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## **Democratic welfare state in the face of populism. Remarks and predictions from the theoretical and practical perspective**

### **Introduction**

Even a casual observer would notice that the whole world is currently in the process of redefining the post-Cold War global order. Historical experience suggests that it is not an unprecedented phenomenon. After a period of struggle between various forces, a new kind of order will emerge. The existence of a specific order, based on universally accepted principles, enforced and expressed by legal norms, influences the internal policies of states as well. For instance, when functioning in a predictable and stable environment, they can focus on economic development and, on distributing its outcomes.

Problems of a political, legal, economic and social nature are closely interrelated. The same is true of the process of redefining the global order. United States, the main guarantor of the globalist and liberal-democratic system, seems to be no longer interested in maintaining it. The trends to move away from globalisation and return to protectionism are becoming stronger and more visible. Thus, perturbations and economic crises are now even more real. These are related to such effects as the loss of trading areas, disruption of supply chains or to high level of public debt. Economic hardships are coupled with the emergence of political unrest. That being said, the risks of armed conflicts increase. Under these conditions, European countries (already struggling with the excessive debt<sup>1</sup>) are also forced to rebuild their military capabilities, which generates high costs.

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<sup>1</sup> Within the European Union, Belgium, France, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Italy were found to have an excessive deficit in 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/excessive-deficit-procedure/#2024> (accessed: 5.05.2025).

Most European states are founded on the idea of liberal democracy. Moreover, as a result of the social and economic changes during 20th century, these countries implemented ideas of “social justice” and became “welfare states”. The financial crises that have occurred relatively recently, structural economic problems, and the aforementioned transition of the current global order will pose a multifaceted challenges for the countries, still being defined as “democratic welfare states”<sup>2</sup>.

Diminishing competitiveness, deindustrialisation, and dramatically low fertility rates are making the model of state providing its citizens with care and generous social benefits, increasingly difficult to sustain<sup>3</sup>. Briefly speaking: it costs too much. However the societies of European countries, are used to live in conditions of comprehensive care and support from the state. They do not show a readiness to make the sacrifices that would help solve above-mentioned problems. In other words “(...) the welfare state is broadly and robustly cherished (...)”<sup>4</sup>. People’s reluctance to abandon institutions of state welfare makes reducing social transfers difficult for mainstream political actors (who rightly fear the loss of political support). Withdrawing from welfare state policies has been seen as solution of last resort, usually used already in crisis situations. As will be demonstrated further herein, this situation underlies the development of populist ideas and movements that put the preservation of liberal democracy and its values at risk.

This paper seeks to analyse the correlation between the reduction of generally understood welfare state policies and the possible threat of populism in the liberal democratic state. A question was posed about the source of the problems that might arise in this context. Part one analyses the very concept of the “democratic welfare state”. Part two discusses views defining welfare as a kind of legal “entitlement” of the individual. Part three analyses the negative impact on the state caused by the reduction of welfare benefits in a general sense. In order to show the practical significance of the discussed issue, the fourth part analyses the impact of welfare state limitations on the political situation in United Kingdom during the second decade of the 21st century. The article attempts to find solutions to the threat of populism resulting from the need to reduce the welfare state in a liberal democracy. It is primarily based on the analysis of the ideas and doctrines of selected political and legal thinkers.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept is explained further herein on the page 6.

<sup>3</sup> P. Diamond, G. Lodge, *European welfare states after the crisis. Changing public attitudes*, London 2013, pp. 4, 6.

<sup>4</sup> B. Vis, K. v. Kersbergen, T. Hylands, *Did the financial crisis open up opportunities for welfare state reform?*, p. 13, [https://www.barbaravis.nl/Vis\\_VanKersbergenHylands\\_Etmaal\\_2010\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.barbaravis.nl/Vis_VanKersbergenHylands_Etmaal_2010_FINAL.pdf) (accessed: 28.04.2025).

This study is of a theoretical and practical nature. It is based on a multifaceted analysis of the welfare state idea, stressing the importance of political and legal thought for the formation of normative regulations implementing it. The idea of liberal democracy is also discussed in a similar manner. It is worth to underline that the law is not an abstract phenomenon detached from the reality within which it is intended to function<sup>5</sup>. It is a fascinating “reflection” of economic conditions, social aspirations and conflicts experienced by a particular political community. For this reason, the article also attempts to analyse the practical effects of transposition of the welfare state idea on the existence of countries and societies. This concerns primarily systemic stability of states, which at the same time implement the idea of liberal democracy. To avoid creating a multi-volume study, the discussion is limited to an in-depth analysis of the problems that occurred as an effect of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. This example is valuable to evaluate because of the outstandingly significant effects it caused (UK leaving European Union) and their connections to the rise of populism in the state seen as a cradle of liberal democracy.

### **The concept of “democratic welfare state”**

According to the timeless view of Samuel Huntington, countries belonging to the civilisation circle known as “the West” are characterised by being rooted in the legacy of Greek philosophy, Roman law and Christian morality. They are characterised by an adoption of the ideas such as the rule of law, individual rights, separation of powers, the right to political representation and pluralism. These features are attributed to the idea of liberal democracy. It is still one of the basic axiological principles of the political and legal systems in the countries of European part of “the West”. Undoubtedly these countries can also be described as welfare states<sup>6</sup>.

Citing the whole, extensive history of the welfare state’s development and implementation, is not the object of this study<sup>7</sup>. However, for the purposes of the analysis below, the concept of the welfare state is understood as a legal, political, economic and social system in which it is the state’s responsibility to counter inequalities and dangers of an economic nature, threatening the

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<sup>5</sup> B.Z. Tamanaha, *Law’s evolving emergent phenomena: from rules of social intercourse to rule of law society*, „Washington University Law Review” 2018, No. 5, p. 1149.

<sup>6</sup> I adopt the concept of ‘the West’ following Samuel Huntington. More on this topic in: cf. S. P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations?*, „Foreign Affairs” 1993, Vol. 3, pp. 39–41; L. Birken, *What is Western civilization?*, „The History Teacher” 1992, Vol. 4, pp. 451–461.

<sup>7</sup> More on this topic in: T. Przybyciński, *Etyczne i ekonomiczne aspekty państwa dobrobytu*, „Annales. Etyka w życiu gospodarczym. Annales. Ethics in economic life” 2016, Vol. 3, pp. 28–29.

individual's functioning in the conditions of a free market economy. By performing a wide range of activities, the welfare state should create a fair standard of living in a socially balanced and peaceful environment. Therefore the welfare state is characterised, for example, by redistribution of the national income, establishing various social security programmes, and safeguarding the rights to education and healthcare<sup>8</sup>.

