CHAPTER 10

Disorganised Collective Citizens' Interest, Social Transformations and Technopopulism

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1 Introduction

This chapter starts by identifying the crisis of democratic representation and the ruptures in the institutionalisation of politics that have resulted from the weak intermediation between citizens and the state (Mair, 2012 [2023]; Hay, 2007). These ruptures are triggering a specific way of doing politics and a rise of new parties and social movements, organised in a variety of ways to implement electoral strategies on behalf of 'the people' in general, or economisation of politics.

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The use of unelected officials, or technocrats, appointed to run governments and do politics is used as a practice in various European Union (EU) member states, including, but not limited to, Italy,[1] France, Spain and the Czech Republic. By politicising expertise and bypassing or limiting public debates in policymaking, the appeal to technocracy is used as an alternative. This combined use of appeal to populism and the appeal to expertise, that is, technopopulism (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021), is revealing deeper roots of the crisis of representation in the EU and the failure of societal actors, especially political parties, to intermediate with the citizens or to promote active citizenship, ending up 'doing politics without policy' (Schmidt, 2019). This chapter argues that the gradual disenchantment of the societal classes, along with the decline of party politics (Mair, 2012 [2023]), is a result of a longer historical transformation of the collective organised interest. It is also a result of the shift to the neoliberal doctrine that has been incorporated since the 1970s. It is in this context that the European nation-states were transforming into EU member states as part of the integration process (Bickerton, 2012).

The key symptoms and manifestations of the use of the logic of technopopulism are similar in different EU member states, regardless of their stages of democratisation, political systems or historical, economic or ideological backgrounds. It is a result of the same societal transformations and the decoupling of organised interests from institutionalised representation in favour of the market logic of doing politics. The transformation of the organised interest, evident in both Western and Eastern European societies, has different path dependencies, as do the decline of party politics and of the oversight role (Rosanvallon, 2008) of the national parliaments. However, what is common is the fragmentation of organised interests coupled with the corporate logic of institutionalisation of politics, bound to the period of the rise of neoliberalism 'as a doctrine for the emancipation of individual personality and as an accommodation of group rivalry' (Maier, 1983, 2023). As Charles S. Maier (1983, p. 28, 2023) has put it, much of today's uneasiness about 'corporatism' as experienced later in the neoliberal societies is just a continuation of the legacy of the ambiguous acceptance of this doctrine. Within this context, the state's interaction with the organised interests of civil society 'not construed as a

[1] Italy was run by a technocratic government, led by the Italian Prime Minister, Mario Draghi, in coalition with the Populist Party, Lega. In the UK, Dominic Cummings, an elected official, running the pandemic crisis, etc.

complete alternative to parliamentary or territorially based representation, but as a functional supplement' (Maier, 1983, p. 27) is a valuable dimension for understanding the conditions under which the crisis of democratic representation and the rise of technopopulism are taking place in the contemporary context.

The cases of the Czech Republic and France, different in their historical, economic and political developments, can demonstrate these arguments. The new populist parties and movements in the Czech Republic as a post-communist state came into power after the EU financial crisis in the late 2000s and into the 2010s. In 2017, the businessman Andrej Babiš presented himself as an 'ordinary man' who can get things done by running the state as an 'efficient' political firm, doing away with democratic deliberation, pluralism and compromise (Guasti & Buštíková, 2020, p. 302). His newly founded party ANO won the 2017 parliamentary elections based on his promises to 'the people', representing neither left nor right ideology, to solve their problems inherited from the authoritarian past. It was a claim to rise against the 'elitist' leaders from the post-1989 period who had private interests in running state matters, rather than citizens' interest at heart. With his 'expert and business-like' governance style running 'the state as a firm' (ibid.), without any real party base and with a party financed mainly by himself as founder, the Czech political leader legitimised his electoral strategy by promising to challenge the status quo of the democratic project that had imploded due to corruption scandals. He was a former representative of a chemical company, which, using the lawlessness of the 1990s, he eventually took over (Guasti & Buštíková, 2020, p. 317). When he claimed to be able to solve 'the people's' problems with his entrepreneurial expertise, he embodied the logic of technopopulism. In order to do so, he exploited the many vulnerabilities of the political systems of the post-1990 period and the underdeveloped political culture of democratic accountability, favouring the market logic of doing politics.

The successful personalisation of a political leader representing a new party founded by an outsider is also very similar to the case of France. Emmanuel Macron's rapid 'march to power' started officially in the aftermath of the EU financial crisis. The movement *En Marche*, founded by Macron in April 2016, had a relatively weak programme and unclear campaign funding, but Macron's anti-establishment electoral strategy was also built on strong rhetoric against his former Socialist party and against all the French political elites in general (Perottino & Guasti, 2020, p. 547).

