationist stance, arguing that the significance of the state is to prevent an invasion of foreign capital, goods and labor.

Third, there are differences in their understanding of individual status. Populism believes that individuals are the backbone of social life, while the extreme right-wing believes that individuals are subordinate to the state.

Fourth, there are differences between them in their understanding of history, the current situation and the future. The extreme right-wing is more willing to evoke the golden ages of history, and populism is more pragmatic and selective.

Fifth, although sharing similar roots, they are hugely divided on moral topics such as homosexuality, abortion and

divorce. Populists believe that top-down referendums and legislation can work well, and the extreme right-wing is skeptical of that approach. In addition, populists don't reject democratic institutions and basic democratic values. They are only "verbal" extremists and not willing to use violence to achieve their goals. However, the extreme right-wing is the opposite.

The difficulty is that populism and the extreme right-wing often resort to disguises to confuse people in order to win elections. The extreme right-wing can pretend to be simply populist without any right-wing tendencies. Therefore, many analysts often associate the extreme right-wing with populism and produce the concept of a "populist radical right-wing," "non-radical right-wing populism" and a "non-populist right-wing." All in all, despite the connections and confusion between these concepts, populism can be seen as a state of mind which regards the people as an organism that fights against hypocrisy, inefficiency and social degradation by promoting moral qualities, diligence and integrity. Populism can only be compared with the extreme right-wing on the basis of the definition which claims that the authority of the people is their legal source of power and the people should be above legal or institutional constraints.

Kong Tianping, professor at the Institute of European Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, shared the cases of Hungary and Poland and analyzed the rise of populism in Central European countries and their conflicts with the EU from the perspectives of concept, systems and policy.

Since the inauguration of the Fidesz party led by Viktor

Orbán in Hungary in 2010, Hungary has been committed to the establishment of so-called “non-liberal democracy.” In October 2015, the Law and Justice Party won the Polish general election and became the ruling party. It then began to restrict the independence of the Constitutional Court, controlled the judiciary, and clashed with the EU over the rule of law. After the Brexit referendum, Hungary and Poland said they hope to stay in the EU, but they stressed that Europe needs a loose and decentralized EU.

The legitimacy of the Hungarian and Polish regimes is unquestionable, since they were the results of democratic elections. The two countries have not abolished the multiparty system and the opposition parties continue to act legally and criticize the government’s policies. The two countries adopted strongman rule, but their governance is not rigid and retains a certain flexibility.

The economic policies of the two countries have also changed accordingly. Hungary started deviating from the mainstream economic transition path in 1990 and nationalized some strategic assets to strengthen the state’s role in the economy. Poland changed its economic policy, emphasized economic patriotism, weakened the status of foreign banks and multinational corporations and emphasized that strategic sectors must be controlled by the Polish.

The conflicts between Hungary, Poland and the EU are focused on three aspects. The first is the dispute between democracy and legislation. Hungary started to limit the role of independent institutions after Fidesz took office. The European Commission and the European Parliament have intervened in

different ways to prevent the “democracy regression” in Hungary. In November 2015, the Polish Law and Justice Party took power, and its conflicts with the Constitutional Court triggered great concerns from the EU. In January 2017, the Polish government announced that it would carry out an overall judicial reform. The European Commission opined that the reform means the judicial system will be under the political control of the ruling majority, and in the absence of judicial independence, the effective implementation of EU law will face serious problems.

The second is how to deal with the refugee problem. Since 2015, nearly a million Syrian refugees have flooded into Europe. With the refugee crisis, the difference in ideas between the new and old EU member states is highlighted. Countries such as Germany have seen refugees as opportunities, while new member states have regarded refugees as a threat. In Jarosław Kaczyński’s campaign for parliamentary elections in 2015, he publicly stated that immigrants brought diseases such as cholera and dysentery to Europe. Orbán believes that the refugee crisis has been regarded as an economic and cultural issue, but the immigrant problem has become a public security issue because of the threat of terrorism. He also thinks that refugee quotas are reshaping the ethnic, cultural and religious makeup of Hungary and Europe. He claims that Hungary’s actions are not in opposition to Europe, but in fact defend European democracy.

The third is the dispute over the EU’s future. Orbán believes that the Brexit referendum may be a sign of the final disintegration of the EU. Kaczyński believes that the ideal Europe is not a federation, but a loose confederation. Poland

proposes to amend the Treaty of Maastricht to strengthen nation-states and eliminate all kinds of arbitrary EU rules. In March 2017, the European Commission issued a white paper on the future of Europe, proposing five options for the EU's development before 2025, and a "multi-speed Europe" is one of them. The Visegrád Group countries such as Poland and Hungary strongly oppose it, because they think it is likely to further marginalize their position within the EU.

After the Cold War, the EU set the Copenhagen Criteria for expansion. The political criteria are to guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights and to respect and protect the institutional stability of ethnic minorities. The Central and Eastern European countries were accepted by the EU, which means that they were considered to have met the Copenhagen Criteria. Since then, with the weakening of the EU's constraints, reforms in Central and Eastern Europe have experienced fatigue, the political consensus at the beginning of the transition has gradually disappeared, and some political forces have begun to challenge the Copenhagen Criteria. The EU has no mechanism to monitor the democracy and the rule of law of new member states, and thus was at a loss due to the changes in some member countries. Poland and Hungary believe that the conflicts are competitions for power between the EU and its member states. They say the judiciary is the exclusive domain of each member state and the EU has no right to intervene. However, the EU believes that the conflicts are caused by different values, and Hungary and Poland weaken democracy, weaken the rule of law, erode fundamental rights, undermine the principle of European solidarity, and pose a threat to the EU, which is a community of

shared values.

Both Hungary and Poland claim to be European realists. Some observers refer to the disputes between the two countries and the EU as a confrontation between European realists and European liberals. At present, both sides have entered into a showdown, and the result will heavily impact the future integration of Europe regardless of the final result.

Shi Chunyu, associate professor at the School of Public Administration at Zhejian Gongshang University, spoke about the French far right party Front National in his speech.

According to Shi Chunyu, the far right-wing forces in France can be traced back to the frenetic nationalism of Boulanger's followers in the early days of the establishment of the Third Republic and the Action Française during the anti-semitism of the Dreyfus Affair in the late 19th century. However, before the 1980s, the political influence of these parties or organizations was relatively limited. The Front National (FN) was founded in 1972 (renamed as Le Rassemblement national in June 2018), with the aim of integrating French far right-wing forces against united left-wing forces and trying to increase their influence in the legislative and presidential elections.

Marine Le Pen began to rule FN in 2011, opening up a new historical era for the party. Marine Le Pen's goal is to get rid of the party's public image as a fascist party and turn it into a modern, respectable and trustworthy political party with the legitimacy to rule. However, in essence, FN is still an authoritarian populist party. Some of its open and modern expressions on certain social issues (such as homosexuality and

women's rights protection) cannot change its far right-wing nature. Its ideology is still full of xenophobia, racism, authoritarianism and populism.

Populists believe that society is divided into two opposing groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite.” Politics is the expression of the people’s will to protest against a democratic system which is completely disjointed from what they really desire. According to FN, people should abandon the traditional political parties and political systems that failed them. FN condemns the deteriorating political life of the country and claims to be the party that represents the true will of the people and opposes the elite. Thus it is the defender of true democracy. The shaping of this political image is conveyed through political slogans such as “Marine Le Pen, the voice of the people, the spirit of France.” Marine Le Pen claims without hesitation to be a populist.

