

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 17, Issue 2 (2021)

Introduction

The Limits of European Legitimacy: On Populism and Technocracy. Introduction to the Special Issue

Russell Foster, Jan Grzymiski and Monika Brusenbauch Meislová

Citation

Foster, R., Grzymiski, J. and Brusenbauch Meislová, M. (2021). 'The Limits of European Legitimacy: On Populism and Technocracy. Introduction to the Special Issue' in, *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 17 (2): 75-86. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v17i2.1237>
First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

This article introduces the special issue on populism and technocracy in the integration and governance of the European Union (EU), framing these opposing approaches in the context of polarised debate on the (il)legitimacy of the EU. The special issue was conceived as an interdisciplinary approach to questions of the EU's legitimacy in the aftermath of structural crises (the eurozone, sovereign debt and the election and appointment of governing agents) and spontaneous crises (migration, external state and non-state security challenges, Brexit and Euroscepticism). Since the special issue's conception the unanticipated Covid-19 pandemic, and responses from the EU and its member states (current and former) starkly illuminated debates on how the EU should operate, the limits of its power and the limits of its popular legitimacy. The era of passive consensus has been replaced by claims of legitimacy based on active expert-informed intervention, alongside populist claims of the EU's inherent illegitimacy as an undemocratic technocracy. As such the special issue's objective is to critically analyse manifold ways in which the populist-technocratic divide is narrated and performed in different regions, disciplines, and social and political systems in an era of growing internal and external challenges to the Union. We observe that the EU's institutions remain highly adaptable in responding to challenges, but that member-states have continued and accelerated a tendency to nationalise success and Europeanise failure, with the EU acting as a perennial scapegoat largely due to the ease with which it can be narrated as a site of projection for mistrust, resentment, and social grievances. We argue that the relationship between populism and technocracy is rapidly evolving from an imagined binary into a much more fluid, overlapping, and reversible set of political narratives. We conclude that despite the changing nature of populist-technocratic debates and the resilience and adaptability of the EU, it faces accelerating challenges to its legitimacy in the new era of 'politics of necessity'.

Keywords

Populism; Technocracy; European Union; EU governance; Crisis

EMERGENCY EUROPE: BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This special issue was originally conceived in September 2019 through our UACES-funded network '*The Limits of EU-ropes*'. Through this network, the issue's themes were introduced and discussed at one of the last face-to-face academic conferences – the 49th UACES conference, held in Portugal on the tenth anniversary of the Treaty of Lisbon. Speculating on whether or how the new British government of the recently-appointed Boris Johnson would ever resolve Brexit, and why and how the *Spitzenkandidaten* system had been abandoned in the transition from Jean-Claude Juncker to Ursula von der Leyen, we imagined that this special issue would address what we anticipated would be a running theme into the future – a tension between the unelected experts of technocracy versus the sweeping promises of populists. What we could not anticipate in Lisbon in September 2019, was how much this vague binary would solidify.

The Global Covid-19 Pandemic has seen Europe, and the entire world, plunged into emergency governance mode for more than a year. In this sense, the perspective of this special issue is now obviously different than when it had been conceived. We originally aimed at investigating the relationship between populism and technocracy and the growing gulf between 'populist' and 'technocratic' systems of knowledge production within European politics, and specifically how populist agendas in Europe challenge a consensus-based European decision-making model. Since then, priorities and players have changed. The United Kingdom (UK) finally broke its Brexit deadlock and, for better or worse, left the EU. A new European Commission was chosen behind closed doors, antagonising national leaders and the European Parliament while reigniting early 2000s narratives of the European Union's (EU) supposed democratic deficit. Hungary and Poland threatened to mortally wound the EU by derailing the planned seven-year budget amidst culture wars. Yet similar events of the past year, from wildfires to drone assassinations to the Suez Canal, have been overshadowed by the pandemic. Unprecedented state intervention and control over citizens' lives, vaccine wars, and record levels of spending (too much for creditors, not enough for debtors), and an entirely new era of expert-led technocracy versus populist anger.

Although Europe, as well as the rest of the world, has endured the largest shock since the end of the Second World War, changes to the functioning of EU institutions are less than one could expect. Most importantly, the conceptual limits of Europe remain mostly unchanged. 'Emergency Europe' is undoubtedly not new, but rather an expansion (albeit a very large one) of the EU's crisis mode of the past ten years or so (White 2020).