Formation of the ideological foundations of the welfare state took place primarily in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. It occurred simultaneously with the liberalisation of the political and legal systems in countries of "the West". According to John Rawls, this process also ran alongside the development of large, free-market economies<sup>9</sup>. It can be said that ideas that would form the intellectual basis for the "liberal democratic state" were mainly forged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Undoubtedly, this system is based on individual freedom<sup>10</sup>. According to Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, the main objective of a liberal-democratic state should be to provide individuals with the conditions allowing them to pursue their life goals, to participate freely in economic processes, and to accumulate property<sup>11</sup>.

On the other hand, in the views of the above-mentioned liberal thinkers, one can also find ideas that fit into the welfare state concept. Therefore, as a rule, they did not exclude state intervention. They allowed it, wherever it could give the best outcome in the context of social relationships arrangement<sup>12</sup>. For example, Jeremy Bentham accepted providing aid by the state, claiming that in a "civilized political community" no individual should "be left to perish". However, this aid was to be limited only to the so-called "necessaries of life"<sup>13</sup>. This is in line with the view, according to which Benthamian utilitarianism can be "linked back directly" to the modern welfare state<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> A. Heise, A. Serfraz Khan, *The welfare state and liberal democracy: a political economy approach*, „World Review of Political Economy” 2019, Vol. 2, p. 222; J.G. Andersen, *Welfare states and welfare state theory*, Aalborg 2012, p. 5; cf. A. Heywood, *Politologia*, transl. B. Maliszewska, M. Masojć, N. Orłowska, D. Stasiak, Warsaw 2008, p. 510.

<sup>9</sup> J. Rawls, *Justice as fairness: political not metaphysical*, „Philosophy & Public Affairs” 1985, Vol. 3, p. 225; cf. Y. Morigiwa, *The laws of a nation: the essential formula for a liberal and democratic state*, „William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal” 1992, Vol. 187, p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> Ł. Święcicki, *Słowo wstępne*, „Civitas. Studia z Filozofii Polityki” 2021, Vol. 28, p. 9; B. Szlachta, *Demokracja liberalna: źródła, ustanowienie (?) i kres (?)*, Warsaw 2022, p. 690.

<sup>11</sup> D. Held, *The development of liberal democracy: for and against the state*, p. 95, <https://www.bresserpereira.org.br/papers/2021/Cap-3-The-Development-of-liberal-democracy.pdf> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 96–97.

<sup>13</sup> J. Bentham, *Fundamental positions in regard to the making provision for the indigent poor*, [in:] M. Quinn (ed.), *The collected works of Jeremy Bentham: writings on the poor laws*, Vol. 1, Oxford 2001, p. 10; M. Quinn, *Mill on poverty, population and poor relief*, „Revue d'études benthamiennes” 2008, Vol. 4, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> G. Bowrey, C.J. Smark, *The influence of Jeremy Bentham on recent public sector financial reforms*, „Journal of New Business Ideas & Trends” 2010, Vol. 1, p. 3.

An analysis of Bentham's thought indicates that he agreed with the existence of publicly funded assistance for two reasons. The first one had an idealistic dimension and pointed to the necessity of preserving humanity and human dignity as reasons of supporting individuals. The second reason, on the other hand, was dictated by pragmatism. It was manifested in the need to guarantee "public security"<sup>15</sup>. Similar views can be also found in the reflections of John Stuart Mill<sup>16</sup>.

Nevertheless, in their acceptance of the social involvement of the state, both Bentham and Mill opposed the separation of the question of individual's ability to work from the capability of making a living. They emphasised the negative and demoralising impact of a situation in which it would be possible to support oneself not by work but with publicly funded assistance. Both Mill and Bentham warned against the spread of such a situation and the establishment of large communities based on this principle. This could even result in the "destruction of society". Being of the opinion that assistance ought be limited to aforementioned "absolute necessities of life", they believed it should depend on meeting certain conditions, e.g. the performance of work that is within one's abilities<sup>17</sup>.

Considering the aims of this article, it is worth referring to the views of one of the most important theorists of the liberal democracy – Alexis de Tocqueville. He combined freedom, understood as the individual's ability to manage his or her life independently and rationally, but also responsibly. In other words, the exercise of freedom under the conditions of a democratic and liberal state must be based on rationality and knowledge. De Tocqueville attributed a large role to the "enlightenment" of the members of society. This meant that they should have the knowledge as to what their interests were and how they should be taken care of<sup>18</sup>.

The development of liberal democracy has led to the universal political empowerment of the social masses, which is unprecedented in the history of humankind. As a rule, the age was the only criterion that excluded a citizen from the process of making decisions in political terms (e.g. as part of the electoral act). Finally, at the end of the first half of the twentieth century,

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<sup>15</sup> J. Bentham, op. cit., p. 10; M. Quinn, *Mill on poverty...*, p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> J.S. Mill, *The poor laws*, „Examiner”, 9.03.1834, [in:] A.P. Robson, J.M. Robson (eds.), *Newspaper writings by John Stuart Mill*, Toronto 1986, p. 686; P.N. Turner, *John Stuart Mill on luck and distributive justice*, [in:] I.M. Church, R.J. Hartman (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of the philosophy and psychology of luck*, New York 2019, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> J. Bentham, op. cit., p. 39; J.S. Mill, *Dissertations and discussions: political, philosophical, and historical*, Vol. 3, Boston 1855, p. 55–56; M. Quinn, *Mill on poverty...*, p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> A. de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Vol. 1, Paris 1850, p. 110, 217; M. Tracz-Tryniecki, *Wolność w ujęciu Alexisa de Tocqueville'a*, [in:] O. Górecki (ed.), *Wolność człowieka i jej granice. Antologia pojęcia w doktrynach polityczno-prawnych. Od Cato's Letters do klasyków anarchizmu*, Vol. 2, Łódź 2019, pp. 372–373.

liberal democracy dominated the countries of “the West”<sup>19</sup>. As indicated before, both great processes, political liberalisation and achievement of successive “social achievements”, proceeded parallelly within the Western civilisation, often conditioning and complementing each other. In the author’s opinion, indicating this relationship has tremendously important consequences for threats that may affect the democratic welfare state<sup>20</sup>.

