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Emotions and Politics: Ideas and formats for citizenship educators

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Abstract

by **Ola Hnatiuk**, University of Warsaw/ Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

Why do nowadays so many people in various democracies experience similar sets of emotions, including frustration, rage, disappointment, anxiety?

If we do not understand what is going on with us, here and now (*hic et nunc*), the most common way to deal with it is to broaden the context, and to find at least partially correct solution. Let's try this recipe. I will try to broaden the context in historical and geographical sense. Negative emotions, frustration, anxiety – haven't they been a reason for break-out of French Revolution, which has been a turning point for Modern Age period? Leaving behind "old Europe", what kind of emotions led millions of Ukrainians to protest on Maidan in 2013/2014? It was an anger, rage, despair. Only? No, people were standing for something. And they were exactly positive values. They were desperately trying to defend what? – men's dignity and liberty, democratic values. It sounds a little bit pretentious, but these were the real reasons behind Maidan protests in 2013. The protesters wanted to be citizens, not servants, to be the subject, not the object.

It seems to me that the rise of populism one can observe today is nothing new. In 1929 Ortega y Gasset published *La rebelión de las masas*. He has observed similar phenomenon we are witnessing now. His 'mass man' is a man influenced by populism today. His hunch of totalitarian dread is similar to ours, when we are asking:

How can we work with the emotions of citizens which we do not understand and do not share? How can we work with negative emotions? How to react less with contempt and more with respect?

These emotions are based on the feeling of exclusion. When I look for the border between patriotism and nationalism, or "good" and "bad" nationalism, I point on to the notion that nationalism begins not from hate, but from exclusion. And the feeling of exclusion will lead to the rebellion or to the revolt. In my opinion there is at least one way to defuse the situation, that is civic education on different levels. It should be not a theoretical approach, but a one rooted in practice. Students' self-government at the elementary school level mustn't be a theory (it's very common now, at least in Eastern Europe). The same one could say about local governments or self-governments in the factory (do not be confused with trade unions). Local government's activities in Poland during last ten years were a good example of really effective operation. Due to the engagement of people at local level the impact of populism has decreased.



If we broaden the context in a geographical sense, we can take a look from Ukrainian point of view on current changes in EU “old democracy” states. For Ukrainians the question if European democracy survives is an ultimate question: to be or not to be. If EU is further weakened by paroxysms of particularism, nationalism and populism, Ukraine will not survive the conflict with Russia. If we broaden historical context we can recall that in 1920. USSR using the instrument of Comintern (Communist International) tried to undermine the Versailles Treaty. In the next decade the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact began WWII. Nowadays we are observing Russian support for radical (first of all rightists) movements everywhere in EU, and even beyond. Therefore it's not enough to understand the sources of negative emotions of common people (or mass men according to Ortega y Gasset).

We have to understand the mechanism of manipulations from abroad. Hybrid war applies not only to Ukraine. Last investigations (by OKO press) have proved that in Poland, well known for its resentment for Russia, almost twenty portals replicate Russian content from “Sputnik”, “Voice of Europe” and other media outlets sponsored by Russia. In other states, which are not as much immunized for Russian propaganda as Poland, this phenomenon is even more widespread. One can recall the role of Paul Manafort in the triumph of Trump and the role of Russia in 2016 US Presidential Elections. The influence on even up to $\frac{1}{3}$ of hesitating voters, is crucial not only in U.S., but in every democratic state.

We cannot underestimate the role of internal players in manipulations of public opinion and play with voters' emotions, but we have to remember about the external players. But this is the role of the state. Civic society has no instrument to counteract or neutralize these attempts.