Since the onset of the Global Financial Crisis the EU has staggered from one emergency to the next. The eurozone and sovereign debt crisis, the so-called migration crisis, Crimea and the ongoing war in Donbas, Brexit and the rise of authoritarian anti-EU politicians, to name but a few, effectively triggered emergency rule in the EU long before the pandemic. It became an opportunity for elevating the importance of technocratic expertise, introducing exceptional policy tools and giving more prerogatives to EU executive institutions. In turn, this extension of technocratic governance fuelled resentment at an ostensibly distant and unelected bureaucracy, creating a favourable environment for populist politicians demanding a return of sovereign powers, restrictions on EU powers and greater popular agency against the emergency doctrine of 'politics of necessity' which by definition leaves little room for alternative policy options. The Covid-19 pandemic is a global emergency, but its impact in Europe (including the UK) was significantly exacerbated by appearing in a political, economic and social context of widespread existing mistrust, resentment and division. It tested the resilience of both supranational and intergovernmental capacities of the EU (Salvati, 2021), and starkly highlighted long-simmering resentments between national capitals and Brussels. It is reasonable to say that with the pandemic added on top of previous crises, there is a 'normalisation of EU public policy responses in times of permanent emergency' (Wolff and Ladi 2020: 1031).

On one hand, the EU's responses to the pandemic exposed the potential of European integration. The first symbolic manifestation of this was when many EU nationals used repatriation flights under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, to return home following the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. Arguably the most significant manifestation was the creation of Coronavirus Bonds and an EU Recovery Plan, which has smoothed the worst impacts of lockdowns, but which has simultaneously added to tensions between creditor and debtor nations. Notwithstanding EU-UK tensions over the Irish border, and a tense relationship between the European Commission, national governments and the AstraZeneca corporation, the EU has demonstrated its continuing, remarkable ability to survive its semi-permanent state of crisis. But greater, large-scale solidarity between EU members is now of vital importance for the future development of European integration and, arguably, survival. That includes a common purchase and distribution of vaccines among the EU population (regardless of the initial delays) and the largest ever EU economic recovery plan 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU) with sharing public debt and issuing common EU bonds, alongside preparations for future emergencies.

On the other hand, the pandemic simultaneously stimulated European disintegration. In particular, UK-EU tensions over vaccine procurement and distribution, manifesting in damaging smear campaigns and poorly-managed executive orders relating to the Irish border, alongside other EU neighbours in the east and south being effectively excluded from the fast supply of vaccines. This raised critical voices warning against the rise of the alleged 'vaccine nationalism' and continues to imperil an already delicate post-Brexit relationship between an EU and a UK growing increasingly disillusioned with one another. As a result, this strengthened the chasm between the EU, its member states and its European neighbours, in relation to both the post-Brexit UK and those in east and south of the EU. Moreover, the initial 'nativist' reactions of the majority of EU member states during the first lockdown, to bring back home 'our' nationals, even if that was supported to some degree by the EU repatriation flights scheme, was a visible sign that in the moment of existential crisis. It is primarily the 'nation state' model which was expected to provide with rudimentary safety and protection, not the EU. Hence, the pandemic has not overridden the conceptualised limits of Europe, but to some degree it has only magnified them, where the processes of European integration and disintegration are dialectically intertwined.

At the same time, Covid-19 underlined other issues in relation to both technocracy and populism. The most obvious was that the sense of urgency legitimised yet again the technocratic governance model in the name of the 'politics of necessity'. This manifested itself in unprecedented securitisation of intra-EU mobility with the selective suspension of freedom of movement in the Schengen zone (although not for the first time) and the imminent introduction of an EU Digital Green Certificate, or 'Covid-19 Passports'. In this context, the role of technocratic expertise was critically linked with public trust in science. It is worth noting that the universal population vaccination became contentious before the pandemic, with vaccine hesitancy rising among European populations and picked up by many populists. Scenes from Berlin, Amsterdam, London and across the European continent, as anti-lockdown protestors swelled the ranks of anti-vaxxers, demonstrated the limits of technocracy as European populations swung from faith in science, to faith in public consensus. The Covid-19 pandemic added a new layer to the discussion of technocratic, expert-driven public policy decisions, as local lockdowns and the closing of many sectors of national economies and social life was followed by de-politicisation and heavy reliance on expertise. Yet this came at a price.