In the West, the period after the end of World War II was characterised by a significant increase in political support for the Communist parties. Socialist ideas postulated by politicians associated with the USSR won significant popularity in the societies of Western European countries. As a result, ruling elites had to finally abandon the policy of *laissez-faire* and move towards building a welfare state. Their aim was to limit the political influence of the Communists<sup>21</sup>. In effect, many countries adopted constitutions rooted in the idea of a welfare state (the regulations of the Italian constitution are a good example here). As a result, as early as in 1960, the average level of public expenditure in developed countries reached 27.9% of GDP. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of further expansion of state interventionism, development of social security systems, strengthening progressive taxation and the role of state-owned enterprises in the economy. The final goal was to ensure social security for all citizens “from cradle to grave”. However, during this process, the idea of subsidiarity in state aid provision and the need for citizens to remain empowered, independent, and accountable, have lost prominence<sup>22</sup>.

Summing up, from the perspective of the 21st century, a ‘democratic welfare state’ is a state whose membership (citizenship) is based on three aspects. Firstly, it is the citizens who are the ultimate source of collective political will. Secondly, citizens are also “subjects” on whom the collective will can be imposed (by a government having democratic legitimacy). This will is limited by the broad range of citizens right concerning various spheres of their life. Thirdly, in order to secure their existence on many levels, these citizens are ‘clients’ partially or totally dependent on state-guaranteed social benefits and services<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Ł. Rozen, *Liberalizm i demokracja jako fundamentalny dylemat współczesnej polityki*, [in:] K.A. Wojtaszczyk, P. Stawarz, J. Wiśniewska-Grzelak (eds.), *Zmierzch demokracji liberalnej?*, Warsaw 2018, p. 107. Naturally, one cannot forget such exceptions as Spain under General Franco’s rule or Portugal under A. Salazar.

<sup>20</sup> About the correlations between political and social rights also: D. Lis-Staranowicz, *The relation between political rights and social rights: some remarks concerning the Polish constitutional and political practice*, p. 81, [https://www.apgads.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/lu\\_portal/apgads/PDF/Juridiskas-konferences/ISCFLUL-7-2019/iscftul.7.2-06\\_Lis-Staranowics.pdf](https://www.apgads.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/apgads/PDF/Juridiskas-konferences/ISCFLUL-7-2019/iscftul.7.2-06_Lis-Staranowics.pdf) (accessed: 24.02.2026).

<sup>21</sup> N. Gilman, *The cold war and the welfare state*, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/12/04/cold-war-welfare-state/> (accessed: 3.04.2024).

<sup>22</sup> T. Przybyciński, op. cit., pp. 30–31.

<sup>23</sup> C. Offe, *Democracy against the welfare state? Structural foundations of neoconservative political opportunities*, „Political Theory” 1987, Vol. 4, p. 501.

## Well-being and welfare benefits as an entitlement of the individual

The previous part of this article has demonstrated the links between the ideas of liberal democracy and the welfare state. Both ideas are guaranteed in most Western states at the constitutional level or function through the introduction of appropriate regulations. As specified in the ruling of German Federal Constitutional Court, the principle of the welfare state (*Sozialstaat* – its German equivalent), as expressed in Article 20(1) of the German Constitution, implies a state's obligation to bridge social disparities in order to guarantee a "just social order"<sup>24</sup>. A good example of the constitutional anchoring of the welfare state idea is paragraph 2 of the Swedish "Form of Government Act" of 28 February 1974:

The personal, economic and cultural welfare of the individual shall be fundamental aims of public activity. In particular, the public institutions shall secure the right to employment, housing and education, and shall promote social care and social security, as well as favourable conditions for good health<sup>25</sup>.

The law of a given state, in particular constitutional regulations, is a reflexion of the social, political and economic conditions in which it was established and in which it is to be applied<sup>26</sup>. Contemporary Western European countries are not different. Constitutional regulations reflect and guarantee the existence of the individual under conditions of universal liberal freedoms and, also universal, social activity of the state. Members of European societies believe (of course to a varying degrees), that it is the duty of state, especially in the events of crisis, to take on part of the responsibility, not only for the individual but also for the community. This belief is implemented in a way of exerting pressure on the political establishment by people making electoral decisions in liberal democracy.

The process of "political democratisation" of the welfare state is associated with one of the ideas characteristic of understanding the state as an entity providing well-being. It refers to well-being understood as an individual's "entitlement" or even "political right". Thus, well-being gains the meaning of something that a citizen can demand from the state on an equal footing with, e.g., demanding respect for personal freedom.

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<sup>24</sup> Judgement of the Federal Constitutional Court of 18 July 1967, case file No. 2 BvR 335/62, <https://opiniojuris.de/entscheidung/1520> (accessed: 28.04.2025); S. Rixen, *Sozialrechtliche Regulierung des Sozialstaats*, „Zeitschrift für Politik“ 2018, Vol. 3, p. 324.

<sup>25</sup> The Instrument of Government (1974:152), <https://www.riksdagen.se/globalassets/05.-sa-fungerar-riksdagen/demokrati/the-instrument-of-government-2023-eng.pdf> (accessed: 13.05.2025).

<sup>26</sup> P. Häberle, *Der Sinn von Verfassungen in kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht*, „Archiv des öffentlichen Rechts“ 2006, Vol. 4, pp. 636–637.

Initially, “modern” understanding of the state’s role, was focused on protecting the spheres of individual’s existence that would be free from the intervention of state (as in John Locke)<sup>27</sup>. Until the mid-19th century the main postulate of the liberals was to expand the area of individual freedoms and consolidate them. With the development of industrial states and societies, the functioning of the free market proved that the mere definition and adherence to the so-called “negative freedoms” was not enough. The negative effects of the free market economy have led thinkers like aforementioned Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill to move away from “classical” liberal positions. They began to accept activities of the state that were intended to safeguard the common good. Views appeared that political and civil liberties were not the sole “phenomena” in the state. The influence of these views has led to the conceptualisation of “social rights” or “economic rights”. One of their functions was to maintain civil liberties endangered by negative effects of the free market economy and capitalism<sup>28</sup>.

Ideas of Thomas Humphrey Marshall are one of the most emblematic answers to this problem. This scholar popularised the concept of so-called “equal citizenship”. He argued that it was manifested in three types of rights: civil, political, and the “social rights of citizenship”. According to Marshall, ensuring at least elementary economic security was crucial for maintaining democratic order in the state and for its proper functioning<sup>29</sup>. An individual as a citizen should be therefore “entitled” to:

(...) whole range [of rights – author’s note] from the right to modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society<sup>30</sup>.

These views were quite during the time of welfare state’s expansion. For example, the existence of so-called ‘social rights’ (understood as an entitlements) has also been present and accepted in the social teachings of the Catholic Church (e.g. in the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*)<sup>31</sup>. As early as in Leo XIII’s teachings, social rights were correlated with freedom rights and formed an integral whole<sup>32</sup>. The Catholic social teaching in this respect is

<sup>27</sup> More on this topic: J. Locke, *Two treatises on government*, London 1821, pp. 303–311.

