

## The Discourse of Populist Party: Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) through the Anti-immigrant Rhetoric

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### *Abstract*

*The populist movements have become a global phenomenon and have gotten significant votes in many European countries, such as Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, Rassemblement National (RN) in France, and Five Star Movement in Italy. The issues being used by the populist movement mainly fall under two categories: the economic insecurity and the cultural backlash. Globalisation and the internet are contributing to the emergence of the populist movement. The massive coverage provides the populist movement as a symbolisation of “the alternative voice” that challenges the perceived “evil” elites. This article discusses the definition of populism from three different approaches and sees how they are translated into a case study on the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). SDS is depicted as the representative of “the Slovenian people” by accentuating the anti-immigrant discourse in their political campaign. The discourse is visible through their posters and slogan. The party also uses alternative media to spread its discourse, especially to attack its political opponents.*

**Keywords:** *Slovenia; Populism; Anti-Immigrant*

### Abstrak

Gerakan populis telah menjadi fenomena global dan mendapat suara yang signifikan pada pemilu di banyak negara Eropa, seperti partai Alternatif untuk Jerman (AfD) di Jerman, partai Barisan Nasional (RN) di Perancis, dan partai Gerakan Bintang Lima di Italia. Isu yang digunakan oleh gerakan populis ini terbagi ke dalam dua kategori: insecurities ekonomi dan pertentangan budaya. Globalisasi dan internet ikut memberikan kontribusi dalam berkembangnya gerakan populis ini. Pemberitaan yang masif di media memberikan gerakan populis sebagai simbolisasi “suara alternatif” yang menentang elit “jahat”. Artikel ini memberikan diskusi definisi dari populisme itu sendiri dari tiga pendekatan yang berbeda dan melihat bagaimana ketiga pendekatan ini ditranslasikan kedalam studi kasus Partai Demokrasi Slovenia (SDS). Partai SDS digambarkan sebagai representasi dari “orang Slovenia” dengan mengedepankan diskursus anti imigran dalam kampanye politiknya. Diskursus ini dapat terlihat dari penggunaan poster dan slogan saat kampanye politik SDS. Partai SDS juga memilih untuk menggunakan media alternatif untuk mendapatkan suara, terlebih untuk menyerang lawan politik.

**Kata Kunci:** *Slovenia; Populisme; Anti-Imigran*

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## Introduction

The victory of Donald Trump at the U.S. presidential election and the day when the U.K decided to hold a referendum to vote whether they want to stay or leave the European Union (EU) become two events that put populism on the radar of the current political phenomenon. Both share similar political context that tries to bring an appetite for a change to counter the political establishment (Bauer, 2020). In a glimpse, populism seems to offer one way against the disarray of the current global condition, although some people will attribute the populism as the “dirty word” in modern politics. But is populism the answer to the problem?

The term populism is dated back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when American farmers frustrated on their lack of economic prosperity and eventually establishing the People’s Party, the emergence of populist parties in Europe had not caught any attention up until the 1990s. The earliest parties in Europe are the Democratic Union of Croatia (1990), National Independence Party in Estonia (1992), and Northern League in Italy (1994) among others (Mudde, 2011). But their discourse started to gain more attention in the 2010s with the number of Europeans voting for populist parties in the national votes surged from 7% to more than 25% (Henley, 2018). What are the factors on the rising of populist parties in Europe?

Populist parties owe its emergence to, at least, globalisation and the internet. The globalisation has been defined in many ways such as global economic integration, interconnectedness across boundaries, etc. (Flew and Iosifidis, 2019). In turn, globalisation has risen nationalism, and latter populism, as the mobilisation of an emotionalised “us”, the minds and feelings of “us”, which directed against stereotyped and stigmatised forms of “them” (Gingrich, 2006). Adding the argument from John Tomlinson “globalisation has been perhaps the most significant force in creating and proliferating cultural identity” (Flew and

Iosifidis, 2019), and “contemporary populism... often counterposed to an ideology of globalism” (Flew and Iosifidis, 2019). This gives the consequences of seeing globalisation as evil and dangerous (Gingrich, 2006).

