



Hungarian
Europe Society

UNCERTAIN TIMES

The Future of
Trans-Atlantic
Relations from
the Perspective
of NGOs and
Think Tanks in
Central Europe
and Hungary

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The Future of Trans-Atlantic Relations from the Perspective of NGOs and Think Tanks in Central Europe and Hungary

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István Hegedűs¹

INTRODUCTION

When the Hungarian Europe Society initiated a project called “Uncertain Times - The Future of Trans-Atlantic Relations from the Perspective of NGOs and Think Tanks in Central Europe and Hungary”, the first wave of a new type of pandemic was just over in the summer of 2020 in Europe. Although we had no idea what was coming next after this sudden shock, we knew very well that our lives had changed dramatically. The consequences of lock-downs, social distancing and isolation have been tremendous on our human behaviour as well as on our political relations. Individual liberties have been constrained, economic decline has become tangible and worrisome, whilst liberal democracies have faced the forceful populist-authoritarian challenge worldwide – just to mention a couple of frustrating and pressing phenomena of our new era.

At the end of 2021, the fourth wave of COVID-19 has reached most of the countries on our old continent. Even if less people have died recently, thanks to the efforts of vaccination projects, travelling abroad is still complicated as free movement of citizens has been only partially restored. Yet, it is not evident at all, whether the corona virus will be seen as a historic game-changer, or most of the people will simply forget about the health crisis - just like it happened to the Spanish flu after the Great War – as soon as we return to normality. But will that normalcy be the same as it was before?

When the Hungarian Europe Society initiated this project in the summer of 2020, the international order has reached a deep crisis mode as well. The President of the United States did not follow any basic foreign policy and diplomatic rules on the global stage and made almost no decisions to be marked as reasonable and predictable – much to the irritation of his country’s Western allies. Since the beginning of 2021 there is another president in office who respects the ideals of the traditional transatlantic friendship. Still, in spite of a fundamental shift in international politics and US domestic policy areas, relations between the longstanding partners on the two sides of the Atlantic often show a chaotic character. The twenties of our century seem to be very different from the good old days of the nineties of the 20th century after the end

¹ Chairman, Hungarian Europe Society

of the Cold War. Today, we see a return to great power politics, a global competition between authoritarian regime models and the offer of the democratic community. Meanwhile the necessary adjustment of the European Union and its member states to a fast changing international environment has created increasing internal debates and a fear of becoming even less significant globally.

When the Hungarian Europe Society initiated this project in 2020, authoritarian populism was on its peak in Hungary. Although we still have the same prime minister – just like Lord Voldemort, he who must not be named in his homeland -, his party does not belong either to any mainstream European party family or to any political group inside the European Parliament any more. Hungary and Poland are under stronger scrutiny and pressure exerted by the European institutions than before especially in the matter of the rule of law and its conditionality mechanisms. Whether such development hits a clear break-through in the struggle within the European Union between pro-EU democrats and populist-nationalists is still more than doubtful. Nevertheless, liberal democrats have a better momentum to take the lead regarding European recovery and resilience whilst even pushing the European project forward based not only on economic benefits, but also on shared political values. After the painful secession of the United Kingdom, a new internal reform process has been started in order to introduce new ways of citizen's involvement and to comply with the demands of changing global conditions, including climate emergency, the need for economic growth that gives better, safer lives to many individuals as well as members of different social groups, including minorities. An innovative European Union is supposed to smartly adapt to an unprecedented technological revolution as well as to the political consequences of altered mass and social media systems.

When we applied for a small grant to the Embassy of the United States in Hungary in 2020, it was a rather positive surprise for us that we eventually succeeded. Certainly, we also applied for support to our close German partner, the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für Freiheit. We are equally grateful to both of our sponsors making the project possible - including the publication of high-level intellectual analyses of the above mentioned themes and beyond. The debates on the future of our international liberal order, politics, human rights, sustainable development and digital cohesion must go on.

*

Central Europe - the Eastern part of the European Union – has a special place in our analytical approach. When member countries of the former Warsaw Pact successfully gave up their satellite dependence from the Soviet Union during the historic years of 1988-91, the region played an exceptionally positive role in the peaceful deconstruction of the geopolitical status quo dominated by the competition of two world systems in a bipolar international order. The Euro-Atlantic orientation of the newly born democracies helped in creating a rule-based global security framework - with all its problems and shortages. The often painful catching up process of former communist nations to Western political as well as defence structures and institutions, notably their clear objective to join the European Union, was seen as a trustful contribution to the growing self-confidence of liberal democracies worldwide at the end of the last century. Especially the co-operation of the Visegrad countries meant a break with toxic historic disputes between neighbours and a fresh start for regional collaboration under the umbrella of their forthcoming EU membership. At the beginning of the new century, following nationwide legislative referenda, most of the accession candidates entered the gate of the exclusive club through a “Big Bang” enlargement: the reunification of the continent seemed to be almost complete.