Macron, like Babiš, saw that people in general were dissatisfied with France's traditional parties, and, based on his competencies as a former banker, he was offering a new effective solution to 'people's problems' using his skills. This technopopulist style of governance, in the absence of an organised electoral base or institutionalised collective interest, has, however, deeper historical roots.

In the case of France, the progressive disappearance of the clear left–right cleavage is linked to the beginning of the French Revolution after 1789 and the confrontation of 'two Frances' (Perottino & Guasti, 2020, p. 547). In the second half of the twentieth century, this cleavage was suppressed by the rise of the French Fifth Republic under the leadership of Charles De Gaulle and the beginning of 23 years of 'dextrism', government of the right (ibid.). In the Czech case, the rise of the anti-establishment populist challengers on the right and the left was a response to the rapid political, economic and societal transition as part of the process of democratisation and Europeanisation.

However, both cases are also associated with the period of neoliberalism and its 'desire to constitutionalize private law to extract all economic decisions from collective deliberation' (Renaud, 2023; Serna, 2019). The problematic aspect of this logic was the downgrading of legislative power in favour of executive power under the pretext that, unlike the parliament, which is elected by the people and becomes ossified in the right–left struggle, the executive has no ideology, so they can apply the law (ibid.). It is from this perspective that we can also analyse the changes required by the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, the weakening of the organised collective interest, and the pressure faced by the democratic institutions to institutionalise politics and its commitments towards welfare states.

The transfer of competencies from the nation-state to the EU supranational level, the depoliticisation of economic policies and the rise of non-majoritarian regulatory bodies (Majone, 1996) were formalised with the Maastricht Treaty of 1993. Such critical junctures serve as the basis of a methodological strategy for investigating similar occurrences in Western and Central-East European societies, which are still rare in political science or limited to growing literature on 'democratic backsliding'. The 'democratic backsliding' literature identifies differences in the way crises are managed in Central-East and Western Europe (Bohle & Eihmanis, 2022, p. 491), run by populist governments in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and has argued that democratic erosion further undermines the quality of democracy (Tudzarovska & Rone, 2023). The research on populism and

technocratic governance has identified manifestations of decline of representative democracies, but so far the examinations of the conditions leading to these occurrences are rare. This chapter argues that this type of doing politics, that is, technopopulism (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021), has long historical roots, born in the period of the interplay between politics and economics (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]; Conway, 2020; Maier, 1983, 2023), leading to weak intermediating bodies and an empty representation of citizens' interests and to the rise of the managerial approach to doing politics. This 'hollowed' type of democracy, run by political leaders using a managerial style, also serves as a precursor in determining how countries are able, or not, to cope with emergencies or navigate a systemic health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within this research scope, this chapter analyses the conditions that have led to this political trend. The cases of France and the Czech Republic are used as illustrative cases. Based on theoretical observations, historical accounts and studies of the EU integration project, this chapter examines the trend's roots and elaborates on the reasons behind these ruptures in the political systems where the popular movements and the appeal to technocracy are gaining strength (Müller, 2016; Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Urbinati, 2019; Habermas, 2015). It observes the historical context of citizens' disengagement from party politics and offers a perspective on the shortcomings of the interplay between party politics and the collective citizens' interest in policymaking. The chapter argues that these ruptures paved the way for the rise of populist leaders and a technocratic managerial approach as a sort of a new type of social contract (Rousseau, 1997 [1762]) in exercising the general interest. With this new social contract, citizens gained a new role as an 'audience', rather than as active participants in decision-making processes.

In the context of the post-communist societies, the specific societal relations between the post-communist states and their citizens were additionally shaped by the specifics of the EU integration process. The adaptation to the new neoliberal political and economic doctrine and the 'fictionality' of the neoliberal ideology (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]) has triggered some new specifics in the context of the Central-East European countries in producing varieties of populism and technocratic governance and in establishing tailor-made democracies which serve the interest of the political leaders and their two-thirds majoritarian voters in the national parliaments. The French case, although different in historical, economic

and social trajectories, exhibits the use of the same logic of technopopulism[2] in a similar context of disorganised collective interest.