For the internet, populist parties base their assumption on the mainstream media as “mediating” which comes to the point of “somehow distorting political reality” (Muller, 2016). Populist parties see media owners as one of “the elite”, people who hold leading positions (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). The emergence of “alternative channel” gives populist parties and movements a platform, not only to spread their values but also to reach wider masses that they perceived as “the people”. Internet, especially social media, enables populist organisations to avoid journalistic gatekeeping, criticism, and social control from the mainstream media (Kramer, 2017).

There are several issues that populist parties bring from the effect of globalisation. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris bring two theories which perhaps the most widely held by most populist supporters: (1) the economic insecurity and (2) cultural/identity backlash (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Inglehart and Norris mentioned income and wealth inequality, the rising of economic insecurity and social deprivation, and the less secure strata of society, as the popular fuel among the “left-behind” for the resentment of political classes (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Populist parties also try to trigger negative reactions among older traditionalists who felt threatened by the erosion of the values which were once predominant (Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

Through both theories, populist parties need a scapegoat to blame for the situation that “make sense” to those people on the “left-behind” bracket. Immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and the EU, are among the scapegoats repeatedly mentioned by the populist parties. This argument is in line with Alessandro

Drago's, who brings two theses on why populism has arisen in Europe: (1) due to economic liberalisation, European countries now divided to those who benefited and not, (2) and the perceived democratic deficit at both the EU and national levels, worsen the problems and emerging individuals who disgruntled towards the EU (Drago, 2018). Moreover, a nostalgic "euphoria" among older electorates, who still holding onto traditional values (religion, race supremacy) and retro norms, along with the less-educated groups, were predicted to evoke the "silent revolution" among the traditionalist (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). These traditional values are among the most common and effective discourse that the populist brings as these values are more persistent compare to the other values which more materialistic. But do the immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers bring danger?

Some scholars agree that actual economic and physical dangers may be less relevant than the discursive construction of fear, anxiety, and a threat that the populist parties try to deliver as a way to attract their voters (Kinnvall, 2018). Populist leaders are channelling and governing these emotions, with the same time satisfying the imagined needs for pride, attachment, and pleasure (Kinnvall, 2018). These ontological insecurities are affirming the restoration of national values and on the idealised images of a past order through the act of nativism, racism, xenophobia, and the appeals for a strong state (Kinnvall, 2018). This also aligns with Alessandro Drago's intention of quoting Takis Pappas and Hanspeter Kriesi, that the right-wing populist parties "reframe economic conflicts in cultural terms" (Drago, 2018). The loss sense of security of being, which in the larger groups indirectly creates a collective emotion, could produce resentment among the "left-behind" group. Caused by the feeling of resentment, a situation where one feels impotent to act on emotion from the resentment, this "left-

behind" group uses populist parties and movements to channelling their anger and fear that they are not able to maintain or attain the standard of living and social status (Salmela and Scheve, 2017).

There are also some narratives from populist parties that depict the EU as having a remote and bureaucratic decision-making process (Gingrich, 2006), run with a sophisticated team of "experts" with less input from citizens (Drago, 2018). The other narratives are EU as a dystopian "evil empire" which positioned as a reversal of its founding myth of peace, democracy, freedom and human right (MacMillan, 2016) and the usage of historical grievances which framed through memories and legacies, such as the legacy of World War in two founding members, the legacy of right-wing dictatorship in two Southern European member states, and the legacy of communist dictatorships in two Central and Eastern member states (Petrovic, 2018).

Using the above narratives, in the sense of the "left-behind" group, it brings a feeling that the EU could not fulfil their needs, as well as shield them from the perceived external threats of refugees, asylum seekers, terrorists, and so on. There is also the emergence of the feeling of insecurity from an ontological perspective, as the EU is expected to implement and carry out its own goal through creating a European public sphere to minimise the flotation of anger, repressed shame, and resentment from its citizens (Drago, 2018).

Moreover, populist parties also build the EU's image in a dystopian colonial dictatorship of financial and technocratic elites (MacMillan, 2017) which with this discourse might prolong the disengagement and dis-attachment towards the EU. Rassemblement National (NR) and UK Independence Party (UKIP), for example, use this discourses to describe the EU as a stifling, totalitarian regime controlled by an all-encompassing, quasi-Kafkaesque or Orwellian bureaucracy (MacMillan, 2017). Through the above argument, This article would like to

emphasize that the EU is not only as of the object of anger and resentment from its citizens but also as one of the contributors of the emergence of the populist movements, as it could not provide a feeling of “security” towards its citizens through providing a good system.