<sup>28</sup> K.R. Himes, *Rights of entitlement: a Roman Catholic perspective*, „Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy” 1997, Vol. 2, pp. 512–515.

<sup>29</sup> J.D. Moon, *The moral basis of the democratic welfare state*, [in:] A. Gutmann (ed.), *Democracy and the welfare state*, Princeton 1998, pp. 42–43.

<sup>30</sup> T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and social class*, [in:] *Class, citizenship and social development, essays by T.H. Marshall*, intr. S.M. Lipset, Garden City 1965, p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> K.R. Himes, op. cit., pp. 528–529.

<sup>32</sup> F.J. Mazurek, *Prawa społeczne człowieka w encyklice Rerum Novarum*, „Roczniki Nauk Społecznych” 1991–1992, 1, p. 61; Cf. *Encyklika Leona XIII o kwestji robotniczej ‘Rerum Novarum’*, tłum, wstęp i objaśn. J. Piwowarczyk, Kraków 1933, p. 97. The earlier roots of this idea are discussed by M. Merkwa. More in: M. Merkwa, *The necessity of the absolute or absolute necessity?*

based on human dignity, focusing also on the community-related dimension of individual's existence. It is a question of providing it with material resources not only to preserve his or her inherent dignity, but also to allow them to "participate" in social life<sup>33</sup>.

The democratic welfare state is thus understood as guarantor of a whole set of rights, which comprise not only "traditional" liberal values. Following John Locke, it should be once again indicated, that the limited state is designed to protect the individual's rights to live, freedom, health, and property. In the concept of the welfare state, "social" rights, such as the right to employment, economic security, health care and education, function on an equal footing with these rights<sup>34</sup>.

### Restricting the welfare and growth of populism

The conclusions drawn so far allow to state that, it is impossible to depart from the political aspect of the welfare state regarding the functioning of liberal democracy. By taking part in the democratic process (e.g. elections), the individual may choose who will take part in governing the state on his or her behalf. Therefore, by definition, the individual can decide who will be entitled to social benefits provided by the state (e.g. by voting for political parties supporting the redistribution of national income)<sup>35</sup>.

In a liberal democracy, gaining power involves winning sufficient support from members of the electorate. This support is shaped by a number of factors, starting from electoral preferences and specific political programme tenets, to the experience from the years of previous governments. The process of ensuring citizens' welfare is unique in this context. It is important to remember that most welfare state policies are implemented over a distant time horizon. The effects of such decisions are often spread over time, even generations (e.g. the pension system). However, the time horizon of politicians acting in a liberal democracy, is generally limited to a single term of office (four years on average). This is also the period for assessing the effects of decisions being made. In the absence of adequate knowledge (as postulated

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*On the first attempts to search for the foundations of natural rights*, „Studia Iuridica Lublinensia” 2021, Vol. 5, pp. 465–466.

<sup>33</sup> K.R. Himes, op. cit., pp. 519–521. For more detail on this topic, see: M. Łuszczczyńska, *Katolicka nauka społeczna – doktryna ‘per se’ czy ‘per participationem’?*, „Studia Iuridica Lublinensia” 2012, Vol. 17, pp. 100–101.

<sup>34</sup> J.D. Moon, op. cit., pp. 30–31. This belief underlies the view that welfare rights must be located in the system of human rights: A. Sen, *Elements of a theory of human rights*, „Philosophy & Public Affairs” 2004, Vol. 4, p. 316.

<sup>35</sup> S.S. Wolin, *Democracy and the welfare state: the political and theoretical connections between Staatsräson and Wohlfahrtsstaatsräson*, „Political Theory” 1987, Vol. 4, p. 470.

by de Tocqueville), citizens, *en masse*, are not in a position to assess the long-term consequences of decisions taken by politicians<sup>36</sup>.

A kind of laboratory ideal condition would be functioning of a democratic welfare state in continuous economic prosperity. This would enable financing social benefits from growing tax revenues. However, it does not require deep insight to say that the nature of the free market economy includes various types of turbulence and economic crises. It is also obvious that they may hinder or even prevent the state from implementing the instruments of welfare state<sup>37</sup>. The so-called “golden age” of the welfare state ended with the oil crisis of the 1970s. Decline in economic growth, unemployment and emergence of ageing societies (which had a negative impact on the pension system) began to seriously hinder the guarantee of well-being within the welfare state<sup>38</sup>.

In liberal democracy, the lack of funds to finance welfare state policies does not provide, at least initially, an incentive to reduce spending for this purpose. As showed by recent experiences of European states, a political party that implements solutions intended to improve economic situation, is ultimately faced with a loss of support among its electorate<sup>39</sup>. Dorota Lis-Staranowicz indicates, that promises of social benefits play an important role during the electoral campaigns, becoming “the decisive factors for an electoral success”<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, any reduction of welfare state benefits may bring too high political costs, and in fact entail a loss of power. There is a legitimate risk that the electorate will shift its support to a populist movement promising to maintain or even extend welfare policy<sup>41</sup>.

Finally, the exacerbation of the crisis, forces the government to implement a policy of austerity. It involves budget cuts that are unpopular and painful for the general public, often increasing the tax burden. Both the crisis and the austerity generate “winners” and “losers” in the society. Growing frustration rooted in the lack of understanding by mainstream parties, results in a division into “people” and “establishment”. The rhetoric of the dichotomisation of society following the “us-against-them” rule is extremely

<sup>36</sup> D.F. Thompson, *Representatives in the welfare state*, [in:] A. Gutmann (ed.), op. cit., pp. 132–133.

<sup>37</sup> M. Bochenek, *Kilka refleksji na temat kryzysu, ryzyka i niepewności*, „Roczniki Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej w Toruniu” 2012, Vol. 11, p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> A. Heise, A. Serfraz Khan, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>39</sup> A. Alesina, G. Ciminelli, D. Furceri, G. Saponaro, *Austerity and elections*, „IMF Working Paper” 2021, Vol. 21, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> D. Lis-Staranowicz, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> E. Cziomer, *Wprowadzenie*, „Kraakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2011, Vol. 4, p. 7. For example, none of the three main political forces during the UK 2010 elections specified how they intended to reduce the budget deficit. B. Vis, K. v. Kersbergen, T. Hylands, op. cit., p. 4; S. Berman, *The causes of populism in the West*, „Annual Review of Political Science” 2021, Vol. 24, pp. 73–74.

dangerous to social cohesion. Such conditions provide an ideal basis for emergence of populism. The risk of such a situation grows with the increase in the number of members of society who consider themselves victims of unfair social relations. Increase in populism is a response to economic problems, often related to changes of a breakthrough nature, such as the transition to an industrial economy or, finally, globalisation with its negative effects on blue-collar workers<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, one of the main factors providing a good basis for the increase in populist tendencies is the generational deterioration of living standards. Nowadays mass immigration is also playing an increasingly important role. It is considered not only as a threat to national identities, but also to the effective implementation of welfare state policies. Thus, there is an increase in the general sense of insecurity and the emergence of the phenomenon called “status anxiety”<sup>43</sup>.