The economic policies of FN are also gradually showing typical populist characteristics. Around the issue of globalization, the party casts a hostile relationship between “big guys” and “little people.” The big guys are the power-holder class, such as plutocrats and important people in the financial sector, in the EU, in large international companies, and so on. The small people are workers, farmers, small traders, craftsmen, ordinary civil servants and staff. Marine Le Pen gradually publicized her opposition to the liberal economy and her support for nationalism and interventionist policies, trying to find a third path between socialism and liberalism to build an economic protectionist policy that opposes globalization.

Compared with the Jean-Marie Le Pen era, FN is no longer

marginalized and has become increasingly formalized, professional and powerful.

It is still difficult to predict whether FN will become the ruling party in the national elections in 2022 or even in 2027, and it is also hard to predict the prospects of its alliance with the French right wing at the national level. Without being the national ruling party, its actual impact on French politics and EU politics, especially related domestic and international important decisions, is relatively limited, but we cannot rule out the negative impact it would bring about nonetheless. First, FN will continue to advocate its ideology of ethnocentrism, opposition to immigration, and opposition to Islam, and transform these claims into specific local policies in the areas where it rules. This will fuel the increasingly tense emotions and conflicts among different ethnic groups in France. Second, under the background of deteriorating social security in the country, the authoritarian social governance style of FN will continue to exert pressure and influence on the ruling party, the French right wing and even public opinion.

Matthias Hackler, a PhD candidate at the School of International Relations at Renmin University of China, gave a speech titled “Recent Developments and Internal Contradictions of Germany’s Far-Right Alternative für Deutschland.” Germany’s far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) was founded in 2013 and initially attracted many disgruntled Euro-skeptics and so-called protest voters. As the European refugee crisis intensified, the German public became increasingly dissatisfied with the EU’s refugee policy, which AfD saw as an opportunity for its own growth. The basic agenda

promulgated in 2016 was anti-Islam and strongly opposed large-scale immigration, clearly declaring that Islam does not belong in Germany. Meanwhile, it emphasized the national identity of Germany and traditional family concepts, and proposed to develop “German-dominated culture and not multiculturalism.” AfD has gradually changed from a party established to abolish the euro as Germany’s currency to having a broad right-wing populist platform.

After entering the state legislature and the Bundestag through elections in 2017, the party chose to narrow the issues it tackled in the Bundestag into several areas such as domestic security, immigration issues, and Islam. The party often related these issues to other issues with little logical connection. In addition, in Bundestag debates, the party often used sensationalism to create political provocations, and tried to obtain attention by breaking political taboos. This approach has increasingly colored Germany’s existing “conservatism” with the brush of “right-wing extremism.”

At the same time, the binary structure of AfD has become increasingly prominent. The fundamental differences within the party come from the tension between pragmatists and radicals. The pragmatists in western Germany, who represent market liberalism, hope to join the governing political coalition in 2021 and move closer to the political center, while the right-wing conservative radicals in eastern Germany are skeptical of the “old party” and democracy. Outwardly, this dual structure deprives AfD of its potential for development, but some analysts believe that it is this dual structure that allows the party to win with the public, who are dissatisfied and

disappointed with the current political and social situation, and seize votes from other political parties.

If AfD aims to take power in 2021, it will face many challenges. From the inside, it depends too much on the issues of refugees and Islam and lacks the ability to innovate on policy. Its strong dependence on the same issues has led to increasingly prominent divergences within the party. If AfD can eliminate the conflict within the party, adjust its social policies, avoid expressing extreme opinions, and maintain its conservatism, it will have a chance to gain a foothold in the state legislature and the Bundestag, thereby weakening or even challenging the ruling status of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany party. On the contrary, if AfD goes further toward nationalism, the relationship between the right-wing conservative camp and the liberal economics camp within the party will worsen, and AfD will split and decay due to losing the inner balance of the party.

IV Populism and Europe's political changes

Dong Yifan, assistant research fellow from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, gave a speech titled “The Development of Europe Populism after the Financial Crisis.”

Since the financial crisis in 2008, there have been some new developments in European populism. First of all, populism has come into full bloom all over Europe. Populist parties with great influence and among the top three major parties in their parliaments have emerged in Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and the Nordic

countries. Second, populism has entered the national system. It has become the norm for populist parties to participate in politics as a member of a ruling coalition, or even as the ruling party, in European countries. Third, both the left and right wings in European politics have become breeding grounds for populists, and the boundaries between them have blurred. Fourth, populism has launched an unprecedented challenge to EU authority. The policy propositions of populist parties in various countries are mostly based on dissatisfaction with EU institutions and their policies.

Populism opposes the traditional ideas of elites and establishment parties, and revolts against the current system. The main reasons are the negative effects of globalization, European integration, and the new technological revolution on the middle and lower classes. Since the financial crisis, the European economy has experienced a transition from a severe recession to a gradual recovery, which in turn has brought about changes in political, social and cultural identity, creating an environment for the “strong growth” of European populism. This environment is nurtured by four elements.

First, traditional political forces are losing their support. After the European debt crisis, European center-left-wing parties were unable to come up with effective solutions for the resulting political, economic, and social crises, and they are now declining under dual pressure from the center-right and populist parties. In order to compete with populist parties, the policies of traditional political parties have tended to follow an extreme direction, and they are developing toward a more left or right direction while reforming

themselves.

Second, populist parties are integrating into the mainstream. While the traditional political parties were switching their immigration and EU policies to the right, the populist parties, in order to take power, also partially abandoned unrealistic radical ideas and moved closer to mainstream politics.

Third, populism has seriously delayed the process of European integration. Ultimately, European integration is the process of each country transferring sovereignty to supranational institutions resulting in a uniformity of policies in the political, economic, and social governance fields. Fundamentally, integration conflicts with what populism advocates, such as the reconstruction of the social order under the framework of the nation-state. In the future, the conflicts among EU countries in terms of immigration, the eurozone, free trade agreements, and foreign policy will be more prominent.

Finally, populism stimulates protectionism to rise. The populist parties, under the banner “traditional politicians are incompetent,” cater to public dissatisfaction and give the EU and the EU member governments more pressure and constraints in formulating policies. This furthers people’s dissatisfaction with issues including globalization and free trade. European politics generally has a tendency to “turn right,” passively follow populism, be nationalistic, and offer more protection to their people. Traditional establishment parties need to reflect and respond to the public’s dissatisfaction, and compete for support with populism. Economic protectionism responds to the demands of the people to protect employment, industry, etc., and

divert people's attention to "foreigners" and away from dissatisfaction with other domestic affairs. In the EU in recent years, multiple crises have caused conflicts among member countries over refugees, fiscal budgets, reform of the eurozone, and foreign affairs. People's doubts about the EU are increasing. Since trade policy is one of the few policy areas controlled by the European Commission, the EU is suspected of deliberately giving the public the impression that the EU is "protecting their interests" by taking the initiative in this area, therefore gaining public trust.

In 2016, during the EU's hype about China's market economy status, parties such as the Five Stars Movement held a campaign in Brussels to protest China's overcapacity in steel, showing that populist parties support protectionism in the EU.

Liu Lida from the School of Public Policy and Management at the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences gave a speech titled "Nationalism, Political Crisis and Electoral Cleavage: an Analysis of the Rise of European Right-wing Populist Parties."

In the study of comparative politics, the concept used to describe the right-wing populist parties is complicated due to the parties' complexity and variability. But in fact, because populism on one hand insists on the social and cultural value of conservatism ("right"), while on the other hand advocates economic policies such as big government, the welfare state, and protectionism ("left"), it is impossible to use the traditional concepts of "left" and "right" to classify the ideology and policy of the right-wing populist party.