LEGITIMISATION OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: THE POLITICAL AND A-/ANTI-POLITICAL

In such new and extraordinary circumstances, the analytical context of this special issue is even more relevant. The rise of populist movements in the 2010s exposed the limits of

the legitimisation of European integration. Since its inception after the Second World War, integration was based on 'permissive consensus' among Western European democratic elites and relied on distinctly undemocratic, technocratic forms of governance, where legitimisation was based on assumed aggregate support among member state populations (Habermas 2015) and an emphasis on input/output legitimacy of EU decision-making as justification for EU-level policymaking. Notwithstanding questions of 'throughput' legitimacy (Schmidt 2010) and whether the EU should be democratically accountable to the people (Majone 1998), this mantra is continually deployed as evidence of the EU's democratic deficit. The urgency of 'politics of necessity', following the Global Financial Crisis and austerity politics and the EU's (and member states') responses to national and transnational problems, including (but not limited to) the 'migration crisis', only strengthened the discussions of this ostensible deficit. Populist movements challenge the technocratic model by presenting it as the rule of unelected administrators ignoring the will of 'the people' in order to promote the interests of a transnational 'elite', and in a fraught domestic and European climate characterised by the 'Age of Anger' (Mishra 2017) such arguments enjoy widespread popularity. As a result, EU politics are caught between the two poles of populism and technocracy, with few solutions on the horizon.

There are numerous ways in which populism and technocracy are defined, and this special issue does not aim to provide new definitions. It is more concerned with studying the relation between them and to expose the conceptual limits of both terms in the context of European integration. In general, populism is conceptualised in several ways: as 'a thin-centred ideology' in which society is separated into two homogeneous and mutually antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite' (Wodak 2015; Müller 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015: 18; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2017); discourse (Lacalu 2005; Aslanidis 2016), political style of communication (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Moffitt 2017); political strategy (Weyland, 2021; Rueda, 2021; Barr 2018); and eventually as the form of contestation of liberal democracy (Stanley 2017; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2007). Technocracy is most commonly defined as a specific form of governance drawing on bureaucratic and technical expertise in political, social and economic areas (Stie 2012; Radaelli 2017; Kuus 2014). Expertise is, therefore, the basis for a legitimate governing, where 'decisions should be guided by an informed understanding of the most efficient means to achieve determined goals' (White 2020: 107). As a form of governance technocracy is preoccupied with 'depoliticisation, harmonisation, rationalisation and objectification of policymaking and evaluation, and which promotes the role of technical experts in policy-making' (Kurki 2011: 216). It is perceived as bringing objective solutions to social problems, hence the legitimisation of technocrats and their self-image is based on political objectivity. Finally, technocrats are seen as those who 'transform discourses of expert knowledge into discourses of social policy ... They are makers of politics' (McKenna and Graham 2000: 225).

The underlying puzzle for this special issue was a problem that emerges in many discussions of populism versus technocracy. Both populists and technocrats show similarities when saying that they offer exclusively legitimate solutions. Populists claim to represent the interests of 'the people', while technocrats claim to be implementing an objectively correct set of procedures. Both sides offer radically different approaches to address political, economic, and social issues, and both exclude pluralist solutions. Hence, both are in a way a-/anti-political, where 'the political' is assumed to be based on a respectful confrontation of opposing political, economic and social visions (Mouffe 2000; Laclau 2005). Both are 'essentially anti-political visions of collective decision-making, postulating a unitary, general, common interest of a given society (a country)' (Caramani 2017: 60).

This reveals two points, which address a major *desideratum* in contemporary European Studies. First, populists reject consensus-based decision-making and cultivate a polarisation of political life. By claiming to be the *vox populi*, they delegitimise technocratic

or centrist opponents as 'rootless cosmopolitans' at best, or 'traitors' at worst, and place them outside *their* legitimate area of 'the political'. Second, technocrats claim an exclusive access to the complexity of political, economic and social life, and encourage solutions negotiated through unelected experts. In this way, meticulous consensus is achieved, but it is mostly unavailable or unintelligible to a public who may lack the time, resources and training to scrutinise such negotiations, and who fear a 'creeping extension' of the EU into everyday lives already saturated with anxieties and frustrations over economic decline or stagnation, a sense of abandonment by political elites, and concerns over cultural change.