As will be demonstrated later, such circumstances lead to a situation in which politicians who have not previously pursued populist policies are forced to adapt them, in order to compete with the populists. This is caused by striving firstly, to avoid electoral defeat and secondly, to quench social unrest. Under conditions of budget scarcity, the establishment in power is forced to borrow money in order to prop up the policy of state welfare. Introducing possible budget cuts is delayed as much as possible. Government focuses on “crisis management” rather than on real reform of the welfare state<sup>44</sup>. As the turning point should be regarded the excessive cost or atrophy of capabilities to finance welfare state policies through borrowing on the so-called “financial markets”. Only then does the need to make cuts to avoid state bankruptcy arise. These are manifested in the aforementioned concept of austerity<sup>45</sup>.

In the conditions of growing populism, party pluralism does not focus on proposing the best possible governance programmes, but on a bidding competition of welfare promises aimed at winning the votes of “target groups”. Thus, there emerges a practice of “buying votes”, usually on credit, while abandoning rational economic policy. Relations between political group and citizens become a relationship based on clientelism<sup>46</sup>. Within the society,

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<sup>42</sup> C.R. Kaltwasser, *The ambivalence of populism: threat and corrective for democracy*, „Democratization” 2012, Vol. 19, p. 186; W.A. Galston, *The populist challenge to liberal democracy*, „Journal of Democracy” 2018, Vol. 2, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Y. Mounk, *Pitchfork politics: the populist threat to liberal democracy*, „Foreign Affairs” 2014, Vol. 5, pp. 29–30.

<sup>44</sup> Y. Steinbach, Ch. Knill, J. Jordana, *Austerity or welfare state transformation? Examining the impact of economic crises on social regulation in Europe*, „Regulation & Governance” 2019, Vol. 13, p. 303.

<sup>45</sup> L. Bini Smaghi, *Austerity, a threat to democracy?*, „The International Spectator” 2014, Vol. 1, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> M. Walzer, *Socializing the welfare state*, [in:] A. Gutmann (ed.), op. cit., p. 16.

numerous and well-organised groups of interest strive to use the institution of the welfare state to maximise their benefits. In return they offer a sufficiently large range of political support<sup>47</sup>.

These conditions seem to be effectively used by parties that are referred to as the “radical right”<sup>48</sup>. It is worth to note their change in the declared approach to social assistance. Until quite recently, their agenda was characterised by free-market postulates (sometimes even in extreme terms). However, contemporary research demonstrates that there was an evolution towards acceptance and support for the idea of the welfare state. This confirms the above-stated conclusions regarding the adaptation of the political agenda to the expectations of voters. Importantly, the agenda of the “radical right-wing parties” is characterised by the break with the universality of welfare state. It introduces the division of society into a group of “hard workers” and a group of “lazy” ones (even referred to as “parasites”). This tendency is a prelude to an even greater threat to social cohesion and state stability, i.e. “welfare chauvinism”<sup>49</sup>. The views expressed by Viktor Orban may be emblematic here. According to him, the welfare state should be revised towards replacing “entitlements with a merit-based society”<sup>50</sup>.

Regarding the phenomenon of populism, it should be stated that it became democracy’s indispensable feature as early as the mid-twentieth century<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> C. Offe, op. cit., pp. 505–506; C.R. Kaltwasser, L. Zanotti, *Populism and the welfare state*, [in:] B. Greve (ed.), *Handbook on austerity, populism and the welfare state*, Cheltenham–Northampton 2021, p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> This concept includes political circles characterised by nativism, authoritarianism, populism and welfare chauvinism. C. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe today*, [in:] J. Abromeit, Y. Norman, G. Marotta, B.M. Chesterton (eds.), *Transformations of populism in Europe and the Americas. History and recent tendencies*, London 2016, pp. 295–296. It is worth noting that the increase in the support for ‘radical right’ parties grew from approx.: 2% in 1990 to 17.5% in 2019. N. Lendvai-Bainton, D. Szelewa, *Governing new authoritarianism: populism, nationalism and radical welfare reforms in Hungary and Poland*, „Social Policy & Administration” 2021, Vol. 4, p. 563.

<sup>49</sup> P. Rathgeb, M.R. Busemeyer, *How to study the populist radical right and the welfare state?*, „West European Politics” 2022, Vol. 1, p. 2, 9. J. Chueri points here to, e.g., populist parties in Scandinavia. J. Chueri, *An emerging populist welfare paradigm? How populist radical right-wing parties are reshaping the welfare state*, „Scandinavian Political Studies” 2022, Vol. 4, p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> Viktor Orban’s speech at the Aleksanteri Institute of the University of Helsinki, 13 May 2013, <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/the-prime-ministers-speeches/speech-by-prime-minister-orban-at-the-aleksanteri-institute-of-the-university-of-helsinki> (accessed: 28.04.2025). More on the question of populist right parties approach towards welfare state, see: K. Abts, E. Dalle Mulle, S. van Kessel, E. Michel, *The welfare agenda of the populist radical right in Western Europe: combining welfare chauvinism, producerism and populism*, „Swiss Political Science Review” 2021, Vol. 1, pp. 21–40. The constitutional aspect of welfare policy of Polish Law and Justice Party, ruling between 2015 and 2023, is also worth considering. More on this topic, M. Krajewski, *The constitutional quandary of social rights: questions in times of the Polish illiberal turn*, „International Journal of Constitutional Law” 2023, Vol. 21(1), pp. 156–186.

<sup>51</sup> Y. Mounk, op. cit., p. 27.

Despite this, scholarly discourse still struggles to clearly define populism and its impact on the democracy<sup>52</sup>. Some define populism as a distinct ideology, for others it is just a style of public discourse<sup>53</sup>. For some, populism is the purest form of democracy, while others point to its potential to destroy it and pursue tyranny<sup>54</sup>.