To clearly see the essence of the right-wing populist parties,

we should start with the idea of “nationalism.” In recent years, the political propositions of right-wing populist parties have focused on anti-immigration issues, which indicates that the core ideology of the right-wing populist parties is “ethnic nationalism,” that is, the boundary of the political community should be consistent with the boundary of the national community in the bloodline sense. Due to this logic, outside the boundary of the political community (nation-states or ethnic autonomous regions), right-wing populist parties oppose the authority of any political body, while within the boundary, they oppose heterogeneous communities (immigrants or ethnic minorities). Racism and xenophobia are also derived from ethnic nationalism colored with a focus on blood ties and exclusivity. Therefore, the “right-wing” element in “right-wing populism” gets stronger as ethnic nationalism increases. Parties supporting anti-immigration and anti-EU policies can be classified into right-wing populist parties of different degrees based on the different degrees of ethnic nationalism.

Existing research analyzes the rise of right-wing populist parties from the perspective of a supply and demand model for voters in the political market.

The supply factors include all political and institutional opportunities that create openness in the electoral market, such as the electoral system and party structure. (This is also known as political opportunity theory).

The demand factors include objective situations that lead to grievance or discontent, such as the transformation of values in the modernization process, structural cleavage, etc. (This is also known as grievance theory.)

The supply factors of right-wing populist parties involve specific political party structures and interactions, and national integration models in European countries. The rise of ethnic-nationalist parties represented by FN is mainly due to the convergence or polarization of mainstream parties on immigration issues, which provides nationalized and legalized endorsement for right-wing populists' exclusive nationalist claims. But in fact, it is impossible to fully implement tough measures against French minority immigrants beyond the expulsion of illegal immigrants. At the same time, the economic problems caused by the European debt crisis are prominent, and class contradictions are also presented in the form of nationalism. In terms of the supporters of nationalist parties, nationalist parties symbolize the insistence on a true "nation-state" – the parties defend the nation's sovereignty from being eroded by the EU and globalization, and defend the nation's spirit and culture from being dispelled by the increasing diversification of populations and cultures.

The demand factors for the rise of right-wing populist parties are mainly the structural changes in European politics, i.e., the crises of the nation-state model, representative democracy, the welfare state and the ideology behind these things. Since the European debt crisis, the problems of the above four aspects have interacted, and multiple contradictions have intensified, which galvanized the political demand for the rise of right-wing populist parties.

Where should Europe go? At minimum, the rise of right-wing populism, which is anti-EU and anti-immigrant, shows that Europe is not completely in the post-national

constellation, but an ethnic and post-national constellation under construction. The approach of using “constitutional patriotism” that is based on the constitution, rules and civil rights to build European citizen unity and promote European integration may have essential flaws. This abstract design, which erases culture, history and tradition, in practice has difficulty resisting shocks from ethnic nationalism. For Europe, the era of national political entities is over. It is now an era of empires and an era of transnational political unity, but these unities still have to be formed by the affiliated nation-states. How to get along with nationalism is an important issue that Europe and other communities cannot avoid in their development process.

He Qingqian, a PhD student from the Department of International Relations at Tsinghua University, gave a speech titled “Cultural Resistance or Cultural Backlash? The Comparison of Causal Effects of the Rise of the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe.”

She said that by comparing and analyzing the causal effects of resistance to globalization and the backlash against modernization, she found that in terms of people’s preferences for right-wing populist parties, the influence of resistance to globalization is much stronger than the influence of a backlash against modernization. This implies that the rise of populist radical right parties should be attributed more to a resistance to globalization rather than a backlash against modernization.

In the existing literature on demand-side factors, there are two popular explanations: resistance to globalization and a backlash against modernization. The former argues that the

increasing support for populist radical right parties lies in the cultural threat of immigration in the process of globalization. The latter emphasizes a counter attack of traditional conservatives in the face of widespread of liberal culture.

The theory of globalization resistance is mainly based on social identity theory from sociology. The theory of social identity holds that individuals have the natural ability to distinguish between “self” and “other.” They tend to establish connections with similar individuals. While forming cohesiveness, they tend to think that the “self” group is better than “others.” The theory therefore attributes the flourishing development of contemporary Western European right-wing populist parties to a sense of threats in the dimensions of culture and identity. This sense of threat is suffered by the “self” when the “self” encounters more and more “others.”

Modernization backlash theory emphasizes cultural factors in the rise of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. However, unlike the theory of globalization resistance, which emphasizes the cultural impact of foreign immigrants, the modernization backlash theory focuses more on the evolution of cultural values within Western European countries, in particular, the evolution from the traditional materialist values which emphasize survival and order to post-materialist values that emphasize individuality and self-expression.

Based on data from the 2014 European Social Survey, He Qingqian’s study used the matching method to analyze the causal effects of globalization resistance and modernization backlash.

The results show that both the cultural threat of immigration in the process of globalization and a threat to traditional conservative values have a certain influence in the flourishing development of contemporary Western European right-wing populist parties, but the influence coming from the former is greater than the latter.

Whether examined through comparisons of mean difference or incidences in logistic regression analysis, globalization resistance has a stronger influence on people's preferences for right-wing populist parties. Therefore, the rise of contemporary Western European right-wing populist parties should be attributed more to the resistance to globalization rather than a backlash to modernization. The cultural threat of immigration in the process of globalization is the primary reason for the support of right-wing populist parties in contemporary Western European countries. On the contrary, a backlash against liberal cultural values is not as serious as academia imagined.

V Democracy and Populism

Jürgen Gebhardt, professor emeritus of Political Science at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, gave a speech titled "We the People: Popular Sovereignty, National Identity and the Democratic Principle."

He believes that the populist movement is only one of the signs of the conflicts that plague the EU. These conflicts have hampered the unification of Europe and exacerbated the centrifugal national forces in the EU. Populism is also part of the trend of supporting national sovereignty in the entire transatlantic region. The crux of the problem does not lie in the

challenge of populists to Western representative democracy as a politically dominant model, but rather in the dilemma faced by the idea of a popular government and even the concept of democratic political order itself. Therefore, it is necessary to trace the grave tensions, within and between democracies, back to their historical origins and to the fundamental ideas that constitute the modern principle of democratic political order: the “people” and the “nation.” As the potential meanings of “popular sovereignty” are realized within the framework of the nation-state, democratic elites display an inherent tendency toward self-referential populism and nationalism. That’s why Max Weber spoke of the plebiscitarian-Caesarist features of modern mass democracy.

The democratic revolution on both sides of the Atlantic between 1649 and 1789 attempted to realize a new order in politics which would be based on the two interrelated principles of both popular sovereignty and the nation. In the British revolution, the sacred rights of the king were replaced by the sacred rights of the people. In the American revolution, the “great republican principle of the supremacy of the people” was finally embodied by a novel representative democracy. The mainstream of social science believes that populism is a political phenomenon originating from the US and this term and its meaning originated from a “third party” in American politics in the late 19th century. American populists are a precursor of direct democracy as a political alternative, and populist politics is an active force in the US that can influence the highest level of national politics. The latest example is the 2016 presidential election. The continued successful operation of representative

democracy in the US has absorbed the direct democratic foundation required by potential populism and reminded the ruling elite that state power should come directly from the people.

The ultimate challenge to representative democracy emerged in France between 1789 and 1804. After the revolution of 1789, France experienced a series of constitutional experiments, and a power struggle accompanied the significant changes of people's concept of sovereignty. The Jacobin faction replaced the representative function of the parliament with a revolutionary government and regarded the democratic dictatorship as the true interpreter of the will of the people. However, the revolutionary potential of democratic principles reached its culmination in Napoleon Bonaparte's "democratic" form of Caesarism. He frequently resorted to referendums to get legitimacy for his actions including launching coups, seeking lifelong rule and being crowned as the emperor. Plebiscitarian-Caesarism has become a third form of achieving democratic principles.