In both cases populists and technocrats claim to know best and delegitimise the other, based on their self-declared legitimacy as *vox populi* or specialists. As Caramani (2017: 54) emphasises, the main conceptual differences between populism and technocracy is that populism stresses 'the centrality of a putative will of the people in guiding political action', whilst technocracy stresses 'the centrality of rational speculation in identifying both the goals of a society and the means to implement them'.

Populists strongly rely on sharp political polarisation, and their ability to communicate seductive and simplified messages by appealing to emotion and by using social media (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck et al. 2017). They employ digital techniques and appeal to emotions to target message receivers, hence their focus is on 'emphasis framing' (Druckman 2001). In contrast, technocrats rely on complex messages which claim a monopoly on expertise, but which are unavailable, unintelligible or simply unappealing to member states' voting populations (Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley 2017). However, expertise is not a thing that one innately *has*, but something that one uses or performs (Kuus 2014: 3). Hence, expertise is a form of social relation, which gains its legitimacy only when it is accepted by non-expert actors as a form of knowledge production. The legitimacy of technocratic expertise is thus being eroded by populists who delegitimise technocrats (Leconte 2010). Paradoxically, this has recently led to technocrats invoking morality and ethics in defence of their policies, while populists enhance their affective and emotional rhetoric with the ostensibly objective, neutral knowledge afforded by small business 'common sense' economics (Müller 2016). Thus, both populists and technocrats exclude opponents as incompetent and/or illegitimate, and borrow from each other's repertoires of objective and subjective language, with an unequal outcome. Despite this similarity, though, populists enjoy a strategic advantage. In the 'age of anger' across Europe (Mishra 2017), right-wing populist movements can communicate their affective messages (Thomson and Hoggett 2012) with far greater impact than technocrats (Bartlett 2018).

RATIONALE AND STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The exact nature of the relationship between populism and technocracy has garnered growing attention in academic studies, but with limited consensus. Most existing research has focused on how they differ and conclude that they are primarily opposed to each other. Within that, populism is understood as 'politics without policy' and technocracy understood as 'policy without politics' (Schmidt 2006: 9). However, as Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2015: 186) argue, there is also an important element of complementarity between them which says that both populism and technocracy are forms of critique of party democracy itself.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the contributions of this special issue attempt to develop empirical and conceptual understandings of the relationship between populism and technocracy. In doing so, readers will find multi-methodological and multidisciplinary perspectives on these relationships, as the contributions to this special issue come from political science, sociology, international relations, history and political economy. As such, this special issue tackles the relationship between populism and technocracy in different

ways applicable to different contexts. The major aim is to investigate various relations between 'populist' and 'technocratic' systems of knowledge production and their legitimisation within European politics. In what follows, we briefly introduce the contributions to the issue and outline how they relate to the goal of the special issue and to each other. There are different kinds of contributions to this special issue: context-building commentaries, research papers, and articles which offer normative visions of different ways to legitimise EU governance. This mix offers readers various perspectives through different styles of academic expressions. Each of the articles collected here brings us a step further down the path to grasping the intricacies of the populism versus technocracy debate. On their own, each is necessarily insufficient and cannot possibly clarify the issue in its complexity. Considered together, however, the contributions in this special issue substantially advance our understanding of the multi-level discussion of populism versus technocracy. Through their unity in diversity, these contributions shed light on the multidisciplinary and multifaceted challenges, and opportunities, facing Europe.

The first section consists of commentaries to establish a broader context. William Outhwaite explores the relationship between technocratic governance and geopolitical policymaking at the supranational and intergovernmental levels. In this way, the concept of the limits of Europe immediately engenders geopolitical and territorial imaginations. In his commentary of EU institutions' and member states' approaches to integration efforts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Outhwaite reveals the paradox at the heart of EU territorial governance in the tension between an expansionist (in geographical and institutional terms) EU and hesitant member states wary of long-term EU efforts which cannot be instrumentalised by short-term politicians in national capitals, who are eager to maintain the EU as a potential scapegoat. In doing so, Outhwaite argues that the 'sovereignty games' which dominate European media are only a veneer over much deeper tensions between expansion and hesitation, and that the very drive to expand the EU may actually be counterproductive at national and local levels.