I accede to the statement that, despite its initial apparent advantages, populism poses a threat to democracy. At the beginning, it may indeed lead to bringing forgotten issues to the public debate or giving voice to neglected social groups. Nonetheless, its prolonged impact ultimately endangers democracy. It exposes it to the manipulation and demagoguery of leaders who may seek to undermine or destroy the normative institutions protecting liberal-democratic order. This is primarily about the rule of law, and the role of parliamentary bodies. It is worth mentioning that the actions of populists putting democracy at risk may not be revolutionary in nature. Nowadays, they have the nature of gradual initiatives that weaken and dismantle the institutions of liberal democracy<sup>55</sup>.

Left unchecked [populism – auth.], moves to undermine freedom of the press, weaken constitutional courts, concentrate power in the hands of the executive, and marginalize groups of citizens based on ethnicity, religion, or national origin will undermine liberal democracy from within<sup>56</sup>.

Also dangerous is the trend of populist movements to introduce themselves as the only entities guided by legitimate demands and having exclusive legitimacy to govern. It jeopardises liberal democracy, which should be based on the functioning of the opposition, exercising control over those in power, and their readiness to seize it<sup>57</sup>. For populists typical is their belief that a nation, in a political sense, is able to adopt only one right position. This leads to a series of zero-sum conflicts in society. Therefore, someone can either support or oppose a particular postulate. This is a misconception. Societies are characterised by a multitude of different types of groups and positions being represented. They are pluralistic and not homogenous. Populist party assuming that its views are the only right ones threatens minorities

<sup>52</sup> K. Abts, S. Rummens, *Populism versus democracy*, „Political Studies” 2007, Vol. 2, pp. 419–420.

<sup>53</sup> M. Beaumier, *Le populisme à gauche et à droite: les cas de Marine Le Pen et de Jean-Luc Mélenchon*, „Nouvelles perspectives en sciences sociales” 2023, Vol. 1, p. 202.

<sup>54</sup> K. Abts, S. Rummens, op. cit., p. 405; C.R. Kaltwasser, op. cit., pp. 189, 199–200; cf. T. Tännsjö, *Populism is not the problem. It's part of the solution*, <http://www.thecritique.com/articles/populismisnottheproblem/> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

<sup>55</sup> K. Weyland, *Populism's threat to democracy: comparative lessons for the United States*, „Perspectives on Politics” 2020, Vol. 2, pp. 389–390.

<sup>56</sup> W.A. Galston, op. cit., pp. 14–15.

<sup>57</sup> C. Crouch, *Post-democracy and populism*, „The Political Quarterly” 2019, Vol. 1, p. 135.

and their rights in a liberal-democratic state. This leads to the risk of tyranny of the majority, as once described by Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>58</sup>.

## **Populism and its correlations with the problematics of Brexit**

There is no doubt that certain economic and social conditions of the 21st century are considered to be factors nourishing the development of populism<sup>59</sup>. As a result of crises, such as the Great Recession of 2007/2008, populism has emerged in stable, “Western” liberal democracies<sup>60</sup>. Recent experience regarding the attempts to reduce or reform welfare state institutions shows that these initiatives virtually always end in the outbreak of social discontent and populism. In other words: societies benefiting from normatively affirmed social rights, when facing the necessity to cut spending on welfare, neither accept nor understand its reasons.

The policy of austerity was implemented (to varying degrees) by the governments of the countries affected by the financial crisis of 2007–2009. Marina Prentoulis even argues that this period was the beginning of the end of the neoliberal world order. According to her it was marked by breakup of ties between citizens and the political order they should identify with. The state did not address the material needs of citizens. It can be said that the welfare state, which should protect its citizens during economic crises, has abdicated. Those who lost their jobs found themselves in a situation of insufficient state support. The reason was the government’s need to reduce the excessive public debt. In addition to the austerity policy, another factor driving social discontent, was the social stratification that accompanied the crisis. Growing income disparities intensified the “us-versus-them” rhetoric mentioned above. A further factor in the growing discontent was considerable immigration, perceived as a threat to labour market<sup>61</sup>. Support for the new populist movements was also growing due to the frustration of numerous social groups convinced of their insufficient political representation<sup>62</sup>.

As mentioned in the introduction, the text analyses the problematics of Brexit. This is considered as an example of the influence of welfare policy

<sup>58</sup> W.A. Galston, *op. cit.*, p. 13; C.R. Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>59</sup> One may point here to economic instability, inflation, public austerity policies, a lack of development prospects for young people, and the emergence of the precariat.

<sup>60</sup> E. Cziomer, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>61</sup> P. Stankov, *Economic freedom and welfare before and after the crisis*, Cham 2017, p. 136.

<sup>62</sup> M.D. Poli, *Contemporary populism and the economic crisis in Western Europe*, „Baltic Journal of Political Science” 2016, Vol. 5, p. 45; M. Prentoulis, *From austerity to Brexit: the failed populist moment in the UK*, „Soundings. A journal of politics and culture” 2022, Vol. 81, p. 112.

reduction on the rise of populism within the state. Occurrence of an outcome that was detrimental to liberal-democracy, is also important in this aspect. Brexit affected not only the UK but also Europe as a whole. It can be said that it ended the 70-year uninterrupted process of European integration<sup>63</sup>.

The policy of austerity pursued by the Conservative Party in the years following the crisis of 2007–2008 led to an increase in populist sentiment in the United Kingdom. Prior to the crisis, British welfare state had been by all means extensive. It provided those in need with a range of generous so-called “social benefits”. However, year 2010 marked the beginning of radical cuts in public welfare spending and became the symbolic beginning of the increase in support for populists. The policy of austerity introduced by the Conservative Party after the elections that year led to a decrease in social spending by 16% *per capita* in real terms. Their level returned to the level of the early 2000s. At the local level, between 2010 and 2015, the figure of social spending fell by 23.4% *per capita*. The cuts did not affect healthcare spending, but did not match the growing needs resulting from such aspects as the ageing population. Moreover the Welfare Reform Act of 2012 had negative consequences for social security. One of the most significant effects of the austerity policy was the need of ordinary citizens to indebt in order to secure basic living needs. Their sense of dissatisfaction and abandonment by the state was growing. Political choices of citizens depended on their personal financial interests infringed by the policy of cuts. The electorate’s support began to shift towards the Labour Party. However, the novelty was growing support for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), whose main objective was to take the United Kingdom out of the EU<sup>64</sup>.