Technopopulism,[3] as coined by Chris Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, is rooted in two alternatives to representative democracy—technocracy and populism (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021). In different political settings, technopopulism combines the claim to the pure 'people' (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Müller, 2016; Algan et al., 2019; Badiou et al., 2016) and the claim to a technocratic style of governance or the politicisation of expertise (Urbinati, 2019; Habermas, 2015). As an unmediated form of party governance (Rosanvallon, 2011; Taggart, 2002), technopopulism is filling 'the void' (Mair, 2012 [2023]) which political parties as guarantors of the social contract between the state and the citizens are not able to fill. The rise of this logic challenges pluralistic forms of representative democracy (Piquer & Jäger, 2020, p. 533). The chapter's analysis suggests that the forms of governance enriched by intermediation with civil actors could be possible avenues for increasing the quality of representation (Rosenblum, 2008). This, however, requires challenging the status quo of party democracy and the organisation of collective interests through party politics and other societal actors.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The following section outlines the symptoms of technopopulism in the EU. This current political logic is then situated in the framework of the critical junctures that led to this development, identified in the process of societal transformation along with the incorporation of the neoliberal doctrine. The neoliberal doctrine which pushed forward individualism has paved the way to the managerial approach to doing politics as organised commodities, borrowed from the market logic. Amidst these transformations, party politics has also changed since the end of World War II, both in Western and Eastern European societies, with different capacities to adapt to these changes (Maier, 1983, 2023; Conway, 2020). This has dismantled the substance of party politics further and led to the economisation of politics. The illustrative cases of France and the Czech Republic, the former a founding EU member state, the latter a post-communist state, have followed the same logic of

[2] The symptoms are not limited only to these cases. They have also been identified in the UK, Spain and Italy. See further Bickerton and Accetti (2021).

[3] The term was previously used in the early 1990s by the political scientist Carlos de la Torre to characterize a series of Latin American politicians. See further in Piquer and Jäger (2020, p. 533).

technopopulism. In the final part, this chapter discusses the status of the crisis of representative democracies and suggests further research on the avenues for re-engaging the collective interest in the neoliberal context.

2 Technopopulism and Crisis of Representative Democracies

In the past few years, a crisis of democratic decay has been identified in the rise of populism and technocracy, from the aspect of populism (Urbinati, 2019; Mudde, 2007; Müller, 2016), technocracy (Habermas, 2015), and combined as technopopulism (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021). Populism promises to address the 'people's problems' and to challenge the corrupt elites, representing the general will of the people as monolithic and hegemonic (Laclau, 2005). Technocracy seeks to shift power to the experts (Caramani, 2017), and it is related to the logic of constraining popular sovereignty (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 20) embedded in the EU's ideological project (Willkinson, 2021). Rosanvallon has conceptualised the 'counter-democracy' as an 'interplay between institutionalized politics and civic engagement when citizens can express their grievances and complaints other than voting' (ibid.). The bond that held together the political parties and citizens until the 1970s resulted in the 'political purpose' of joint social struggle, identified as well by Martin Conway (2020) in his historical analysis of post-war Europe. This ideological transformation to the liberal market economy and the self-regulation of the state involved constraints to popular sovereignty (Müller, 2016; Conway, 2020) as a response to the control of the masses. The reconstruction of the social bonds in the society merged with the specifics of the decline of party politics, and laid the foundation for the first pillars of the 'audience democracy' (Manin, 1997, pp. 222–223).

An audience democracy does allow for voters to respond to elections, 'but not also to express their social and cultural identities', as Manin argues, and this is something quite different from the way democracy was exercised in the 1950s and 1960s (Conway, 2020). The collective interest once organised through the active engagement of social classes, trade unions or civic activism and institutionalised through the political parties has been gradually transformed into a 'reactive' rather than 'responsive' democracy. Nowadays, political candidates build their positions based on opinion polls or external expertise, blended into homogeneous electoral strategies which do not necessarily recognise left or right ideologies.

This new type of 'audience democracy' (Manin, 1997) arose as a reaction to counterbalance the rise of economic power amidst the adoption of the neoliberal doctrine. The advance of the corporate state (Streeck, 2014) during the 1970s and 1980s has also set the framework for a 'new marriage' between politics and economics and for the rise of the technocratic style of governance (Bickerton, 2012, 2022). This also meant bypassing the citizens in their party bases. This sort of 'anxiety of influence', as Rosenblum (2008) has also observed, in its core encompasses the question 'who rules'[4] or where does the ultimate authority lie.

This relation has established the basis of a new interaction between populism and technocracy that downgrades the importance of party ideology (Caramani, 2017) and enables political leaders with managerial competencies to establish new parties so they can run state affairs. These leaders embody 'the people and act on their behalf' (Laclau, 2005) and, through the use of their expertise, they are managing problems for the benefit of 'the people' in general. In such a context, when the state 'is run as a firm' (Guasti & Buštíková, 2020), little room is left for voicing civic activism. In such a context, executive aggrandisement further undermines checks and balances in the name of the people (Tudzarovska, 2021).