This is a relatively well-known story. Nevertheless, initial enthusiasm has decreased during the long preparations and negotiations, whilst the utilitarian dimension of the economic integration has become the hegemonic interpretation about the benefits of a single market in the public discourse. Political entrepreneurs detected the ambivalence of public attitudes and an amorphous fear of the unknown future inside a multinational entity. Nationalists introduced Europessimistic and soft Eurosceptic rhetoric misusing inferiority feelings of people towards traditionally richer and bigger member states. In accordance with the domestic political development and the decline of liberal ideas in Central Europe, a new sovereignist narrative, hence, an efficient mobilising instrument has been gradually established – first in the Hungarian public sphere. Following the victory of Viktor Orbán at the national elections in 2010, the Hungarian government not only undermined independent institutions and proudly proclaimed the foundation of a new illiberal regime – within the European Union -, but made fresh friendships in the international political arena with authoritarian regimes. During the last decade, waves of nationalist-nativist centralised campaigns have been orchestrated against Brussels that allegedly wanted to colonise the member states on its Eastern periphery.

For a short period, Hungary was a unique laboratory experiment. Most of the top political actors at European level followed a wait and see strategy – if the cacophonous reactions to the

backsliding of democracy can be called a strategy at all. Hungary's example became a pattern for Poland's right-wing government from 2015 onwards and soon "Warsaw became Budapest", whilst in parallel, the populist virus also gained ground in the Western part of the European Union. After a long and desperate internal conflict, a breakup between the centre-right party family, the European People's Party and its member organisation Fidesz became finally unavoidable in 2021. Today, European institutions use a much tougher rhetoric in the case of Poland and Hungary, whilst new elements of the tool-box available have been invented in order to put bigger pressure on the two misbehaving governments.

The ideological radicalisation of Fidesz has received a new stimulus from the migration wave that arrived to Europe when Hungary became a transit route for refugees in 2015. The issue of immigration that was unknown in Central Europe until then has been quickly thematised and framed by Orbán's smear campaigns including a conspiracy theory blaming American-Hungarian philanthrop George Soros for a "Muslim invasion". When refusing to take its share in a joint European mechanism in order to mitigate the crisis, illiberal domestic political agenda of a member government has been irrevocably lifted to regional and European confrontations. From this turning point, the Hungarian Prime Minister intended to transform the Visegrad 4 Group into a stable headquarter based on a proclaimed cultural counter-revolution against the traditional liberal values agreed upon within the European Union and to create an axis of Central European countries to fight for their economic interests in a pushy manner. Nevertheless, the four governments have never really co-operated hand in hand and the group behaved rather divided into 2+2 subgroups. The incapability of the Hungarian and the Polish regimes to manifest a continuous East-West cleavage made it evident that differences have been developed not between two historic geographic areas inside the European Union, but the roots of disagreements are mostly ideological and partisan.