The thesis that Conservative Party wanted to avoid the considerable political cost of the austerity policy was confirmed by a change in its public narrative. Voices and views in favour of welfare chauvinism and making access to social assistance dependent on national/ethnic criteria began to emerge within the party. These problems also coincided with the Brexit campaign period<sup>65</sup>. The reduction of state welfare policies had a quite considerable impact on the rise in support for the “Leave” slogan used by populists. The implementation of the Brexit referendum was not only a sign of the profound political crisis troubling the UK, it was also a clear symptom of the rise of populism<sup>66</sup>. The data presented by Thiemo Fetzer show that the areas most affected by cuts and the negative effects of the austerity policies were the

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<sup>63</sup> T. Fetzer, *Did austerity cause brexit?*, „American Economic Review” 2019, Vol. 11, p. 3884.

<sup>64</sup> A. Wiedemann, *The electoral consequences of household indebtedness under austerity*, „American Journal of Political Science” 2024, No. 2, pp. 368–370; T. Fetzer, op. cit., pp. 3850–3851, 3862–3863.

<sup>65</sup> P. Rathgeb, M.R. Busemeyer, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> M.D. Poli, op. cit., p. 41.

fastest to provide UKIP with their support. Furthermore, Fetzter proposes and proves the thesis that if it were not for the austerity policies, the support for the “Leave” option would have been so low that Brexit would not have happened<sup>67</sup>.

Based on this example alone, one can state that governments that entered the path of austerity during the European debt crisis suffered a sharp decline in public support, which led to political instability<sup>68</sup>. The policy of austerity undermines the social contract and leads to the social delegitimization not only of those in power, but even of the entire political structure. Moreover, one of the effects of such a policy is the popularisation of another dangerous phenomenon, namely ‘welfare chauvinism’, understood as the desire to limit social security only to members of a specific, ethnically defined group. Thus, it disturbs social cohesion and the sense of solidarity between community members that is necessary in the welfare state<sup>69</sup>.

## Conclusions

This article analyses the issue of the relationship between the disturbances in the implementation welfare policies and rise of populism in the liberal-democratic state. This study has sought to demonstrate that the societies of Western European countries, when deprived of their social transfers (even partially), are susceptible to the influence of populist groups. In well-established liberal democracies, solving problems affecting the community should take place in a public debate based on rational arguments. Citizens that are aware of the political, social and economic situation should understand the complexity of the situation and agree to rectify it, even assuming the loss of some social privileges. This public belief should be responded to by representatives of the citizens, i.e. politicians.

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<sup>67</sup> T. Fetzter, op. cit., p. 3850. Based on their own studies, Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig state that the support for the Brexit in the referendum of 2016 was higher in regions whose populations had been affected more by globalisation – I. Colantone, P. Stanig, *Global competition and Brexit*, „American Political Science Review” 2018, Vol. 2, p. 217; A. Noury, G. Roland, *Identity politics and populism in Europe*, „Annual Review of Political Science” 2020, Vol. 23, p. 430.

<sup>68</sup> E. Hübscher, T. Sattler, M. Wagner, *Voter responses to fiscal austerity*, „British Journal of Political Science” 2021, Vol. 51, p. 1751.

<sup>69</sup> M.S. Finnsdottir, *The costs of austerity: labor emigration and the rise of radical right politics in central and Eastern Europe*, „Frontiers in Sociology” 2019, Vol. 4, pp. 1–12. An example of political application of welfare chauvinism may be the slogan ‘welfare for our kind’. This political slogan is usually considered to be coined by the Danish People’s Party, Ch.A. Larsen, M. Frederiksen, M.H. Nielsen, *European welfare nationalism: a democratic forum study in five countries*, [in:] P. Taylor-Gooby, B. Leruth (eds.), *Attitudes, aspirations and welfare social policy*, Cham 2018, pp. 64–65.

However, it has been proven that even the “cradle” of parliamentarianism, democracy and liberalism, the United Kingdom, is not immune to the increase in public support for populist movements, as a consequence of limiting the welfare state functions. Public debate on the Brexit and its effects is an exemplification of this problem. At its core there is departure from a rational and effective solutions to problems within the state. Modern European populism, which has also grown out of welfare state implementation problems, has the significant potential to destabilise political and legal systems. Populist parties antagonise societies and fuel social conflicts to win political support as part of procedures characteristic to liberal-democratic state<sup>70</sup>.

Populism and utopia build an ideal world without any reference to reality<sup>71</sup>.

Populists argue that problems can be solved in a simple way, and that only they have a monopoly on solving them. Another element of populism is the dichotomous division of civil society, which is, after all, one of the foundations of liberal democracy. This is so because populism is based on conflict. It strives to identify the group responsible for the difficulties and to oppose it in order to channel social discontent. Populism is largely based on demagoguery and influencing human emotions. It leaves no room for any reasonable assessment or the search for solutions to specific problems. The above is the absolute opposite of the postulates proposed by aforementioned father of liberal democracy – Alexis de Tocqueville. He stressed the importance of citizens having adequate knowledge about state’s functioning. This knowledge would allow them to rationally and responsibly exercise their freedom to make political choices. Populism is far from the postulate of rational use of freedom; it is more like recklessness. As such, it puts at risk the proper functioning of democracy and the whole set of normative and political institutions referred to as the “rule of law”. In fact, it undermines trust in democracy and democratic institutions, and allows authoritarian tendencies to emerge<sup>72</sup>.

As noted earlier, the occurrence of crisis phenomena that disrupt the implementation of welfare state policies is inevitable (if only because of the occurrence of business cycles). Therefore, crisis events are also present in liberal democracies. In view of the above statement, it should be marked that the

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<sup>70</sup> The ‘fragility’ and ‘superficiality’ of systemic foundations of representative democracy have aptly been discussed by A. Łuszczynski, *Prawo i racjonalizm*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska – Sectio G (Ius)” 2018, Vol. 2, p. 170.

<sup>71</sup> M. Rebes, *Państwo demokratyczne wobec wyzwań edukacyjnych: pomiędzy ideologią, populizmem a filozofią odpowiedzialności za innych*, „Paedagogia Christiana” 2023, Vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>72</sup> R. Riedel, *Populism and its democratic, non-democratic, and anti-democratic potential*, „Polish Sociological Review” 2017, Vol. 199, p. 295. However, e.g. Aristotle was able to provide examples of ‘good’ demagoguery. He referred to Cleisthenes who, ‘after the fall of the tyranny’, gave to the Athenians ‘a constitution more democratic than that of Solon’. N. Urbinati, *Democracy and populism*, „Constellations” 1998, Vol. 1, p. 112.

most difficult is to find a way to reform the welfare state that will not disturb the functioning or even existence of liberal democracy, including through the growth of populism. As a result, one can even speculate whether, in such a situation, the views of T.H. Marshall would not be contradicted? Thus, would the existence of “social citizenship” finally lead, through the emergence of populism, not to the extension of, but to the reduction or even elimination of freedom in the liberal-democratic state?

