

# Introduction

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This MarBLE volume is concerned with the idea of democracy and the problems it faces today. By studying Alexis Toqueville's "Democracy in America", the participating students acquired a basic knowledge of the main features of democracy, which worked as the groundwork for their research. In current turbulent times however, the notion of democracy is transforming even faster than Toqueville originally anticipated. Besides analysing the unequal implementation of democracy worldwide, Toqueville speculated about future challenges that might threaten the foundations of democracy. As he expected, democracy brought about a stronger sense of equality in the sense of equal dignity but simultaneously created more resentment as people started to notice the remaining inequalities in terms of competition and materialism. Resentment is defined as an "incurable, persistent feeling of hating and despising", e.g. rooting from people experiencing unequal treatment and being unable to do something about their current state (Scheler & Frings, 2007, p.6). Scheler argues that it arises when people compare themselves to others, judge them and realize there are important, sometimes painful differences between them (Scheler & Frings, 2007, p.13; pp.17-18). This resentment still exists today in the form of populist and anti-establishment sentiments, which pose one of the most crucial challenges to democracies in Europe and beyond. This development is seen as inherent to the democratic systems but simultaneously constitutes a paradox as populism is often anticipated as a crisis that has the potential to undermine the importance and stability of democracy (Mudde, 2010). With regards to this argument, populism can be defined as

"a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2007, p. 23).

The democratic paradox of populism was observed in the Brexit referendum or the latest Italian elections where populist and EU-sceptic parties managed to gain ground in the political system on the local, regional and European level and question the existing democratic world. The recent rise of populism can however not only be seen across Europe, but also in the US with the startling election of President Trump in 2016. Furthermore, these examples show that populism is an expression of the resentment (or anger/ dissatisfaction) towards the existing political and democratic systems in the Western part of the world. Toqueville saw the involvement of people as essential to the establishment of democracy, but evidence shows that the same involvement makes it possible for populist ideas to spread more easily. In brief, despite only studying the democratic system of the US in the context of the decline of monarchies and aristocracies, his studies remain crucial to modern times as he somewhat predicted some of the challenges European democracies are facing today.

In conclusion, based on Toqueville's analysis of democracy, this MarBLE Project was built around the central problem "Democracy and Resentment: Why are so many people angry nowadays?". Taking different perspectives on the topic, the individual authors investigated various and interesting stances of populism and anti-establishment movements. Right-wing populism is of great concern in this issue, illustrated by the analysis of the accession and credibility of the Five Stars Movement in the Italian parliament, the inquiry into the strategies by the Dutch right-wing politician and climate denier Thierry Baudet, the assessment of the democratic legitimacy of the Brexit referendum, and the study of the

media representation on the party "Alternative für Deutschland" from Germany. Left-wing populism's effect on mainstream parties' discourse is also investigated, here in the case of Belgium. Additionally, the interesting case of lack of populism is analysed in the Maltese political system, an exceptional example in Europe. The anger of the French movement Gilets Jaunes was also brought to one of the author's attention, who decided to understand it through a conceptualization of the movement's anger.

Each author thus approaches the central problem of democracy and resentment from a different angle, ranging from populist expressions in various European countries such as in elections, party popularity, referenda, media coverage or protest movements. Their findings are displayed in this 2019 MaRBLe Volume.