The "We the People" in the *Declaration of Independence* declares a historical vision of the sacred rights of the people embodied in the concept of democracy. From then until today, the populist forces that have risen repeatedly have been the most influential players in the power struggles related to democratic principles. This fight has now spread all around the world.

Dario Castiglione, professor of political science at Exeter University, gave a speech titled "People's Rule and the Authority of Democratic Representation."

His speech focused on the new populism that has emerged

in the last two or three decades, especially the key language models and rhetorical strategies used by the party leaders, political parties, and populist movements in expressing political demands. In the new populist discourse, the rule of the people or the will of the people occupies the core position. The will of the people is seen as the fundamental source of the legitimacy of modern governments, especially contemporary democracies. When the new populists use this discourse, on the one hand, they criticize establishment parties for overriding the rule of the people or abusing the rule of the people. On the other hand, they hope to abandon the institutional design that interferes with the principle of majority decision, and exclude ethnic minorities and immigrant groups, to promote the formation of a unified people's will.

Therefore, the challenge facing democrats is to either abandon the democratic sovereignty of the people, or to show the populist discourse misunderstands the meaning of the people's rule under the democratic system. The first position is usually adopted by democratic defenders who are more elitist. They believe that the lack of ruling ability makes the rule of the people difficult to realize. In Schumpeter's view, the democratic election process is not the leader being authorized as a representative, but the leader recruiting voters through their charisma or policy options. The second position rejects the specific interpretation provided by the populists and insists that democracy is based on equality. Robert Dahl distinguishes between populism that cannot serve as guidance for actions in real politics and polyarchy that may maximize people's sovereignty and equality.

Unlike ancient mixed government, the principle and form of the modern government is based on the concept of “unification.” A representative government maintains the unity of the people’s sovereignty, but there is a separation of powers in the way the government is composed and how the power is exercised. The form of separation coexists with the principle of unity. The representative system plays a role in both giving legal authority to the state and the actual operation of government power, which becomes the source of its internal tension. Populists demand that the voice of the people be directly reflected in the government, but in contemporary government, the voice and will of the people are more expressed in the form of mediation. Resorting to methods like referendums to decide significant political issues neglects a more in-depth examination of the reasons, motives and demands behind the actions. In the face of discrete and varied voters, the media power of representative systems is manifested in the media’s ability to help forma consensus on public interest through political mobilization.

Duan Demin, associate professor at the School of Government at PKU, pointed out in his presentation that to truly understand populism, especially the difference between populism and democratic politics, we need to get rid of the analytical perspective of narrow economism, highlight populism’s “political” dimension, and emphasize the inherent importance of this dimension.

He opined that both populism and democratic politics consider the people as the only source of legitimacy for political power. Both see the “sovereignty of the people” as the principle of priority for politics. The difference between the two is

difficult to define clearly. Today, when economism prevails and interest analysis perspectives dominate, this difficulty is particularly significant, because populism can be seen as a more intense expression of interest claims, and it is no different in essence with more “moderate” expressions of interest claims. For this reason, there have been many efforts to analyze populism from the perspective of “the struggle between the left and the right.” Whether on the left or right, if these expressions are too intense, they will lead to populism. But it is not clear how to define “too intense.” This is in line with the view that populism is a shifting label used in political games.

As for the disputes between the left and the right, the most important issue involved is nothing more than the issue of distribution, especially the allocation and redistribution of economic resources. Meanwhile, the issue of identity is often involved in such disputes in various ways. Fundamentally speaking, this is a shortcoming shared by liberalism (especially neoliberalism) and vulgar Marxism. It treats economics as the basis of political analysis. In this process, politics is reduced to the second most important thing, and considered to be a consequence that is derivative of economic and interest relations.

To understand populism from a political perspective requires us to emphasize the value and importance of politics. In the opinions of ancient Greek philosophers, including Aristotle, “politics” means “matters related to state,” thus being distinguishable from the “economic” matters that involve only the family. In the Western classical context, “politics” first points to the question of “who rules who” and “how to rule.”

When it comes to the issue of populism nowadays, although it is impossible to directly copy the viewpoint of Aristotle, we can still analyze populism from the perspective of “the form of rule.” The people are the sole source of the legitimacy of power, but who is the people? Everyone is part of the people, but who can say that he or she is the ruler? The people are the only sovereign holder of power, but sovereignty does not belong to any individual. In the words of Claude Lefort, such contradictions and uncertainty are rightly the beginning of modern democracy.

Populists often think that they are expressing the voice of “the real people,” who are the “silent majority” that has long been ignored or suppressed by the system. Therefore, populists do not believe that votes can express the voice of the “majority.” When the outcome of an election is in favor of the populist political movement, it is acceptable. Otherwise, it is either the power of the system itself that distorted the election results, or the “real people” failed to make their own voice heard. From the perspective of typical populists, the victory of the people is the victory of the political movements they advocate. The “people” here is actually a concept full of morality. It presupposes a “just” position — such as large-scale tax reduction, exclusiveness, and anti-multiculturalism, and then judges whether the voice of the “real people” is expressed or not based on this position. The views expressed by people through voting are secondary. In populist political movements, leaders’ opinions occupy a supreme position. The populist leaders generally have an authoritarian personality and have the final say within their organizations. The root cause of this is the intrinsic need of

populist politics, that is, the “people’s voice,” to be expressed in a single voice, without any internal conflicts and division. Any sounds that are slightly different will be regarded as anti-people, and therefore unjust, and need to be eliminated.

Although populism is anti-elite and anti-institutions, and is a challenge to traditional representative democracy, populism itself is not really anti-elite, nor even opposed to political representatives. Instead, on the contrary, populism requires a heroic leader to “represent” the people and speak for the people. In traditional representative politics, every representative claims that he or she is a true representative of the people, but does not think that other representatives are invalid, improper or should be completely eliminated. From the perspective of the entire political process, there is a visible distance between the representatives and the people (those who are represented). Each representative explains the “public good” of the political community from his or her own standpoint and perspective. But they can never make a completely exclusive claim of possession on the “public good.” In fact, as Claude Lefort said, the visible distance between representatives and those being represented is the most basic feature of modern democracy.

In populist politics, “the people” is seen as a moral whole without any internal division, which means that the “representative relationship” between the populist leaders and the people is special. Elections that are full of uncertainty usually give a certain “mandate” to the elected “representatives” that limits the legitimacy and power of the representatives. But populism often treats the representative as a direct “reflection” of those being represented (the people), just as the representative

is the “incarnation” of the people. In this process, the importance of elections is greatly reduced, and at the same time, the distance between the populist leader and those being represented is basically eliminated. In other words, the populist leader and the people are seen as completely identical. The will of the leader is the will of the people, and the opposition to the leader is opposition to the people. Because of this, although populism claims to be anti-elite, it is more likely to produce an unrestricted “elite” power. Although populism usually seems to oppose the state system, populism actually makes expanding state power easier. The contemporary political theorist Nadia Urbinati once commented on this point, saying, “Populism does not reach an anti-state outcome; on the contrary, it creates a ‘fruitful ground for increased statism at a large stage.’”

VI Populist politics

Zhang Jiliang, associate professor from the School of Politics and Public Administration at Tianjin Normal University, gave a speech titled “Friend or Foe? On the Relationship between Populism and Liberal Democracy.”