This article will be divided into two further sections. In the first section, this article will explain three different approaches in identifying populism within populist actors. The second section of this article will be given a case study of a populist actor, which is the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), and exercise them using the three approaches.

### **Theoretical Approach**

Although there are many theoretical approaches to define populism, this article will focus on three distinct approaches which are: (1) ideational-normative approach from Cas Mudde, (2) discourse-historical approach from Ruth Wodak, and (3) populism as a political style. This article chooses these approaches as they represent different perspectives in defining populism and can explain SDS’s discourse in a thorough manner.

#### **Ideational-normative Approach**

The ideational-normative approach provides the definition of populism that most scholars share the same core concepts: “the people”, “the elite”, and the general will (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Cas Mudde mentioned three meanings to adequately define “the people”: the people as sovereign, as the common people, and as the nation (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Here, the people as sovereign is defined as the ultimate source of political power that comes from a group of people, or, what he then put as, the rulers. The common people are defined as a group of people who are being excluded from power. And the people as the nation is defined by “the native” to a specific country which forms a community with a common life. Furthermore, the elite is defined as corrupted people who hold

leading positions within politics, economy, media, etc (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). And the notion of the general will from populist is based on “common sense”, which means that it is aggregating different demands and at the same time identifying a common enemy for/from the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). This approach involves a critique to the establishment and glorifies the common people as they represent the general will (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017).

Cas Mudde called populism as a “thin-centred ideology” which is given to assert the flexibility of the populism concept, that it needs to be attached to other ideologies (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). By this, populism can neither offer complex nor comprehensive explanation on questions generated by the society in general as it can take in different shapes which form interpretative frames, which could be more or less appealing depending on the political reality (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). These other ideologies that can be easily combined with populism are, but are not limited to nationalism, socialism, and so forth.

#### **Discourse-historical Approach**

There are three key features of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to understand strategies used by the populist parties, which are context, discourse, and discursive strategies (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014). First, to analyse audio, spoken, visual, and/or written text, the corpus is viewed in terms of their situatedness, which due to their ambiguities could not be understood without seeing the different layer of context, that need to use a four-level model of context: the socio-political/historical context, the situational context, a text-internal co-text, and the intertextual and interdiscursive relations (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014). Second, they view discourse as “context-dependent semiotic practices” and “socially constituted and socially constitutive” (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014). Third, the

use of discursive strategies to identify the positive and negative presentation of others, through nomination strategy, predication strategy, perspectivisation strategy, mitigation/intensification strategy, and argumentation strategy (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014).

The use of those three key features put the DHA on the analysis of which power-dependent semiotic means being used to construct both positive and negative self-presentation of others (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014). Furthermore, DHA tries to uncover the construction of “story”, which linked not only the contemporary situation but also its historical meaning (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014). Several keywords that might be used related to the “story construction” such as association, distinct feature, modulation, and differentiation as being the focus of the DHA analysis (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014).

By using the DHA analysis, the identification of a strategy that might be used by most populist parties, the so-called *calculated ambivalence*, which implementing the blurry boundaries between fiction and reality (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014), is used extensively in several media channels, such as press and TV, comics, website, Facebook, Twitter and so forth (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014). This use of *calculated ambivalence* enables the populist parties to create and play with meanings (Wodak and Forchtner, 2014), perform a *politics of denial* by making false claims sound innocent, allow a denying the obvious, saying the ‘unsayable’ and transcending the limits of permissible (Wodak, 2015)

### **Political-style Approach**

This approach sees popular political communication, in which populism alludes to the amateurish and unprofessional behaviour of their politicians to appeal the media attention as well as popular support (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). As a way of bringing critique to the dominant

conceptions of populism, Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey introduce populism as “political style”, as they argue because there is a relatively wide disparity on the populists’ ideologies, discourses, and political strategies (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014).