Gerard Delanty comments on the possible return of the nation-state in the context of de-Europeanisation. His piece highlights an important limit of neo-nationalism, namely how the nation state no longer exists in its original meaning as a historical entity. The resurgence of nationalism today is, in fact, partly an exemplification of the demise of the nation state. This happens now in the specific guise of neo-nationalism. Delanty concludes that the new nationalist forces do not have a capacity to bring about an end to post-national developments as they lack a capacity for major systemic transformation.

Russell Foster and Matthew Feldman comment on how structural and spontaneous disgruntlement with the political *status quo* in post-Brexit Britain has seen a blurring and shifting of the traditional appeals and affiliations of technocrats and populists. Five years of Brexit debates and the reduction of parliamentary procedure into a toxic and sacralised polarisation between Leave and Remain, has not been ended by, but indeed continued and exacerbated by Covid-19 countermeasures. The political and social pandemonium of the UK, once one of the most internally stable members of the EU, has seen former populists embracing medical and economic technocracy while former technocrats adopt populist appeals to nebulous and emotional tropes. The authors caution that in this reversal of roles and in a UK increasingly defined by social mistrust and political disillusionment, populism and the radical right thrive.

Following the commentaries, research papers examine manifold aspects of the technocrat-populist narrative. Agnieszka Cianciara addresses the differentiation/legitimation nexus in the EU, empirically examining the national production of legitimating and de-legitimising narratives of differentiated integration (DI) and differentiated disintegration (DDI). Cianciara adopts a sociological approach and highlights (de-)legitimation practices, strategically pursued by purposeful political actors making justification and contestation

claims. Drawing on three case studies (France, the UK and Poland) and the structuralist interpretation of the Narrative Policy Framework, Cinaciara finds that DI was more likely to be legitimated with a technocratic narrative, whereas DDI was more likely to be legitimated with a populist narrative. Conversely, de-legitimation of DI is more likely to be pursued by means of a populist narrative, whereas de-legitimation of DDI by means of a technocratic narrative.

In contrast to dichotomous narratives of populism *versus* technocracy in which the two are assumed to be antithetical to one another, Benjamin Farrand and Helena Carrapico present an argument that the two styles are not merely capable of coexistence, they are coterminous. In contrast to an assumed binary in which populists weaponise *pathos* while technocrats exploit *logos*, the authors argue that both approaches are mingled in EU and MS responses to political challenges. This is argued through case studies of three challenges to the EU – Grexit, Brexit, and emergent Polish and Hungarian dissatisfaction – which display convergent themes of *pathos* and *logos* on both sides. This, the authors argue, necessitates a fundamental reimagination not only of the strategies of populists and technocrats, but of their very *ontos*.

Monika Brusenbauch Meislová investigates the main populist and technocratic narratives employed in the campaign in the run-up to the British EU referendum. Adopting the general orientation of the Discourse Historical Approach in Critical Discourse Analysis, she discusses how the language of the Remain and Leave camps bore signs of both populist and technocratic discourses. The key argument developed here is that while, at the most general level, the populist rhetoric was discursively appropriated by the Leave campaign and the technocratic rhetoric by the Remain campaign, the Remain side displayed a lower degree of narrative consistency. More specifically, unlike the Leave rhetoric which suggests a relatively consistent character of its discursive identity towards the EU in terms of presence of populist narratives and non-existence of technocratic ones, the Remain campaign's communicative behaviour took on features of both technocratic and populist discourses, thus being more ambiguous and, arguably, less clear.

Roberto Baldoli and Claudio Radaelli approach the relation between populism and technocracy from a different perspective. Their paper contends that in the real-life world of EU policymaking processes, precaution and innovation – the two foundations of regulatory choice – are pitched one against the other. Instead of seeing the two foundations as opposite, the authors explore their dyadic relationship and show that a conversation between the two is possible via their original reformulation. The reconciliation of precaution and innovation, they argue, needs a social foundation of regulatory choice. Hence, Baldoli and Radaelli propose nonviolence as a foundational framework. In their view, nonviolence can assist the EU and its citizens to endorse innovation that is socially responsible, future-proof and accountable, and enhance precaution as internalised commitment of decision-makers as well as scientific and social communities.