Although populism is prevailing worldwide, there is no consensus on its concept. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser believe that populism is a thin-centered ideology. In it, society is divided into two homogenous and confrontational forces – “pure people” and “corrupt elites,” and politics should be the expression of the general will. This definition lacks a vital element. Populists often claim that society is in a political, economic and cultural crisis and use this claim to mobilize people. In addition, this claim ignores the fact that populists

usually exclude “exotic groups,” such as “ethnic, religious and sexual minority groups,” when speaking of “the people.” If the two elements of crisis and exclusion are added to the above definition, a relatively complete definition is obtained: populism is a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be divided into two homogenous and confrontational forces – “the pure people” versus corrupt elites and exotic groups. Populists believe the improper rule of “corrupt elites” and the invasion of “exotic groups” has put society into a political, economic and cultural crisis. In order to solve this crisis, “pure people” need to end the rule of “corrupt elites” under the leadership of a particular leader or exclude “exotic groups” from society, and then achieve the general will in a variety of direct democratic ways.

The concept of liberal democracy is more complicated than populism. Robert Dahl’s definition is the most popular one, stating liberal democracy is essentially polyarchy that is liberal, highly inclusive, and broadly open and allows open discussion. It can be seen that liberal democracy is based on a combination of majority decisions and minority rights. This combination is unstable. Populism tries to suppress the liberal dimension by using the democratic dimension.

From a positive point of view, populism will strengthen the democratic dimension in liberal democracy and promote democratic participation in various ways. Liberal democracy often automatically presupposes full inclusiveness, but this presupposition does not make sense because a citizens’ right to participate is not the same as citizens’ ability to participate. When people only have political participation rights but lack the will, resources, capabilities and social networks to exercise these

rights, they cannot participate in political life, and the substantive inclusiveness of liberal democracy cannot be guaranteed. Rather, liberal democracy is only responsive to a few citizens who have the awareness to participate and have affluent resources, and it is only responsive to issues that are urgently relevant to those citizens' own interests or interests that they consider important. The inclusiveness of liberal democracy increasingly has an elitist tendency.

In response, populists have incorporated the groups excluded from the political sphere into the political arena to restore the democratic commitment of liberal democracies. This has four aims. The first is to express the ideas, interests and values for those groups that are ignored by establishment elites. The second is to mobilize the groups that are excluded from the political field to participate directly in political activities, thus effectively integrating them into the political arena. The third is to incorporate the policy demands of groups that are excluded from the political sphere into the policy agenda through various formal and informal ways. The fourth is to help rally support for policies preferred by populists or their allies who are not excluded from the political sphere.

Through the above methods, populists ensure that the interests, opinions, and values of groups neglected by establishment elites are included in the political realm, thus effectively correcting liberal democracy's elitist tendency which lacks responsiveness.

From a negative point of view, populism endangers the liberal dimension of liberal democracy. The main manifestations include: the populist claim is an anti-pluralism claim that

suppresses the rights of minorities. Populists will take advantage of the people's sovereignty to overthrow the constraints created by the constitution, rule of law, and separation of powers. Populists will make irresponsible decisions after taking power. The extreme tendencies of populism will shake the stability of liberal democracy.

From a theoretical perspective, since liberal democracy contains two dimensions with different logics, people can emphasize different aspects of the two dimensions from different angles. Left-wing thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe are concerned with how to involve excluded groups in the political arena. They value the important implications of the dimension of participation in populism, so they believe that populism is a kind of hope to fulfill the promise of liberal democracy, rather than a threat. In contrast, liberal thinkers such as Paul Taggart emphasize the anti-pluralism dimension of populism, so they are more inclined to regard it as a threat to liberal democracy.

Ma Hualing, a research fellow from the Si-Mian Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities at East China Normal University, gave a speech titled "Thin and Thick Populism: A Minimal Definition." He opined that all of the four definitions of populism dominant in Western academia cannot provide coherent definitions, so it is necessary to explore a new definition, which is a minimal definition of populism. In this regard, he makes a distinction between thin and thick populism.

The most influential approaches to define populism in Western academia are the ideological approach, whose representatives are Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser.

They believe that populism is a thin ideology with two core contents. First, the whole society is divided into two opposing groups, namely, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite.” Second, politics should express the general will, and populism essentially opposes elitism and pluralism. There are two major problems with this definition: First, it simplifies the complexity of populism. Second, there is inherent inconsistency within the concept of thin ideology.

The representative of the discursive approach to define populism is Ernesto Laclau. He believes that populism is a discourse and its core element is relationships. Populism is a subjective discourse of the people constructed by the opposing relationship of the people and the enemy. There are two major flaws in this definition: First, it is such an overly broad understanding of populism that the terminology of populism becomes meaningless. Second, the definition emphasizes the bottom-up nature of populism, but in practice, populism can be either a bottom-up political movement from the public or a top-to-bottom political strategy of leaders, or even both.

Kurt Weyland devised the political-strategic approach. He believes that populism has three core elements. First, populist rulers are charismatic, personal leaders. Second, the power base of populism is the support of the masses, and populist leaders must rely on the power of the masses in order to win power. Third, the core feature of populism is a direct connection between the leader and the people, without any intermediary. Based on this, he believes that there is a significant difference between populism and right-wing extremism. However, this approach still has insufficiencies. First, it is a narrow

understanding of populism. Second, its understanding of the relationship between the leader and the people is narrow. Third, its understanding of the concept of “the people” is also narrow.

Pierre Ostiguy’s socio-cultural approach provides the fourth definition of populism. This definition is based on Ostiguy’s so-called two-dimensional political space. This space has two axes. The longitudinal axis is the high-low axis, and the horizontal axis is the left-right axis. The high-low axis refers to high- and low-level culture respectively. The left-right axis represents the left and right of the political spectrum, that is, left-wing populism and right-wing populism. According to these two axes, Ostiguy’s two-dimensional political space can be divided into four quadrants: low-left, low-right, high-left, and high-right. This research approach has three shortcomings. First, it equates the people with the masses. Second, in order to quantify populism, Ostiguy simplifies the antagonistic relationship between populists and “the others.” Third, the social-cultural approach is actually a quantifiable political-strategic approach.

Despite the shortcomings of the above four definitions, there is no doubt that the attribute of “thin” should be regarded as a core element of the definition for populism. Because the concept of populism is not independent, it usually needs to be combined with other ideas or ideologies. In this sense, the minimal definition for populism argues that populism is essentially a “thin concept.” Populism, as a “thin concept,” cannot present all characteristics of populism, but only its core features. Moreover, this definition is only based on the universal characteristics shared by all populism, and does not include the

unique features of some populism.

In summary, the minimal definition of populism holds that populism can be divided into thin populism and thick populism. Thin populism is the core shared by all populism. It has two core characteristics. First, populism is the antagonistic relation between the morally noble people and those with poor morality. Second, populists claim to be the exclusive representatives of the will of the people. Thick populism is actually the combination of the core of populism and the periphery of populism. In the political spectrum of Western populism, left-wing populism and right-wing populism are two typical thick populisms.

Xu Xiaohong, a lecturer with the Department of International Politics at the University of International Relations, gave a speech titled “Populism against the Background of Multiculturalist Policies in Western Europe.” She believes that Western Europe does not have a long tradition of mass populism. In most states, the structure of institutions is a consequence of a carefully designed and guided process by elites. From the 1980s on, as a variety of social transformations including but not limited to mass immigration began to show their impacts, the populist radical right parties established themselves on a large scale in Western European countries, taking the issue of immigration as one of their core concerns. As multiculturalism had been the most important policy to deal with issue of immigration in most countries, it became the critical target of populist parties. Populism in Western Europe has three characteristics. First, it prioritizes sociocultural issues and identity, which distinguishes it from traditional ideologies.