This new perspective of seeing populism as “political style” is not only based on the acknowledgment that the contemporary mediated political landscape could be seen as being mediated, stylised, “aesthetic”, and have a performative feature (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014), but also on the underlying of three common features of populist leaders: appeal to “the people”; crisis, breakdown, and threat; and bad manners (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). The attempt of using this approach is not to capture the “essence” of populism nor to see it as an ideal type, but to find the “resemblances” between the number of disparate cases of the practices of populism from different populist leaders (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). These “resemblances” might be in the form of establishing “politics as usual” like using common slang, certain gestures, and fashion; claim that populist “really knows” about the “general will”; deny experts’ knowledge, and glorifying the “common sense” against the bureaucrats, technocrats, representatives, and so forth (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). The main idea is to “fight” against the behaviour of the establishment, such as seriousness, earnestness, gravitas, intelligence, and so on, with the “outsider” behaviour such as directness, playfulness, certain disregard to hierarchy and tradition, and so on (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). Furthermore, populism tends to gain its “hype” when the perception of crisis, breakdown, and threat appear among “the people” so their leader could act decisively and immediately (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014).

### **Critiques on the Approaches**

The main critique to the ideational-normative approach on populism is that

they are too broad, which then can also be applied to other political actors (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). But the hardest critique comes from Michael Freeden who questions whether populism is an ideology or just merely a mentality or a movement (Freeden, 2017). Furthermore, he argued that the ideational-normative approach from Cas Mudde has a restrictive nature with a narrow core, which makes populism as a single-issue or at most double-issue political advocacy discourses (Freeden, 2017). He gives an example mentioning the U.K. Independence Party (UKIP) in post-referendum as ideologically too scrawny (Freeden, 2017). He also added that the populist parties are so concern and triggered by events which might be an ideational emergency and manufactured crisis by giving an example on Brexit, where populist actors using the perceived crisis of migration and sovereignty, which at last could result to another perceived crisis (Freeden, 2017)

A critique on DHA analysis from Ruth Wodak, that her complex analysis on the ambiguous type of discourse (using a mix of visual representation, combination of images, texts, colours, symbols, and so on) needs much more effort to be done as it needs a very good understanding about the specific genre/element, considering there are different layers on its context. In other words, it is hard to understand the “context-dependent semiotic” and “socially constituted and socially constitutive” for someone who is not familiar with the corpus. Thus, “subjectivity” plays a big role in the researcher’s interpretation.

The last critique is on the political style approach which they do not only communicate in a simple and direct manner but also give solutions that are direct and simple (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). This could be problematic since they mostly started their discourse as a response to the ongoing crises situation. This “impulse” to keep everything direct and simple could lead to the tendency of pleasing “the people” without taking an appropriate

decision-making process. Moreover, this “political style” does not define/is associated with parties’ ideology (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). In other words, this performative/stylistic nature could be used in any political parties or does not exclusively within the populist “realm” (Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). This could eventually make the identification of populist become harder.

After debating on the definition and critiques on approaches to populism, this article sees the ideational-normative approach as the most useful to understand and analyse populism. Although the political style approach is something that is extensively used nowadays on the populist discourse, but it is not enough to put someone on the “populist” bracket only from its leader’s appearances or attitudes. As Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey repeatedly mentioning “stylised”, this article sees the phenomenon as part of a politician’s behavioural nature.

Furthermore, although the intertextual and interdiscursive relations on the DHA approach has no problem in anyways applied on the Ruth Wodak and Forchtner’s analysis, it is hard to understand on how much further the analysis could link each corpus that might be categorised as having intertextuality and interdiscursive relations. Imagine a limited corpus or a non-existence historical background on certain discourse, it would bring an obstacle in analysing through this approach. In other words, putting the analysis on identifying populism through its basic definition and basic conceptualisation, identifying populism in a more precise manner can be achieved.

### **Methodology**

This article uses descriptive qualitative analysis by discussing a case study on the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) through the lenses of three approaches mentioned in the previous section. The reason for using a qualitative analysis relies on the nature of this research

which “characteristically explanatory, fluid, flexible, data-driven, and context-sensitive” (Mason, 2002). Scholars mostly have been discussed populist parties in Western and Central Europe, namely in Austria, France, Germany, Poland, and the U.K. as their case studies. Meanwhile, the discussion on a political party in Slovenia has not been fully observed. Through data collection of online texts/documents and posters, this article tries to discuss the discourse of SDS in Slovenia through its anti-immigrant issue.