This rise of technopopulist logic was first noticed at the beginning of the 1990s, already suggesting an empty shell of ideological politics. The second critical juncture was the financial crisis of 2008–2011, which highlighted the absence of any organised political forces and ideological projects to deal with it (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021, pp. 90–91). The symptom of a fragmented and disorganised society, under conditions of ideological disorientation and economic duress, once again exposed the self-referential political rules in the absence of organised collective interests (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021, p. 94). In 'the age when party democracy has already passed' (Mair, 2005, 2023), new political parties and movements have been established, from the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy through to La République En Marche (LREM) in France and Action for Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) in the Czech Republic. This, however, does not imply that the political parties have disappeared, but rather that their functions as collective representatives of the citizens and as organisations have changed.

[4] See further Chap. 6 in Rosenblum (2008). 'Correcting the system: association, participation and deliberation' in *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship*. Princeton University Press.

3 The Historical Transformations and the Neoliberal Doctrine: Conditions for Technopopulism

Democratic politics within the EU in recent years has suffered from restructured political competition, a decline of the ideological struggle between left and right, and the decline of citizen participation in politics. The post-war EU social reconstruction was the period of industrialised societies (Conway, 2020) and an opportunity for Western societies to build a new context for social democracy, with citizens' active participation in political parties, trade unions and local communities. At the beginning of the 1970s, these connections between the citizens and the political parties began to change. The new neoliberal doctrine introduced changes to the welfare systems of the Western European societies and transformations of their political systems by gradually removing control over their economic policies from the national decision-making domain. The transition of the nation-states into a new type of EU member statehood (Bickerton, 2012) aligned with the rising demands of post-industrial globalisation, adding additional stress to the welfare models in both Western and Eastern European societies. In this context, the adaptation of French society to the liberalisation of the markets was accompanied by the idea of 'corporate capitalism' (Maier, 2023), which absorbed the initial idea for social democracy, accompanied by François Mitterrand's U-turn on his Socialist programme in the early 1980s (Willkinson, 2021, p. 144).

The agenda of 'market corporatism' (Mair, 2012 [2023]) and the fictional economisation of commodities (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]) have opened fissures in political decision-making, where the idea of technocratic governance gained strength. In the period of the 'great transformations', as Karl Polanyi (ibid.) has put it, the relationship between the economy and society was transformed. What was also transformed was the way the economic systems started to implement the policies, the required national reforms and how this affected the collective and individual behaviour of citizens. Within this context, Polanyi also exposed the myth of the free market: that 'there was never a truly free, self-regulating market system' and that the key to market transformation was 'getting prices right and getting the government out of the economy through privatization and liberalization' (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]).

What is more, Polanyi also observed that 'ideology misunderstands the nature of the transformation itself—which is a transformation of society,

not just the economy', and a far more profound change than their simple prescriptions (ibid.). As Polanyi predicted, the transformation of society is bound to the activity of human beings, and the key risk to human society was introduced once modern economies just assumed that humans would behave in the same way as real commodities do, suggesting some predictability in citizens' responses to societal changes. This risk is, however, aligned with the unpredictability of citizens' responses to crises and the use of market logic for mitigating risks, as new political leaders are trying to do, which is adding pressure to the representative actors in organising citizens' interests in contemporary politics.

The complex intertwining of politics and economics is not new and became more evident in the post-1990s period. The period of transition for Central-East Europe from past communist regimes, amidst the rise of new societal changes, has left little space for citizens to make choices and decide on collective interest. Political leaders in both the East and the West saw an opportunity to push towards liberalisation of the markets while paying little attention to the ongoing societal changes among citizens. The design of market liberalism to 'subordinate human purposes to the logic of an impersonal market mechanism' (Polanyi, 2001 [1944], p. 74) found perfect ground in the period of globalisation and depoliticisation of economic policies in the national public domain. In the absence of active public engagement, economic liberalism paved the way to technocratic governance of state affairs.