Second, it is closely adherent to radical right parties. Third, it manifested itself as radical nationalism and xenophobia. Populism has already become the main ideology to challenge and criticize multiculturalism. Although populism is in the process of gaining strength, it is still early to say if a populist will be strong enough to get into government in these countries in future.

VII A Comparative Analysis of European Populist Politics

Zhong Zhun, associate professor from the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences at Chongqing University, gave a speech titled “Influences of European Populist Parties on Foreign Policies: A Comparative Study from the Perspective of Party Systems.” He opines that globalization and European integration have stimulated the rise of populist parties in Europe. As a response, these parties generally prefer a policy of anti-globalization, opposition to the EU and nativism. The impact of populist parties on foreign policy largely depends on their party systems.

In recent years, European countries have faced greater internal and external pressures during their economic development. Mainstream political parties in various countries have not been able to solve problems with economic development and encountered a crisis of representation. Populist political parties have taken advantage of the dissatisfaction of the people, and ascended in domestic politics. At present, the right-wing populist parties in Europe have appeared largely as a reaction against globalization and regionalization. Left-wing

populist parties are also skeptical about economic globalization and integration.

European populist parties have different ways of influencing the foreign policies of their countries. With regard to the right wing, the Lega Nord (LN) of Italy, Freedom Party of Austria, and Swiss People's Party all became official members of their national coalition governments after the Cold War and acquired key positions that could affect their countries' foreign policies. Although the Party for Freedom of the Netherlands and Danish People's Party are not official joint ruling parties, they support their own coalition government. The French National Rally and Germany's Alternative für Deutschland have always opposed the ruling party of their country, and they have exerted influence through parliamentary competition and mobilizing voters. With regardsto the left wing, Syriza is now the ruling party in Greece, the Italian MS5 has joined forces with the LN, the Spanish Podemos is vacillating on whether to join the coalition government, and the German left-wing party does not seek governance. The above differences are related to the different characteristics of the political party system in each country.

According to Max Weber, the Western European party systems can be divided into three categories: extreme multiparty systems, moderate multiparty systems and relative two-party systems. The extreme multi-party system and the decentralization of political power in Italy have given populist parties a larger space for activities. The new Italian government, formed by MS5 and LN, is considered to be the first populist government in Western Europe. In term of foreign policies, both

parties are skeptical about the obligations Italy holds to the EU and the international community. The bipartisan coalition agreement promises to adopt policies that will reduce taxation, promote welfare spending, set minimum wages and so on to cater to the public, and fight crime and illegal immigration in the most determined manner. The positions of foreign minister and economic minister, which are the most closely related to the EU, are still dominated by mainstream supporters for integration. LN leader Matteo Salvini is the interior minister, while MS5 leader Luigi Di Maio is now minister of labor and industry. This shows that populist parties still focus on internal affairs rather than foreign affairs.

The rise of populist parties in Germany, which has a moderate multiparty system, is related to the fact that mainstream parties have not performed well in responding to the debt and refugee crises and their policies are becoming more convergent. Like the populist parties in Italy, Alternative for Germany is also anti-globalization, anti-European integration, and anti-Islam in foreign relations, which caters to some people of lower socioeconomic status. Although the number of parliamentary seats of populist parties has greatly increased, their ruling prospects are still very limited under the moderate multiparty system. In 2018, the GroKo government excluded Alternative for Germany from the coalition government; therefore Alternative for Germany's foreign policies cannot directly influence German foreign policy decisions. However, as the largest opposition party in the German parliament, the Alternative for Germany can influence Germany's related foreign policies, especially the budget related to EU issues. At the same

time, the rise of right-wing populism reflects German public opinion to a certain extent, which may become a social factor that restricts the Merkel government's foreign policies.

The British two-party system has distinct characteristics of consensus politics. The Conservative Party and the Labor Party also have considerable consensus on foreign policies. Compared with Italy, Germany and France, populist parties have relatively less influence in the UK. The largest populist party, the UK Independence Party, is a typical single-issue party, that is, it opposes UK membership in the EU. The party became the third largest party in the 2015 general election and played an important role in the 2016 referendum on Brexit, directly affecting the direction of the British foreign strategy. However, in the 2017 British election, the party lost its only seat in the parliament. The UK Independence Party's diplomatic propositions, such as the complete departure from the EU in the shortest time and the lifting of sanctions against Russia, are far from the mainstream consensus. Under the two-party system, the third party is also facing fierce competition from the two major parties.

Under the European competitive party system, each political party has a strong motivation to please a particular group or interest group in the country. Compared with traditional mainstream parties, populist parties have more obvious preferences in foreign policies. However, on the whole, the influence of European populist parties on domestic politics and foreign policies is declining across all party systems.

Lu Yizhou, a PhD candidate at the School of International Relations at Renmin University of China, gave a speech titled

“Who votes for the radical right? — a cross-national comparative study based on macro and micro data.”

He said that the current interpretation of the rise of radical right parties in the academia mainly focuses on the four aspects of refugees and immigrants, political trust, economic crisis and cultural psychology. These aspects involve different dimensions spanning politics, economics, society and culture, and generally cover all facets of political life.

The performance of radical right parties in Europe today has kept exceeding people's expectations, which cannot be explained by the existing theory. The flaw of the explanatory ability likely stems from a shortfall in research methods. Therefore, the direction of future efforts lies in incorporating key variables from existing interpretations into a comprehensive model that takes into account both macro and micro dimensions, while at the same time testing them in different national environments.

Lu Yizhou attempted this, using the following methodology.

First, he examined the macroscopic factors behind the rise of radical right parties, explored the links between various indicators at the national level and the true voting rate of the country's radical right parties, and found out what factors promote the rise of radical right parties. Second, he examined the microscopic factors behind the rise of radical right parties, explored the influence of different factors at the individual level on voting behavior, and found out what kind of people vote for radical right parties. Finally, he explored the interaction between macro and micro factors to explain the complex question of what

kind of people, under what conditions, will vote for radical right parties.

At the macro level, the dependent variable was the percentage of votes a radical right party obtained, and the independent variables were the proportion of refugees and immigrants, unemployment rate, and level of clean government. At the micro level, the dependent variable was voting behavior. The independent variables were the scope of inclusion of refugees and immigrants into society, income perception, political trust, and psychological traits. The control variables were social demographic characteristics.

The data was based on publicly available information from the World Bank, Transparency International, and Eurostat. The samples cover 14 radical right-wing parties in 12 European countries. Through data analysis and statistical diagrams, regression models, multi-layer generalized linear measurement models and other research approaches, he drew the following conclusions.

First, supporters of the radical right parties have relatively stable sociodemographic characteristics: men who are from the bottom socioeconomic class, uneducated, and relatively young are more likely to vote for the radical right parties. What's worth noting is that the impact of income on voting behavior is not more robust than gender, age, and education. To a certain extent, this shows that the key point is not how economically poor the voters are, but what they attribute such a situation to. At the same time, the expectations of different individuals on income, the economic level of different countries, and the gap between rich and poor also, to some degree, blur the influence of income

on voting behavior. With regard to voting behavior, specific xenophobic attitudes show a more robust influence than general political trust.

Second, from the perspective of comparison between countries, the political and economic situation of a country is related to the rate of support for the radical right parties. The countries with a higher unemployment rate and more corruption are more conducive to the rise of radical right parties. However, relevant quantitative research has raised some doubts about these views. First, the degree of correlation between macro factors and the support rate of radical right parties is not high, but is roughly at a medium level. Second, a multi-layer generalized linear measurement model shows that macroscopic factors do not directly affect individuals' voting behavior, but partially adjust the microscopic factors. Therefore, rigorously speaking, most of the existing macroscopic studies have only pointed out conditions that have large potential to influence the rise of the radical right, but the transmission process and causal mechanism of these conditions in the rise of the radical right parties are undoubtedly worthy of continued research by the academic community.