### Analysis and Discussion

There are at least three dominant crises emerged regarding the future of the EU, which are the Eurozone crisis in Southern Europe, the migrant crisis in some Central and Eastern European member states, and the rise of the radical right in France and Germany (Petrovic, 2018). The discourse of fear, especially within the migrant issue, has enabled the “thin-centred” ideology of populism to borrow aspects from basic assumptions of other ideology to accommodate their ontological insecurities through the act of nativism, racism, xenophobia and the appeals for the strong state to affirm the restoration of national values (Kinnvall, 2018). Many populist parties utilise these ontological insecurities to attract voters. One of them being Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) which, with its coalition with Slovenian People’s Party (SLS), got 26.25% on the European Parliament election in 2019 (2019a). This emergence of SDS in Slovenia amid in populist’s thrives in some older member states of the EU, such as Alternative for Germany (AfD), Rassemblement National (RN) in France, and Freedom Party in Austria gives another example on how populist’s discourse becomes more “acceptable” in the newer member states.

### About Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)

Cited from the Slovenian Democratic Party’s webpage, SDS inheritances two former powerful parties, the Social-Democratic Union of Slovenia and the Slovenian Democratic Union, which carried out the democratisation of Slovenia and led the quest for gaining the Slovenian independence and international recognition of Slovenia . Both parties in their programs opposed any totalitarianism, whether communist or fascist, and from the beginning promoting a democratic political order, a market economy, personal freedom of the individual, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for minority rights, and the inclusion of Slovenia in the Euro-Atlantic integration . The values of SDS is originating in Christian ethics, European humanist philosophy, and the Enlightenment, and the tradition of modern democratic, workers’ and social democratic movements, emerged in Slovenia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century .

### Issues and Strategies

This article analyses street banner, poster, and news articles used by SDS in their 2019 election’s political campaign. The main issue being used was anti-immigration, pledging to toughen measures for migrants from countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa to enter Slovenia (2018a).



Figure 1: Street banner in Ljubljana<sup>2</sup>

On the left side of the picture is written *zdaj gre za Slovenijo!* (now it is about Slovenia!), which this article argues to be

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/europe/opposition-center-right-party-favored-slovenian-election>

associated with the narrative of “putting the Slovenia-origin first”, whereas on the right side of the picture is written *brez varnost pade vse!* (without security it drops everything), which can be associated with how the immigrants seen as a threat, imposing stricter anti-immigrant policy is something necessary to save Slovenia citizens.



Figure 2: A poster during SDS electoral campaign<sup>3</sup>

The second example is a poster with a picture of, what can be observed as, a group of migrants trying to “reach” Europe, and specifically Slovenia. The text of *zavarovali bomo Slovenijo* (we will insure Slovenia) can be associated, as a way of SDS, that they will protect Slovenia from the threat of illegal migrants/refugees. According to the data, the total immigrants from abroad coming to Slovenia increased significantly, with 18,808 people in 2017 to 28,455 in 2018 (Razpotnik, 2018). This includes 4,180 non-citizens without a right to stay which apprehended by the government (2019b).

Using the ideational-normative approach from Cas Mudde, this article identifies SDS as a populist party. First, the SDS’ definition of Slovenian people rooted with Christian values (heritage) by carefully and thoughtfully preserve the cultural identity, proud of the national identity and history, fits into Mudde’s definition of “the people” as the nation or “the native” to a particular country (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). This definition of Slovenian as “the native” opposing to the immigrants that majority hold Islam,

despite being the second-largest religion in Slovenia but remains treated as “Other” and subjected to racialised, gendered, and burdened by the misconception from the migrant crisis (Bajt, 2016). This anti-immigrant prejudice frequently being disguised as allegedly patriotic safeguarding the homeland, and as the protection of the nation, “our” language, culture, etc (Bajt, 2016).

Second, SDS tried to build their media (Nova24TV and Skandal24) as the channel for their politicians to expedite their agenda, as opposed to the mainstream media which they perceived as one of “the elite”. Janez Jansa, SDS leader, once accused RTV Slovenia, a national public broadcaster, of being misleading to the public (2020a). This narrative of being a victim, attacked by mainstream media propaganda, courts and corrupt judges, and political “uncles” from the previous regime has become a useful strategy to gather supports from the public (Pajnik, 2019).