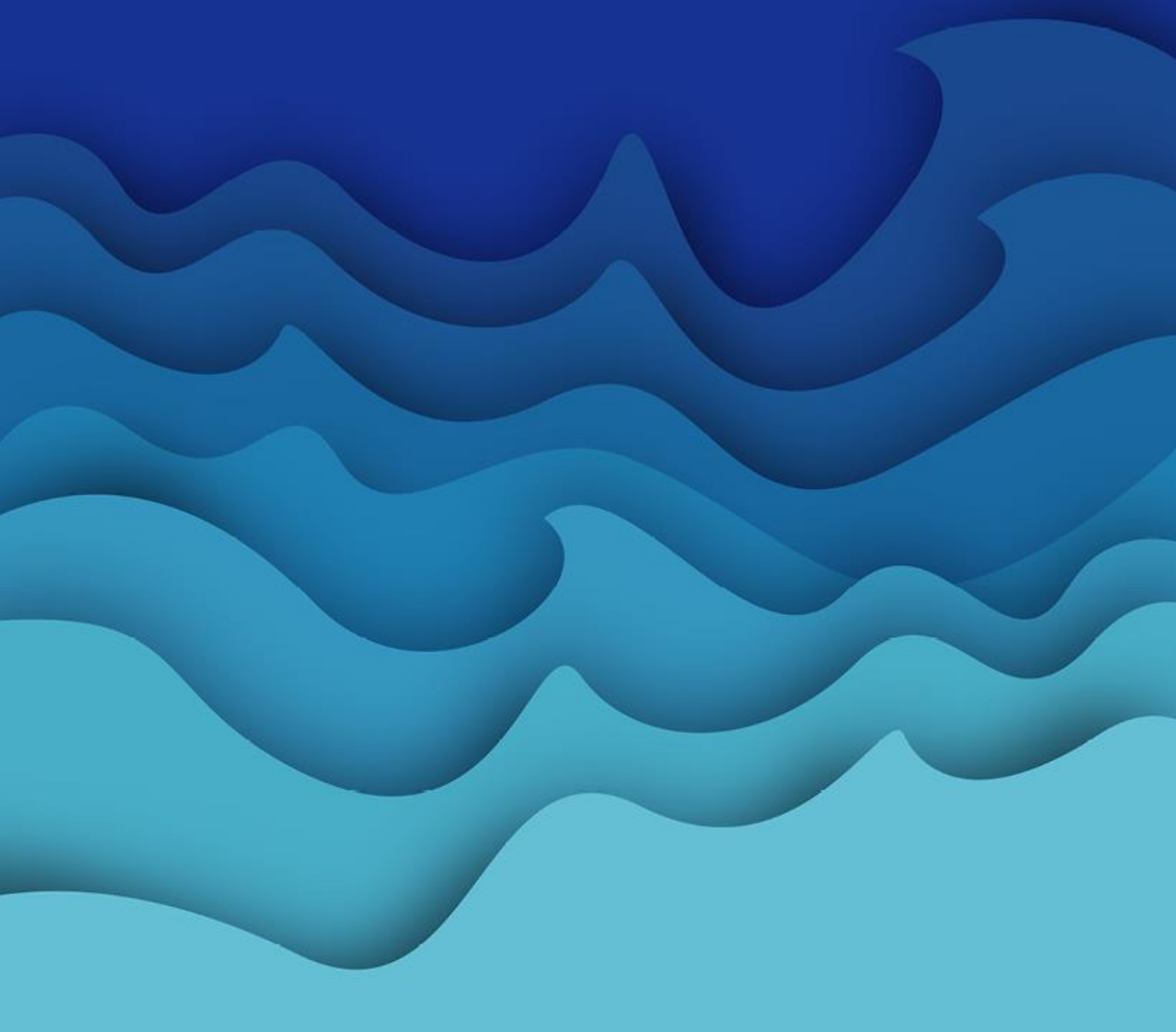
It happened in this broader context that Hungary started to openly block and veto resolutions approved by all the other member states. The own way of Orbán's government in the field of international politics has been extended from the refusal of mentioning any potential positive impacts of migration to the denial of solidarity with demonstrators for democracy in Hong Kong as well as insisting on an ultra-conservative definition of gender issues. Consequences of illiberal national rules have already reached a threshold jeopardising internal decision-making mechanisms and mutual trust within the European Union - just as this danger came to surface through the on-going institutional disputes about the lack of independence of the Polish judiciary. Now, in the case of common foreign and security policy, where qualified majority

voting has not been introduced by the Treaties, the threat of regular vetoes by an illiberal member state can even paralyse a definite appearance and concrete actions of the European Union on the international stage in the future. In general, the EU has looked for its one voice for a long time which would obviously be necessary in order to fix recent problems and parallel tensions which emerged in the transatlantic relations particularly under the Trump era. The collaboration between old partners in order to cope with the complexity of global disorder and, especially, to find joint strategies vis-à-vis the geopolitical expansionism of authoritarian China and Russia would be the essential task of the next decade.

The efforts of the US administration to bring together a broader international alliance will be salient at the virtual Summit of Democracies in December 2021. Hungary, according to the news, is the only EU member state that has not been invited to the meeting. The increasing gap between the leading big power of the Western world and the Hungarian government - which has special and provocative ties both to the Russian and Chinese ruling elites - shows how illiberal politicians like Orbán have been gradually isolated themselves from the democratic mainstream. Still, a new “Populist International” to be created by different populist right wing and extremist parties in Europe – and later globally - is not just a sensational fiction any more. Recent friendly talks between representatives of divergent political tendencies on the illiberal side of the political cleavage, first of all Marine Le Pen’s meetings with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in Brussels and with Viktor Orbán in Budapest express their desire to unite their forces to influence and change the future.

What began as a relatively insignificant national riot to a liberal European institutional system by the Hungarian government, later received a partly regional Central European character. At the moment, the joint resistance to a restored liberal world order has brought together populists from the Western and Eastern sides of the current European Union. To avoid the implementation of a worst case scenario, democrats and liberals have to insist on their basic principles against unacceptable populist claims - whilst being able to renew their political agenda and to increase/regain public support of the citizens both domestically and at global level.