Third, as a kind of exploration and experiment, the study introduced two less common political psychological variables related to the radical right parties. The results of the analysis show that different models have all confirmed a negative correlation between supporting equality and voting for radical right parties. This connection has shown outstanding significance in some countries' samples. In contrast, no evidence was found that an attitude of "rejecting change" would affect voting

behavior. Therefore, to a certain extent, the radical right tendency has certain psychological roots, and the roots are different from traditional right-wing ideology. The traditional right-wing trend is rooted in the acceptance of existing inequality and the rejection of change. These two psychological attitudes satisfy the strong demand of conservatives to control uncertainty and fear. However, the results of the analysis show that the radical right ideology and the traditional right-wing ideology only share attitudes toward equality, but not tradition. Therefore, the acceptance of inequality has led to racial or national superiority in some individuals, and thus bred xenophobia. Under the banner of xenophobia, the radical right parties have simultaneously attracted two waves of voters who respectively reject change and support change. The former feels uncomfortable with the changes brought about by refugees and immigrants, and looks forward to returning to a homogenous traditional society composed of the indigenous people. The latter believes that refugees and immigrants have already scarred contemporary society, therefore pinning their hopes on fierce reforms to solve these problems.

Wang Yingjin, professor of political science at the School of International Relations at Renmin University of China, gave a speech titled “An Analysis of the Catalan Referendum: from the Perspective of Law, Theory and the Current Situation.” Catalonia is a highly autonomous region in Spain. Wang Yingjin opined that due to Catalonia’s intricate historical, ethnic and economic relations with Spain, the demand for autonomy in this region has been rising and gradually evolved into the demand for separation, which eventually triggered the independence

referendum on October 1, 2017. However, the Catalan referendum was the product of both a lack of conformity and legitimacy. In terms of conformity with the current law, the referendum in Catalonia was a violation of the Spanish Constitution, and did not conform to international law either.

The main legal supports for Catalonia's autonomy are the 1978 Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, which was amended in 2006. Spain is a unitary state, and its local autonomy is granted by the central government as a "sovereign representative." In this case, autonomy cannot transcend the constitution. From the perspective of constitutional norms, Catalonia does not have the right to separate from the Kingdom of Spain.

In terms of the conformity with academic theories, the Catalan referendum cannot find any rational basis in the fields of Western "separation of powers" theory, social contract theory and democratic referendum theory. First of all, the Spanish central government has not brutally abused or slaughtered people in Catalonia. On the contrary, it has implemented a policy of ethnic protection and national autonomy in Catalonia. Therefore, Catalonia does not have the preconditions to exercise "a moral right to secede." Second, modern Western social contract theory emphasizes the freedom of the contract, including the freedom of signing and terminating a contract. However, Catalonia has misunderstandings of the freedom of terminating a contract, or has exaggerated its own degree of freedom to terminate the contract. Catalonia's misunderstanding lies in the fact that the freedom of contract is understood to be the one-sided freedom of signing. It only notes that it is necessary to

negotiate with other signatories when signing the contract. After the parties reach an agreement, they form a national community. However, this ignores the fact that negotiations with other contracting parties are also required when terminating a contract, and that one party is free to withdraw only after obtaining the unanimous consent of other contracting parties. Third, theoretically, this referendum is a democratic referendum rather than a self-determination referendum. As a regional democratic referendum, the voting issues are limited to internal governance issues within the autonomous region. This means Catalonia cannot vote on the issue of changing its territorial sovereignty. If this issue is to be decided, Catalonia needs to negotiate and reach an agreement with other administrative units in Spain or the central government of Spain.

Although the referendum has failed, the referendum still provides experience and warnings to other sovereign countries with separation issues. First, excessive decentralization is not a cure for separatism. It is necessary to grasp the balance between centralization and decentralization. Second, the occurrence of separatism is not directly related to the level of economic and political development of a country. Less developed countries cannot pin their hopes of solving their separatism issues on economic development and political democracy. Rather, they should take multi-track approaches to get better results.

Li Kaixuan, an assistant research fellow at the Academy of Marxism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, gave a speech titled “On Italian Populist Parties.” He opined that since the 1990s, populist parties have been an important political force in Italy, closely related to the changes of the country’s economic

and social environment and the legitimacy crisis of mainstream parties. In addition, populism itself is seductive, which is also an important factor. Every strong rise of populist parties has promoted the process of Italy's political reorganization and political and cultural transformation. At present, although the main populist parties in Italy have a high support rate, their future development is still uncertain. The continued development of Italian populist parties will largely depend on whether they can find the proper balance between becoming mainstream and opposing the establishment.

VIII Transformations in European Politics and Sino-Europe Relations

Xu Gang, associate researcher at the Institute of Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, discussed the regional differences in neopopulism in Europe and neopopulism's impact on Sino-European relations. He argues that the performance and characteristics of neopopulism in Central and Eastern Europe vary between different countries in different time periods, with the differences between Central European countries and the Balkan countries being especially obvious. He concludes that the current neopopulism in Central and Eastern Europe should not be viewed merely as a return of traditional populism.

Unliketheir counterparts in Western Europe, neopopulist parties in Central and Eastern Europe focus less on stressing the difference between ethnicities, opposing immigrants, or advocating xenophobia. Rather, they emphasize social justice and equality against the background of “dismantling communist

heritage” while directing their exclusivism toward domestically scattered ethnicities such as the Romani and Jews. They do not occupy a specific place on the political spectrum, nor do they have any distinctive policy marker. Therefore, the practice in academia is to divide neopopulist parties in Central and Eastern Europe into centrists and radicals according to their degree of opposition to parliamentary democracy. It is noteworthy that the boundaries between the centrist and the radical are changeable due to the fact that there is a lack of clear and consistent core policies in neopopulist parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, these parties are actually hodgepodges of different ideologies that cannot be reduced to the simple right-left spectrum, so it is hard to equate them with right-wing populist parties.

Since the transformation more than 20 years ago of Central and East European countries, the countries have witnessed a trend toward a more diverse political environment, of which the unique aspects of their neopopulism is a manifestation. Studies of Central and East European neopopulism must be conducted with the region’s transformation as a necessary background. Xu Gang’s research offers a deeper look into the transformation.

First of all, neopopulism in Central and Eastern Europe should not be viewed as merely the return of classical populism. It is marked by features completely different from the last two generations of populism. The populists oppose liberalism instead of democracy, and oppose political elites and technocracy rather than seeing themselves as an elite reflection of the people leading the people to political triumph. Some of the neopopulist parties are extremely xenophobic and have a strong tendency to hold

street movements amid electoral campaigns, while still behaving within the democratic political system.

Second, neopopulism in Central and Eastern Europe should not be treated as a temporary phenomenon. Neopopulist parties face problems such as internal rifts, party leaders who put themselves above their party, party leadership succession difficulties, vacillating younger supporters and so on, which restrain their development. However, due to the fact that the more traditional parties in the region are challenged by a convergence of ideologies and theories, helplessness in the face of new economic situations, a loss of reputation caused by corruption and other factors, and the impact of social media on voting patterns, the neopopulist parties have become an indispensable and impossible-to-ignore political power.