Many parties were aware that Skandal24 and Nova24TV have become the platform for SDS to force the populist’s narratives. Two examples of news headlines from Nova24TV where Nova24TV attacked someone who once threatened and framed Janez Jansa as a “villain” and try to use his scandal pasts to destroy his image. Janez Jansa also used Nova24TV as the platform to spread his good image towards the Slovenian electorate.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.martinlucas.net/2018/06/22/slovenia-on-my-mind/>

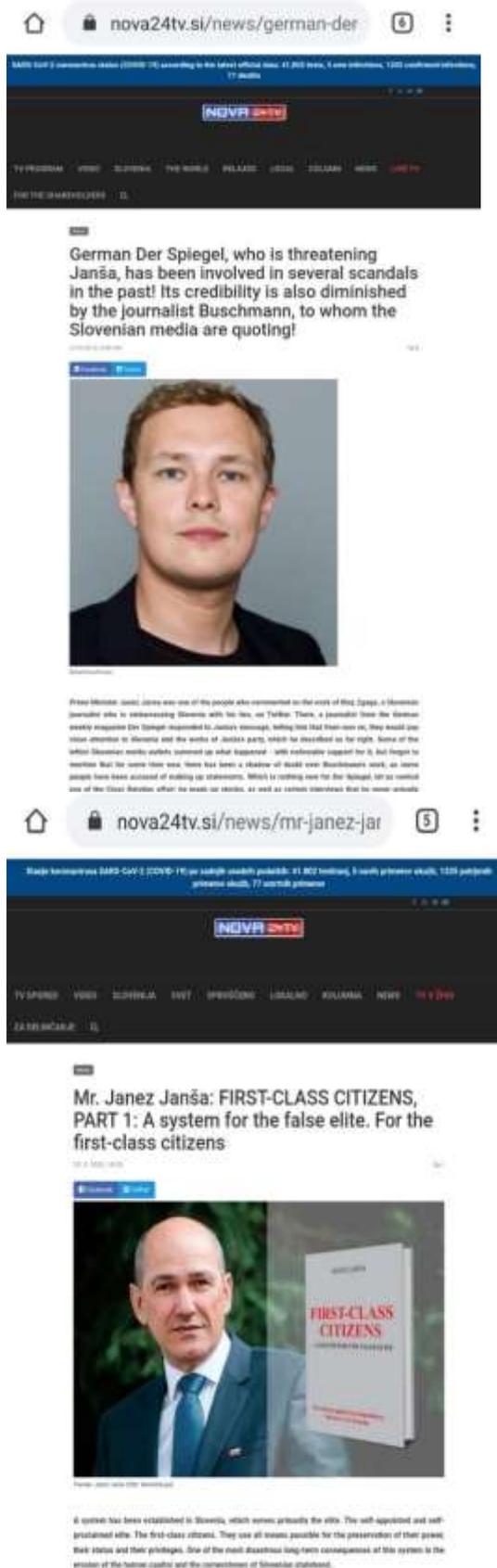


Figure 3: News from Nova24TV, SDS affiliated “alternative media”

Janez Jansa also appeared the so-called ‘crowd-pleasing’ rhetoric and have a combative presence on Twitter, which he used as a platform not only to attack his opponents but also to echoing the tactics of the right-wing populists abroad (2020b). He became the most popular tweeting politician in 2018 with 44,800 followers and his tweets are often full of sarcasm and denunciations of political opponents and mass media, along with the expressions of racist, xenophobic, and sexist views (Pajnik, 2019).

Third, SDS did not only employ the anti-immigrant discourse, but also other problems which they identify to be appeared in the society, such as economic and political crisis, Euroscepticism, social and economic hardship of youth, biased media reporting and propaganda, manipulation of public opinion polls and elections, bankrupt banks, corruption, “the unfinished disintegration of old networks” and so forth (Pajnik, 2019).

The attitudes towards immigrants in Slovenia has been unwelcoming, through tightening the Slovenian border on the Balkan routes since 2016. One of the problems in the migrant crisis in Slovenia is that refugees/asylum seekers make Slovenia as their transit country before they reach Germany (2016). This put Slovenia in burden and made the restriction to turning all irregular migrants back to Greece and Turkey, and only migrants who seek asylum in Slovenia and those with clear humanitarian needs allow for entry (2016). So, it was not a shocking result when SDS won the 2019 election.