When trying to answer the question asked herein, one should think about the original causes of the problem. It is legitimate to say that they lay in very societies of European countries. Their subsequent generations have grown up under the conditions of the welfare state. The people’s sense of self-initiative was diminishing. Individuals become used to being “guided by the hand” of state, because of its welfare policies. The popularity of populism is fuelled by an opposition to any change in these conditions. The ideal solution would be to equip members of civil society with such knowledge and competence that they are able to accept the often unpopular and difficult actions of the state in the field of reducing welfare policies. Once again, one should refer to the views of de Tocqueville, who spoke of “enlightened” citizens and of their potential to identify their long-term interests. A proper understanding and ability to utilise democracy must therefore come from both society as a whole and its particular members<sup>73</sup>. This citizens’ attitude must, of course, correspond with that of the political establishment. On the one hand, it will be forced to ‘adapt’ its political offer to the demands of the (enlightened) electorate. On the other hand, it is responsible to educate the public about their long-term, vital interests<sup>74</sup>. Politicians should be able to take responsibility for making decisions that are unpopular, but aimed at avoiding even more serious problems in the future. Both citizens and politicians should therefore feel Tocqueville’s sense of responsibility resulting from their participation in a liberal democracy.

It is hard to deny the many positive aspects of the implementation of the welfare state idea. Assuming that the goal of the liberal-democratic state is to enable the individual to develop freely and achieve self-fulfilment, it can be said that the welfare state, as T.H. Marshall argued, generally helps achieve this goal. In principle, it allows people to preserve their dignity, helps them to develop, builds community and mitigates social conflicts. When based on self-responsibility, it is a positive factor in the development of the individual

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<sup>73</sup> D.S. Goldstein, *Alexis de Tocqueville’s concept of citizenship*, „Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society” 1964, Vol. 1, p. 40; M. Signer, *Demagogue. The fight to save the democracy from its worst enemies*, New York 2009, p. 208.

<sup>74</sup> H. Rubin, *How to vote well: rebuilding barriers to demagoguery and incentivizing responsible leadership in the American republic*, CMC Senior Theses, 2022, p. 21, [https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4112&context=cmc\\_theses](https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4112&context=cmc_theses) (accessed: 12.12.2025).

and society. Therefore, from the point of view of the economic and political stability, it is advisable to reform the modern welfare state. These reforms should involve getting back to subsidiarity of state aid. It should be limited, as it was noticed by Bentham, to the “absolute necessities of life”. Especially various social benefits should be provided only as a last resort, and help the individual to become independent as soon as possible. Aiming for economic balance, welfare spending should be reduced while rewarding labour activity, e.g. through tax reliefs.

Nonetheless, the proposals presented above require a broad social and political consensus. Otherwise, the threat of populism will increase. As it has already been demonstrated herein it is a negative phenomenon for the liberal-democratic state. Due to the political conditions indicated above, I consider the implementation of the optimal scenario to be unlikely. Much more likely is an uncontrolled debt crisis, leading to a sharp drop in social transfers. As a result, populist entities may gain more popularity among the electorate. In the conditions of democracy they may even come to power. This in turn may endanger principles of present liberal order or lead to irrational decisions made by political establishment.

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## Summary

### **Democratic welfare state in the face of populism. Remarks and predictions from the theoretical and practical perspective**

**Keywords:** social rights, welfare state, democracy, populism, entitlements.

Nowadays, most European countries are liberal democracies implementing the idea of welfare state. This process is financed predominantly from state budget. However, economic disruptions and crises typically lead to cuts in spending on welfare. The article attempts to investigate the correlation between the reduction of welfare policies and the arise of populism within the democratic welfare state. It examines legal and political ideas constituting the welfare state as well as historical circumstances of their introduction. The study is primarily based on the examination of the views of

selected political and legal thinkers. Secondly, using the example of the events leading to Brexit, it focuses on analysing the growth of populism as a factual and negative consequence of the welfare state's reduction. The paper attempts to identify the causes of these problems and find solutions based on political and legal thought. The analysis demonstrates that restrictions on benefits guaranteed by the welfare state can negatively impact the functioning of liberal democracy by fostering populism within it. It argues that reform of the welfare state should be based on its limitation, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and individual self-responsibility. To avoid the rise of populism, however, it should be based on a broad socio-political consensus, which nowadays can be difficult to achieve.

## Streszczenie

### **Demokratyczne państwo dobrobytu w obliczu populizmu. Uwagi oraz przewidywania z perspektywy teoretycznej i praktycznej**

**Słowa kluczowe:** prawa socjalne, państwo dobrobytu, demokracja, populizm, uprawnienia.

Większość państw współczesnej Europy to demokracje liberalne, implementujące ideę państwa dobrobytu. Proces ten finansowany jest w przeważającej mierze ze środków publicznych. Perturbacje i kryzysy gospodarcze z reguły prowadzą jednak do konieczności cięć w zakresie gwarantowanych przez państwo świadczeń socjalnych. Celem artykułu jest analiza korelacji między zjawiskiem redukcji różnego rodzaju świadczeń socjalnych a wzrostem zagrożenia populizmem w demokratycznym państwie dobrobytu. Przedstawiono w nim nie tylko prawne oraz polityczne idee konstytuujące państwo dobrobytu, ale także historyczne okoliczności ich implementacji. W pierwszym rzędzie tekst opiera się na analizie poglądów wybranych przedstawicieli myśli politycznej i prawnej. Po wtóre, posługując się przykładem wydarzeń prowadzących do opuszczenia UE przez Wielką Brytanię, skupiono się na ukazaniu wzrostu populizmu jako jednej z negatywnych konsekwencji redukcji świadczeń socjalnych. Tekst jest próbą rozpoznania przyczyn problemów faktycznych jak i znalezienia ich rozwiązań. W toku analizy dowiedziono, że ograniczenia świadczeń gwarantowanych przez państwo dobrobytu mogą mieć negatywny skutek na funkcjonowanie demokracji liberalnej poprzez wzrost tendencji populistycznych. Wskazano na to, że reforma państwa dobrobytu powinna opierać się na jego ograniczeniu w myśl zasady subsydiarności i samoodpowiedzialności jednostki. Aby nie doprowadzić do wzrostu populizmu, powinna być ona oparta jednak na szerokim konsensusie społeczno-politycznym, który współcześnie może być trudnym do osiągnięcia.