In the case of Central-East Europe, these transformations were pushed under pressure with the rapid transition towards EU membership in the period of the 2004 Big Bang enlargement. The post-communist societies were already characterised by an absence of a developed political culture of accountability and a 'climate for open debate and ability to criticize government without being punished that are the vital substructures of democracy' (Crouch, 2003, p. 16). Moreover, corruption was deeply embedded within state administration. These specifics of the region aligned with a period of mass politics when a variety of interest groups 'sought to influence party programs and nominate their supporters to positions of responsibility' (Conway, 2020, p. 40). Seeing the threats to the rise of popular will combined with the centralised political powers exercised in the communist regimes created an opportunity for new political leaders and former businessmen, such as Babiš in the Czech Republic, to arrive with new, fresh solutions for 'the people' against the old corrupt establishment.

In the case of France, the anti-establishment stance was adopted for the same reasons, that is, to solve all people's problems and to address the people's resistance against old societal challenges in a similar manner. Electoral democracy, which has been reduced mainly to formal processes of elections 'where rules to ensure strict equality among all citizens are usually accepted as paramount' (Crouch, 2003, p. 20), has created an opportunity for 'the informal toing and froing of debate, lobbying and pressure linking to the rest of society between elections' (ibid.). This alignment between formal and informal institutionalisation of politics has created a scope for new political leaders to explore all the many possibilities of law-making that favour their logic of doing politics. It has also pushed the civil society into a context where social movements are active, and potentially vibrant, but with limited powers to challenge the normative instruments in the hands of the political leaders in the way they run state affairs. This forms the dilemma of the practice of contemporary democracy (Crouch, 2003, p. 21; White, 2019).

The former processes which lead to this practice are few. The organised collective interests in post-war Europe were different, as the linkages between the states and organised interests, as Charles S. Maier has elaborated (Maier, 1983, p. 27). Maier argues that the transactions of the 'state' with the organised interests of 'civil society' were not construed as a complete alternative to parliamentary- or territory-based representation, but as a 'functional supplement' (ibid.). Interest groups including 'para-political bargaining networks were linked to trade-union confederations, associations of industrialists and farmers, physicians and public service employees' (ibid.). What is more, it was the state agencies which had the control or were encouraging their activities and pursuing the commitments to deliver general welfare. These organised interest groups were also serving as a link between the state and economic life and were a response to 'the hesitation on the part of parliamentary notables or state bureaucrats to restrict the market's role in setting prices, although various European societies allowed different scope for *laissez-faire*' (Maier, 1983, p. 28, 2023).

The post-war period was also a period of 'social compromise'. The aim to renew socialism on a European basis to address some of the demands raised by the new social movements—workers', feminist, environmental and peace movements—that emerged after 1968 fed European political imaginaries throughout the 1970s. The 'New Left' that emerged sought to use the European Commission to strengthen control over capital beyond the national level (Andry, 2022). The 1970s and 1980s were a

turning point in European political, social, cultural and economic history—and in the nature of global capitalism as well.

The historical period from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, known as the era of transition, was characterised by a progressive breakdown of the previous period's main logic of political competition and, in particular, the organised interests and social actors that provided the content. The overall political dynamics gave rise to modern democracy, as Pierre Rosanvallon has put it, which fills the politics with the powerful but abstract concept of 'the people', something which only occurs when a society of individuals is replaced by a society of groups or organised interests (Rosanvallon, 1998, p. 12). Focusing in particular on the case of France during the first few decades of the twentieth century, Rosanvallon maintains that this led to the emergence of a 'structured democracy', which rests on three pillars: (a) the political parties, which had been divided along the left/right ideological continuum since the French Revolution; (b) industrial relations, which were based on social representation via trade unions and employer associations; and (c) the 'consultative state', which encompassed the variety of economic and social councils created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the *Conseil National Économique* (National Economic Council), which aimed to structure the relationship between civil society and the state around a set of professional and expert concerns (1998, pp. 27–29).

The regional European integration and international cooperation from the mid-1980s onwards (Bickerton, 2012) has also contributed to restructuring relations between civil actors and the state. Since the early 1980s, the national executives were empowered to run state affairs by appealing to a new type of political legitimacy 'from above', that is, the international arena (ibid.), rather than from below. This has cemented the divorce between political classes and their voters. The lack of domestic political accountability, in favour of the EU's executive decision-making, further distanced the elites from their respective national publics. The most problematic aspect in this separation between citizens and their societies came about through changes in economic policy (Alasdair, 2017) while turning to transnational policymaking. In this space, the technopopulist leaders found their ways to push their electoral strategies and legitimise their logic through voting, or in the absence of it, since the rise of populism also constituted a 'backlash' against the establishment's technocratic way of dealing with economic policy, as Paul Tucker has argued (Tucker, 2018, p. 125).