Further analysis is done using Ruth Wodak’s discourse historical analysis (DHA) on the street banner, poster, and news article argues that right-wing populist parties try to construct fear through proposing a scapegoat that is blamed for threatening or damaging the society (Wodak, 2015). To this analysis, the fences were erected by the Slovenian government as a way to keep the “Others” out, who are defined as different and deviant (Wodak,

2015). This narrative is reflected through the utilisation of street banner, poster, and Skandal24/Nova24TV.

Moreover, applying the Figure 1 to Wodak's DHA analysis, a woman is bowing her head while she walks within an abandoned house, this article argues that the picture depicts the economic slowdown and the rise of unemployment in Slovenia as opposed to the immigration issue. The forecast from the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG-ECFIN) of the European Commission is stating that Slovenia's GDP will decrease into minus 7% this year, with the subsequent rise of the unemployment rate of 7%, compared to 4,5% last year (DG-ECFIN, 2020). In Figure 2, SDS used a photo of a group of migrants queuing to go somewhere, which for Slovenian seeing the poster might be perceived that they are heading to Slovenia, which might be a scaremonger to Slovenian. And the traffic sign of "STOP" also used in the poster, might be translated that SDS is the goalkeeper and would like to prevent the migrants come to enter Slovenia.

### **Challenging the European Union**

Being covered by the narrative of the inaction of the Western European member states regarding their willingness to help against communist rulers, and to the current extent against the migrant flows (Petrovic, 2018), this narrative was diluted because of the EU's mandatory migrant quotas. Voters in several Eastern European member states also have turned their vote to parties that oppose the EU's plan for countries to accept asylum seekers under this quota system (2018c). SDS party firmly opposed to such quotas, with Janez Jansa, said after preliminary results were released that "(our) party puts Slovenia, Slovenians first" (2018c).

Janez Jansa's openness to receiving several supports from Victor Orban, and Hungary's conservative group, also put another pressure on the EU. Janez Jansa compared Hungary with the other member

states regarding migration policy, tweeted that Hungary is considered as a safe country and another Brussels is not, due to its wrong policy (2018a). Moreover, SDS is now a member of the European People's Party (EPP), the largest party in the current European Commission which might put a risk on the "united" decision-making with the Commission. The President of the EPP expressed its support towards SDS, NSi, and SLS party in Slovenia by saying that the 2019 Electoral as a momentum to turn the page on failed governments, as the previous government has been seen as jeopardizing the future of Slovenian citizens by not fully address the challenges, such as security, protection of the border, and also migration and stability in the EU's neighbourhood (Milheiro, 2018). There is also a critique regarding EU's border management that it is more about power asymmetry between the Northern European countries towards the weaker regulating states, especially Southern European countries (Niemann and Zaun, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

It is important to look at different theoretical approaches to identify if a political party or a political figure can be categorised as having populist discourse due to their performance of mimicking other ideologies. But through conjoining several approaches like ideational-normative and discourse-historical approach, Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) can be identified as populist through their discourses of using anti-immigrant issues, which now become one of the threats in many EU member states. Their rhetoric against migrants was chosen by the SDS, as the EU tries to impose mandatory migrant quotas to balance the needs for "burden-sharing" from Italy, Greece, and Spain to host refugees to the other member states (2018b).

SDS also stresses the importance of being "Slovenian" and acts as the "guardian" for the citizen of Slovenia from the "evil" illegal migrants. The use of non-

mainstream media by SDS also mirroring populist strategy, in the case Twitter, to attack their opponents using sarcasm, sexist, and xenophobic words. SDS also utilise their media, Skandal24 and Nova24TV as their channel to deliver their populist messages because Janez Jansa as their leader had been victimized by the national broadcasting news. The fact that Janez Jansa making Victor Orban as his ally can put SDS into a “populist” bracket as both leaders support each other to uphold their border restriction to the refugees/asylum seekers. This act of Janez Jansa criticising the EU on its failure to uphold its border management and not having a more efficient solution to overcome the migrant issues, he makes his preventive measures to limit immigrants by imposing a stricter policy for border-crossing.

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