

## ***Serbia – The Avant-Garde of Populism***

**Dubravka Stojanović**

At last there is one thing that places the Balkans ahead of Europe! Populism. Ever since this word entered common parlance I had been preparing to tackle this subject and call primarily Serbia, and perhaps the entire Balkans, the avant-garde of populism. What a powerful feeling!

The beginning of populism in Serbia dates back to the early 1870s. Subsequently regimes of this sort were, with very short breaks, reproduced to this day.

What are the conclusions of our historical analysis? Ideology is irrelevant, it can be both right and left, but what is crucial is the collectivist sentiment that sops up every individual, obliterating all pluralism. A populist movement always speaks for the entire nation, and the possibility for someone to stay outside and think differently is excluded. This is a closed system that perceives everything outside itself as hostile, and that is why it is forced to build homogenization by inciting conflicts, which often leads to war. Fences are raised not so much against others, at least not at first, as for »us«, in order to push us closer together. From that point we no longer need institutions or laws, because they unnecessarily restrain the essential needs of our nation. This is why institutions break down or, if they survive, they do so with their substance completely transformed – abused, exploited and cheated.

I vividly remember the time when this happened in Serbia, after Milosevic took power in the late 1980s. I remember with dread, most of all, this general feeling that everyone was somehow relieved, like they all took off tight shoes. This is precisely what is most seductive and dangerous: this feeling that everything is possible. So how do you go against that? As in modern medicine – prevention. Prevent, at all costs, THIS from coming to power. And if it happens, then get ready to do it all over again. There's no use crying over populism. It leaves nothing behind.