Emmy Eklundh picks up often overlooked left wing resistance to a deepening of the European project. This article analyses how left wing populist parties are in many ways rearticulating a particular 'European' way of life, which is not directly at odds with how European democracy in the EU works. In Eklundh's view, left wing populists are sceptical of the EU, but they are less sceptical of what it means to be European. As a result, they are promoting popular sovereignty to strengthen democracy. At the same time, many left wing populists emphasise national sovereignty in defence of a national working class, challenging conventional understandings of what is meant by populism and technocracy.

Hartmut Behr argues that it is the tragedy of EU politics being trapped in technocratic governance, that lies at the heart of attempts to understand contemporary approaches to European (dis-)integration and identity. Behr argues that any distortion of the balance between the three elements of the democratic triangle (will of the people, political morality and prudent political governance) is preceded by the distortion of one of the other

elements. Consequently, the populist challenge that currently threatens the EU and questions its legitimacy appears as a result of, and reaction against, a preceding imbalance, namely through technocratic hypostatisation as fundamentally and ambivalently entrenched in the fate of the EU. In Behr's view, the most important requirement for achieving democratic politics and fighting populism is the art of actively balancing all three elements so that they remain, whatever the political challenges and threats, co-constituting.

The radical right's rise is a consistent theme across Europe, and as Franco Zappettini and Marzia Maccaferri argue, Italy represents an alarming flashpoint for not only the rise of the hard right, but the limits of Europe itself. The authors analyse Italy's populist left and populist right to demonstrate how two fundamentally opposed groups utilise similar strategies which are neither populist nor technocratic, but both simultaneously. At the same time, the authors illustrate the ability of the two parties to delegitimise the current EU in the eyes of the Italian voters, and how this elevates Euroscepticism into the terminal limits of Europe, in what is arguably, post-Brexit, the EU's most disgruntled member.

Marta Jaroszewicz and Jan Grzymiski analyse the populism-technocracy paradox with reference to migration from Ukraine to Poland. In this case, there is not much connection between the reactions of the public and the technocratic conduct of the securitisation of Ukrainian migration. This contrasts with most existing research of securitisation of migration in Europe, which documented the public's positive response to securitisation with populist 'speech acts' related to migration. Jaroszewicz and Grzymiski's paper adds empirical evidence that securitisation can take place within routine technocratic practices and without populist legitimisation of political speech acts. This means that securitising and othering migration is not always driving populism and there might not be an inevitable link between technocracy and populism within the securitisation of migration.

Spasimir Domaradzki and Ivana Radić Milosavljević explore the technocratic and populist narratives in Bulgaria and Serbia, which were exploited by the national executives in their interactions with the EU and with their domestic public. They take the case of the rule of law conditionality. Bulgaria, being the EU member, is still subject to the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. Serbia is in the process of accession negotiations and, hence, it is subject to the European Commission's progress reports. Domaradzki and Radić Milosavljević analyse the political leadership of both countries' leaders, Aleksander Vucic and Boyko Borisov, in dealing with the Europeanisation processes and how they communicate it to their publics. They demonstrate what they term 'strategic defensive populist and technocratic techniques' to mitigate the impact of EU rule of law pressure, and to secure the persistence of the existing rule of law shortcomings within the process of European integration.

Our penultimate paper ends on an optimistic note by examining how citizens and science can work not as separate entities, but together. Baptiste Bedessem, Bogna Gawrońska-Nowak and Piotr Lis analyse the relationship between citizen participation in scientific research and public trust in research results within the social sciences. They place this in the context of a decline in trust in governance in the EU. Their case, based on online citizen science quasi-experiments concerning the delineation of metropolitan areas of Poland's two major cities, questions what source(s) of knowledge and information are more trusted within an atmosphere of social polarisation. They conclude that citizen-science is an opportunity to overcome polarisation. It allows the 'democratisation' of science and gives the general population chances to explore the rigorous and methodological reasoning of scientists. This might, overall, lead to increasing public trust in evidence-based knowledge and policies.