The most important aspects of economic policy regulated beyond the reach of national politics—amidst the decline of social identities of class and religion as the main party loyalties—have proved to be most challenging for post-democracy (Crouch, 2003, p. 118). Previously, political parties were rooted in opposed identities and represented rival interests within a system of overall inclusion and merged social identities (ibid.). The construction of the social classes also represented the class nature of the struggle for and against the collective public interest. The gradual disappearance of these social identities paved a new way to technopopulism, to be further examined in the following section.

4 The Case of Eastern Europe and the EU Integration Process

The post period of mass politics was an attempt for the parties and party politics to survive, but in order to do so, they had to possess the ability to adapt to change and make choices for reaching party stability as Peter Mair (1997) has argued. However, since 'party organizations are deemed primarily regarding their relationships with civil society, the transformation of political party systems has faced different dynamics in Eastern Europe compared to Western party politics in three key aspects' (Mair, 1997, p. 181). According to Mair, the first difference was that the new party systems emerged in the wake of the democratisation process, without an effective bond to real civil society. Thus, the Eastern European Communist Parties had some basis in the society, but were different in scope and organisation. Anna GrzymañA-Busse (2003) has argued that the transformation of the parties depended on the 'portable skills' they had acquired based on their organisational practices under communism.

Under these conditions, the constitution-makers in the new democracies of Central-East Europe 'find themselves obliged to restructure the political system and establish competition procedures' (Mair, 1997, p. 181) in the context of the EU multi-level governance. On the one hand, the EU advanced the technical expertise and negotiations with the elite governments and party leaders in power. On the other hand, the rival domestic politics did not take the usual form, thus reducing the quality of political competition, while increasing competition based on competence or, later, based on the public media image of the party candidates (Vachudova, 2005).

This lack of political competition proper gave an opening to populist politicians such as Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic and the *Samoobrana* party in Poland (Vachudova, 2005). The elite-led transformation created feelings of disengagement within the overall population. This disconnect between political parties and their electorates only deepened into the 2000s. A gap continued to exist between the executives of the newly consolidated democracies and citizens' perceptions about the overall transitional process (Greskovits, 2015, pp. 28–37). Thus, much information on how party organisations work, about how they change, how they adapt (Mair, 1997), as well as how citizens built their resilience within the context of the post-communist states remained marginalised.

The combination of political authoritarianism and economic liberalism (Willkinson, 2021) was also a general reaction to the development of the modern state and state system in post-1970s Europe overall. 'Western Europeans fashioned a highly constrained form of democracy, deeply imprinted with a distrust of popular sovereignty—in fact, even a distrust of parliamentary sovereignty', as Jan-Werner Müller has recounted in his detailed account (Müller, 2016, pp. 132–50). More generally across Western Europe, democracy in post-war Europe derived legitimacy from the will of the people, but was not exercised 'by the people'. Once they had exercised their right to vote, 'the people were expected to retreat from the political stage and allow their representatives to act in their name' (Conway, 2020; Willkinson, 2021, p. 99). The rise of technocracy, therefore, as a way to find solutions to social and economic problems meant that political leaders could reduce conflict significantly while controlling the populist alternatives in elections.

This occurred in the case of France as well: plans for economic modernisation were pushed through with the state-led modernisation drive that primarily empowered experts, knowledgeable top civil servants and politicians, although the Fourth Republic rebuilt parliamentary democracy to some degree.[5] The rise of managerial political leaders, or technopopulists, as in the case of France and the Czech Republic, were in a way an answer to the unpredictability of the popular sovereignty, exercised formerly through the means of institutional representation.

[5] See further Herrick Chapman, 'The State' in Edward Berenson et al. (eds) (2011). The French Republic: History, Values, Debate. Cornell University Press.

5 Technopopulism: The Cases of France and the Czech Republic

Once the neoliberal doctrine broke the traditions of neoclassical economics by changing the approach to the meaning of competition and the adoption of New Public Management (NPM), it encouraged populist leaders to run state affairs with a managerial and more efficient approach (Crouch, 2003, p. 29). The intervention of business in the state was seen as very likely to improve the performance of the latter, while public services were seen as very hostile to the pursuit of the market logic. In observing these and the previous circumstances, we can identify how the logic of technopopulism emerged.[6] There are a variety of different ways in which populist and technocratic appeals have been combined into a single political offer in the electoral strategies of political leaders in the Czech Republic and France.

The Czech party ANO[7] shows how a new political leader can combine populism with technocracy and legitimise its direct, unmediated, relationship with 'the people' (Guasti & Bustíková, 2022, p. 468). The party's emergence and style of governance also show how it can perpetually feed the crisis of democratic representation (Tudzarovska & Rone, 2023). When Babiš won a large part of the left-wing electorate in 2013 and 2017, he also promised to fight the corrupt elites. He adjusted the purpose of the electoral programmes according to populist surveys and was managing processes in such a manner that many of these symptoms remained unnoticed.