Third, the rise of Central and Eastern European neopopulism cannot be simply attributed to these countries joining the EU. Some of the countries in the region witnessed the emergence of neopopulism after their transformation, but at that time neopopulist parties didn't rise to become mainstream, and economic policies didn't turn to populism either. After these countries joined the EU, emerging problems such as new waves of social impoverishment, high unemployment rates and economic difficulties provided opportunities for neopopulist parties to reproach traditional left- and right-wing parties and attract more votes. We must realize that the phenomenon of populism in Central and East European countries is the combined result of multiple factors during their transformation period, and that the causes varied from stage to stage.

Finally, judging from the trajectory of the development of

party politics, the trait of diversity in modern democratic politics is becoming increasingly apparent, and a neopopulist party as a choice within the system furthers this diversity. As these parties challenge traditional left- and right-wing parties, they also march forward to reform themselves. Undeniably, extreme populism is rejected by modern democratic politics, but we must not simply regard neopopulism, with its possible challenge to democracy, as something negative and a retrogression of democracy.

The growth of European neopopulism will definitely impact Sino-European relations and the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI). First of all, under the converging attacks of left-wing and right-wing populism, European mainstream politics is steadily tilting toward the conservative and rightist end of the scale. In the coming years, populism with a nativist character will become the main trend within Europe, thus bringing about a significantly larger impediment to the Chinese endeavor to promote free trade and investment liberalization with Europe.

Second, the rise of populism to power will push the EU into a more conservative and inward-focused position and intensify “ideological confrontation,” which will in turn exacerbate the European sense of alienation from China and affect mutual trust between the two sides.

Gong Lianbing, associate professor at the Department of Politics at Ocean University of China, pointed out that the current neopopulist ruling party Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance in Hungary is showing strong Eurosceptic traits while actively promoting bilateral relations with China. Thus, a neopopulist ruling government in Hungary could benefit

Sino-Hungarian cooperation within the framework of the BRI. And since participating in the BRI accords with Fidesz's "Eastern Opening" policy, Hungary under Fidesz's rule has always responded ardently to the initiative, and as a result the economic and trade cooperation between the two countries has witnessed a rapid increase.

Hungary's "Eastern Opening" policy and turning away from the EU will undoubtedly have a positive influence on the implementation of the BRI. However, Hungary is still a member of the EU and the opposition Hungarian Socialist party and the Green Party remain supporters of European Unionism. The Socialist Party strove to establish a West European democracy since the revolutions of 1989 in East Europe, and opposed cooperating with communist parties with the aim of getting rid of communist "burdens." The Green Party, on the other hand, set its goal as building a more democratic Europe and a greener economy and society, and thus disagrees with the ruling coalition on issues concerning the EU. Therefore it is crucial that Hungary properly handle its relations with the EU and its multilateral relations with neighboring countries in order to build a stable geopolitical environment and maintain a favorable domestic political environment. Doing this would also have a positive influence on Hungary's role as "the heart of Europe," in promoting participation in the BRI in Central and Eastern Europe or even in Western Europe.

Zhang Biao, lecturer at the School of Political Science and Public Administration at the China University of Political Science and Law, analyzed the relation of Brexit to populism in his presentation. He stated that Brexit is usually viewed as a

victory of European right-wing populism, and is often considered as a challenge to the liberal international order together with Trump winning the US presidential election. From the angle of the politics of signification, “Brexit represents the victory of populism” is a typical signification possessing following characteristics. First, populist significations tend to see Brexit as part of a “populist wave” that is sweeping across Europe and North America. Second, populist significations tend to focus on the opposition between the people and the elite. Third, populist significations tend to see Brexit as anti-immigration. Fourth, populist significations portray populist politicians as demagogues and voters as nativists and losers in globalization.

However, these populist significations face a number of problems. First of all, they all consider a very narrow time frame. Most populist significations are related to the rise of European populist parties. Compared to other significations, populism traces Brexit back to around 2016, whereas Brexit is not simply a short-term issue. Second, they neglect the cross-party characteristic of Brexit advocates. Populist significations tend to attribute Brexit to the Independence Party and overlook the fact that almost all key members of the Conservative Party were also in the camp campaigning to leave. Moreover, supporters of Brexit also include Labour Party members. Third, judging from the actual referendum, the British public are not irrational nativists incited by demagogues.

The populist significations of Brexit are to a large extent misleading as well. First of all, they induce us to consider Brexit as part of the recent populist wave. There are, however, views

that argue Brexit is an eruption of the tension between the UK and the EU that has been growing since 1992. These views hold that Brexit is not an outcome of populism or globalization but a result of the constant difference in identity between the UK and continental European countries. Furthermore, supporters hold that the post-Brexit UK would not oppose globalization but actually deepen the UK's involvement in the (economic) globalization process, which contrasts sharply with Trump's "America First" policy. Therefore, although Brexit derived from certain appeals that are also shared by populism and it indeed has similarities with populisms in Continental Europe and North America, Brexit is in effect the pursuit of a freer and more open economy over a longer period of time.

Li Yongqiang, assistant research fellow of the National Institute of International Strategy atthe Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, focused on Poland's foreign strategy in the revival of neoconservatism.

Since the Law and Justice Party came to power in Poland, the country's foreign strategy gradually shifted toward strengthening its own strategic advantages and clarifying its role in Central and East European affairs as well as general European affairs. With this shift in Poland's foreign strategy, the impact of the revival of neoconservatism in Europe on Poland has become evident. Related policies implemented by the Duda administration are meant to effectively optimize the strategic advantages Poland possesses in Central and Eastern Europe while strengthening Poland's relationship with the US.

Although the revival of neoconservatism has a notable influence on Poland's foreign strategy, we should also notice the

active measures taken by Poland in developing Poland-China relations when studying Polish foreign strategies. The establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Poland provides a favorable background for Poland to engage in the BRI and to participate in “16+1 cooperation.” Poland could make use of the BRI to get involved with the cooperation between China and the Central and East European (CEE) countries within the framework of “16+1 cooperation,” and reap economic benefits.

In terms of Poland’s involvement in international affairs, its continuous strengthening of its relationship with the US, especially in strategic security cooperation, does not prevent Poland from benefiting from cooperation with China and other countries. On the contrary, as Poland is witnessing stronger relations with the US and a growing one with China, it can take the opportunity to gain strategic support from both countries and expand its international influence in CEE and in Europe as a whole.

In conclusion, Poland’s foreign strategy in the revival of neoconservatism will be witnessing a steady implementation of strategies centered on strengthening Poland-US relations. Poland will continue to be a staunch ally of the US in CEE to counter the strategic influence Russia wields in the region. Poland-Russia relations, on the other hand, have been experiencing constant tension due to unresolved conflicts in eastern Ukraine, and are facing hindrance on the way to improvement, caused by the rising Poland-US relationship as well as the long-term strategic confrontation between Russia and the US in Eurasia.

In terms of Poland-China relations, more optimistic prospects are expected as Poland takes part in the BRI to engage more in advancing “16+1 cooperation” between China and the CEE countries. As for Poland’s relations with the EU, Poland exerts positive influence on promoting European integration, while at the same time opposing many West and North European countries in issues like accepting Middle Eastern refugees. In terms of its relationship with other CEE countries, Poland will have a larger influence on these countries with the help of the revival of neoconservatism and will probably end up with a stronger influence on CEE affairs.

Prof. Li Qiang summarized in his speech at the closing ceremony of the forum that scholars from China and abroad had refined their theoretical reflections on populism through two days of discussion and obtained a more comprehensive understanding of both the current status and future prospects of populism. He said that this conference has achieved its initial goal of promoting a comprehensive examination and reflection on populism, right-wing politics and the future of Europe, as participants returned to first principles with classic concepts like “the people” and “demagogue,” analyzed notions of modern “popular sovereignty,” interpreted real-time data on European politics and scrutinized relevant policies and tendencies.