The special issue ends by coming full circle, returning to the author with whom we begin. Stefan Gänzle offers a review of William Outhwaite's *Transregional Europe* (Emerald, 2020), examining the interplay between regional policymaking and the deployment of

discourses to argue that perceptions and policies are not separate, but an ongoing dialogue which is crucial to answering and re-answering one of the most fundamental questions pertaining to the limits of EUrope – do Europeans *feel* European?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The near future will inevitably bring new challenges to EUropean politics, and the populism-technocracy dichotomy is likely to be pivotal. Both left and right wing Eurosceptics, and the established left and right more broadly, will challenge technocratic governance in EUrope. Across the continent the established left are in perhaps terminal decline in policymaking influence and net popularity, as demonstrated by the recent failures of Syriza, Podemos, Jeremy Corbyn's (and Keir Starmer's) Labour Party, and the evisceration of traditional centre-left socialist parties in 2017-2019 national elections in EU member states. But arguably post-pandemic economic and social crises are likely to elevate the left, and if not the old left, then perhaps a new variety. At the same time, right-wing Eurosceptic movements have been steadily gaining substantial power and support (Wodak 2015) with the ability to significantly influence government or even form governments, as witnessed by the ongoing and strengthening influence of Fidesz in Hungary, PiS in Poland, the Conservatives in the UK, the Austrian Peoples' Party, Italy's Lega, the Swedish Democrats, the growth of transnational Identitarian and ethno-political movements and various domestic right wing, radical right and far right movements in member states. Their public support will also increase, following the 'politics of necessity' during the Covid-19 pandemic and continuing appeal to 'promises of agency' in many EUropean societies. The future of EUrope appears to belong to populists of various positions. Assuming that politics can function in a Newtonian manner, in which every action has an equal and opposite reaction, perhaps it is precocious to proclaim the end of technocracy. The Covid-19 pandemic illustrated that there is still a crucial role for technocratic expertise, and perhaps, as witnessed by the United States, populations weary of populist pomp and bluster can seek more sober solutions to their problems.

One immediate consequence is that, from 2021 onwards, EUropean politics will be dominated by a struggle between technocracy and specifically right-wing populism among older and newer member states in many traditionally political areas, from electoral and constitutional politics to policies on social issues ranging from immigration, to state education, to women's and LGBTQ+ rights. This coincides with another imminent, more general, clash between established science and alternative self-declared science in the name of 'people' in areas such as climate change or public vaccination. This brings many urgent issues for the future of EUropean politics, like which model(s) of democratic communication should be pursued in the near future: continuing technocratic forms of governance, advocating even more deliberative practices regardless of limited appeal in the context of the recent rise of right-wing populism, or working towards agonistic pluralism models? And how can the EU's decision-making processes be rendered publicly accountable and legible to EUropean publics? This special issue aims at contributing to these fundamental questions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Creating a special issue is a Herculean effort, and the authors wish to emphatically thank all of the contributors to this project. We also extend our warmest thanks to the many reviewers of papers who gave up their time and effort, under the very difficult conditions of working from home while processing inflated academic workloads. Very special thanks go to Christopher Huggins of JCER for his tireless work, extremely valuable suggestions,

and inhuman patience in managing this project, and great thanks to the staff of JCER and UACES for not only setting this special issue, but commissioning it in the first place.

Finally, and a little self-indulgently, thanks from the three guest editors to each other. We have not met in person since Lisbon in 2019 but despite the lockdown, we have made a good 'quaranteam'. If, in the face of Brexit and Covid, three Europeans in three different nations can support each other and work together to reach a common goal, perhaps there is hope for Europe.

Monika Brusenbauch Meislová's contribution to this introduction was supported by the research project of the Masaryk University 'Perspectives of European Politics in the Context of Global Politics III' (MUNI/A/1138/2020).

AUTHOR DETAILS

Russell Foster, Department of European and International Studies, King's College London, Room 4.21 Virginia Woolf Building, 22 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6LE [russell.1.foster@kcl.ac.uk]

Jan Grzymiski, Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Pasteura street 7, 02-093 Warsaw, Poland [j.grzymiski@uw.edu.pl]

Monika Brusenbauch Meislová, Department of International Relations and European Studies, Masaryk University, Joštova 10, Brno, 602 00, Czech Republic [brusenbauch.meislova@mail.muni.cz]

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