Babiš was able to pursue this strategy due to the failure of the mainstream parties on the left and the right to build a collective objective to challenge the corrupt political culture in the Czech Republic. The resulting void left open opportunities for 'the most extraordinary individuals to lead the most ordinary of people' (Taggart, 2000, p. 1). Babiš used the power of the majority to push for legislation and policies in the absence of proper parliamentary scrutiny (Guasti & Bustíková, 2022), another weak point for the technopopulist leaders to exploit. The alternative he offered as part of the new managerial approach was efficiency in dealing with

[6] In Italy, the former Prime Minister Berlusconi built his own business empire, and privatised the media, thus changing the public space where public opinion has been shaped on demand, ever since the 1990s.

[7] Action for Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO).

people's problems following the EU financial crisis, working against the former corrupt establishment inherited from the communist regime. Babiš adopted this sort of approach during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis as well. He condemned the lack of public investment in healthcare as a structural deficit inherited from the past (Zulianello & Guasti, 2023, p. 11).

In the case of France, the failure of the mainstream parties on the left and the right paved the way for Emmanuel Macron's presidential win in 2017, also in the wake of the EU financial crisis. He was seen as a young, modern leader, a representative of young, modern France and someone with a vision for solving the long-term social and economic difficulties of the French people. He too came into politics as a trained businessman, much like Babiš, and as an elite-level technocrat before he established the En Marche (LREM) movement. Although, at first sight, Emmanuel Macron appeared to have nothing in common with Marine Le Pen or Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the Chapel Hill Survey (2019) showed that Macron's LREM reflects neither left nor right of the right-wing and left-wing populist parties, reflecting also the progressive disappearance of the clear left-right cleavage.[8]

Macron's attempts to find effective solutions to the economic and financial crisis of the French government in the late 2000s was the initial idea for establishing the *En Marche* movement in April 2016. As two of his former electoral strategists, David Amiel and Ismael Emelien, have elaborated, this was a man 'who had never run for office, who a year earlier, had no party, no elected officials, no activists, and no funding' and still managed to win the elections in 2017 (Amiel & Emelien, 2020, p. 1).

His successful electoral strategy was a result of 'the inability of the traditional parties to set themselves new objectives and to push forward topics of major importance for our individual and collective futures, such as global warming and the disappearance of bio-diversity, globalization, territorial divides and multiculturalism, or transhumanism. On all these subjects, the political world lags drastically behind civil society', as Amiel and Enelien have observed (Amiel & Emelien, 2020, p. 29). On none of these great issues were the traditional parties able to formulate a doctrine or implement a policy likely to provide a real solution. New political leaders

[8] This cleavage is linked to the beginning of the French Revolution after 1789 and the confrontation of 'two Frances'. The shift from right to left occurred in 1981 after the success of Francois Mitterrand in the presidential election. It was seen as a revolutionary or a catastrophic moment (depending on the analyst).

such as Macron and Babiš present their managerial skills to reduce politics to a series of technical problems that can be solved by governmental policies, but without any clear platform or programmes which will challenge the status quo of the political life.[9] Citizens still can self-organise to try to challenge the status quo, but they remain limited as long as they do not re-engage in active political life (Amiel & Emelien, 2020, p. 86).

In the spirit of the new managerial approach, French President Macron also suggested reforms to the senior civil service, which included the replacement of the National School of Administration with a new Institute of Public Service (ISP).[10] The idea was to encourage easier transfers from the private sector, further restructuring the public sector to make it more 'efficient and less costly', without any consultation with civil sector. Later, Macron also used the COVID-19 pandemic to develop legitimacy (Zulianello, 2020) concerning his managerial ideas. He further exploited the disagreements in the public sector to offer external expertise from the private sector. This merging of private–public relations represents the 'marriage' of politics and economics as a legacy of the post-1970s ideological turn to the neoliberal logic of running state affairs.

The personalised decisions taken on behalf of efficiency and for the 'pure people', both in France and the Czech Republic, have served to antagonise the actual experts and to undermine public trust, especially in political parties and the role of the other civil actors. Those decisions also exposed the factors which led to the rise of technopopulism. These two cases, with all their variances in Central-East and Western Europe, demonstrate that the crisis of representative democracies has long historical roots, and any improvement of the intermediation between the citizens and the state requires a firm challenge of this status quo at its core. The crisis of representation was also a strong indicator of the country's ability to cope with different crises, including the EU financial crisis or a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. The shortcomings in voicing the citizens' collective interest and their inputs into the welfare systems of the states require the reconstruction of social classes within the representative democracies. It requires the involvement of intermediating bodies and

[9] The strategies to create an administrative power that could embody and work for the general interest also remains short. See David Ragazzoni's review on *Democratic legitimacy: Impartiality, reflexivity, proximity* Pierre Rosanvallon (2011), translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[10] See further at: https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/04/08/emmanuel-macron-annonce-la-suppression-de-l-ena_6075996_823448.html

increased control over economic policies on the nation-state level. It will require re-building citizens' trust in political parties and civil organisations and joining commitments towards welfare states. Moving forward with ideas about how to reorganise the collective citizens' interest, in the context of fragile democratic party politics and of party leaders using a managerial policymaking style, will not be an easy task, if even possible at all. Restoring the internal party democracy is an effort worth trying. Re-engaging the citizens in active political life is another. In this regard, restoring the linkages between the political parties and civil activism may be the one way forward in opening the debate on the ruptures in the institutionalisation of politics.

6 Conclusion

At a time when the traditional parties of the left and the right have lost their connection with their electorate, rooted in society, the trajectory towards 'audience democracy' (Manin, 1997) and the depoliticisation of economic policies on the national level led to fractures in the political and economic systems of the states. This has made possible the new way of doing politics, that is, technopopulism, in contemporary Europe. The historical legacies of the transformations which took place in Western and Central-East Europe, amidst the societal transformations and the market-driven logic in the global context, add another burden to democratic institutions and social actors unable to resist the pressure of globalisation and the merging of politics and economics since the 1970s. The gradual dismantling of the collective interest in favour of the fictional demands of the neoliberal market logic has left a very fragile context for the political parties to adapt to the new political and economic institutional architecture, constitutionally regulated in the EU since 1993.

The lack of adaptability exposed during times of crisis, in this case the EU financial crisis, paved the way for technopopulist leaders in the Czech Republic and France, as well as elsewhere. This chapter has examined these two countries as illustrative cases. The historical socio-economic factors that led to the rise of this logic have also been identified. What was once organised as a reaction to market pressures on the state to implement economic policies is now an unstable framework for delivering democratic legitimation through the key actors of representation. The consequences came in a new way of running state affairs by new parties and political leaders as they build their electoral strategies. They appeal to populism

and/or technocracy while promising to fight the corrupt anti-establishment in the name of the 'pure people', and in the absence of any internal party accountability. These conditions become particularly visible during EU crises, including during the COVID-19 health crisis.

The transformation of the role of political parties as organisations and as actors representing organised collective interests was aligned with the executive-led EU integration project, especially since the 1990s. The communist regimes lacked civil activism and a political culture of accountability. The rapid societal transformation in the case of the Czech Republic which marginalised public scrutiny during the process of EU integration pushed citizens further from active political life. In the case of France, this transformation took a different trajectory but delivered the same outcome. In this chapter, the different cases of the Czech Republic and France illustrate the running of state affairs by political leaders, both with a managerial background and both arriving on the political scene in the aftermath of the EU financial crisis by establishing new parties. This reveals symptoms of the crisis of representative democracies in the contemporary EU and points to the need to explore the conditions which paved the way for these developments. This chapter contributes by offering new perspectives to these questions.

This chapter identified that both the appeal to populism and the appeal to technocracy—or a combination of the two—are a result of the ruptures created during the period of reorganising collective citizens' interest and its alignment with the neoliberal doctrine in the post-1970s period. They are also a consequence of the long societal transformations and the (in) capacities of the traditional political parties to adapt to the neoliberal context. Innovations in institutionalised politics in the contemporary context are necessary (Rosenblum, 2008). Such innovation requires reviewing the standards for democratisation itself (ibid.), but also the standards for restructuring the network of the social actors which can identify and pursue the collective citizens' interest concerning the state.

Technopopulism testifies that electoral accountability is not sufficient to generate the active re-engagement of responsive citizens, which in the contemporary context are building resilience against elitist democracy. Technopopulist leaders should not be easily encouraged to pursue their personalised visions beyond party politics or to bypass the party base in the absence of party ideology. New strategies for the effective representation of collective citizens' interests—including in the domain of economic policymaking—are necessary. The parliamentarians and citizen activists on the

ground can support the need to convert 'audience democracy' into active democracy, but only if the standards of democratic accountability are reintroduced and its normative dimension is respected between elections.

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