The Future of the International Order



Veronica Anghel²

THE FUTURE OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: A REBOOT OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION?

Summary

One year ago, I wrote for this outlet that the US and the EU remain likeminded strategic partners but that their minds are not focused on each other. I followed with the statement that addressing the diminished strength of the transatlantic community is not a priority that will reign high on President Biden's US foreign policy agenda. President Joe Biden's first year in office confirmed ongoing transformations in the transatlantic relationship that go beyond the trials of Donald Trump's administration. It also showed that rebuilding the transatlantic community at all costs was not a priority for the Europeans either. The transatlantic relations have deteriorated significantly over the past three decades to the point that they no longer serve an overarching common purpose. For the time being it is more likely that the once special relation will remain diminished; collaborations will not be automatic, but punctual and transactional.

The fading importance of Eastern Europe from the US foreign policy agenda also continued under the Obama Administration, who had placed unprecedented importance on Asia. The focus on Asian countries is also at the center of Joe Biden's foreign policy. A strategy of simultaneous cooperation and competition towards China will continue to characterize US – EU relations, but it is unclear how any opening towards China will reconcile with these countries' pledge to uphold democratic principles as the core of their foreign policy agenda.

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Introduction

The transatlantic relations have deteriorated significantly over the past three decades to the point that they no longer serve an overarching common purpose. That deterioration means that partners can no longer achieve and maintain equilibrium because they lack clear answers to three fundamental questions: *why* does keeping the special status of the transatlantic relationship matter, *what* should partners strive to achieve, and *what* are the mechanisms to achieve those goals.

This short essay is a thought exercise that builds on the ideal answers to these questions: acting in concert is necessary when neither side can achieve its objective acting alone; the partners should strive to achieve the promotion of common standards and regulations; the mechanism to do so is through coordinated policy actions. It then suggests some reasons why these conditions for a robust partnership are not met.

I focus on the intentions of the actors involved. It is unclear whether the main actors – the United States, the European Union and key member states within the European Union - have an overarching interest to rebuild trust in a mutual understanding that collaboration has greater pay-offs than uncoordinated actions. For the time being it is more likely that the once special relation will remain diminished; collaborations will not be automatic, but punctual and transactional.

Transatlantic relations are generally defined as ‘the overall set of relations between the European Union and the United States, within the broader framework of the institutional and other connections maintained via NATO and other institutions’ (Smith 2018: 539). These relations are dense and broad ranging. Europe and the US are the most connected regions of the world in economics, security and politics (Oliver 2016; Hill, Smith, and Vanhoonacker 2017; Ilgen 2016; Peterson and Pollack 2003). That connection has been increasingly challenged by the main actors’ diverging perspectives and positions on international issues, institutions, norms and the value of the relationship itself (Riddervold & Newsome 2018). President Trump’s agenda to definitively withdraw the US from the ‘center of an open, rule-based international order’ (Zakaria 2017) made it even more obvious that the transatlantic relationship has reached a state of crisis (Ikenberry 2018; Rose 2018).

Joe Biden's election in 2020 motivated expectations of a US comeback as the leader of the free world (Gasparini 2021). Biden's success produced a generalized sigh of relief in Brussels and most other European capitals. Hopes were high that Biden will constructively engage with European partners and reinvigorate ties (Hadfield & Turner 2020; Barnes-Dacey et al. 2020). In its relation to the EU, Biden's team showed the openness we had expected to see. In his first year in office, the presidential administration brought forward a significantly more positive tone in relation to the EU and laid the diplomatic groundwork for common policy building (Brattberg 2021). But we are still to measure any tangible policy breakthroughs. Moreover, we observe increasing disharmony on important major axes of collaboration.

The outcome of the 2020 presidential elections was unlikely to bring structural changes to the transatlantic relation (Jones 2021). The Biden administration is mostly concerned with domestic politics and the political and societal rifts in American society (Fukuyama 2021). This status does not allow much focus on rebuilding a leadership position in world politics. The US continues not to possess the political consensus at home to be the 'manager' of world order abroad. This lack of consensus at home also diminishes its relative influence to partner with Europe on key issues of foreign affairs. Joe Biden became the third US president in a row, after Donald Trump and Barak Obama, who underscored the loss of US appetite to keep policing the world and be the protector of Europe in the process.³ The US foreign policy agenda will continue to be dominated by the expansion of China as a major contender on most dimensions of competition.

Acting in Concert: Why?

The first question to address when analysing the incentives behind these agents' decision making is *why* keeping the special status of the transatlantic relationship matters in the first place. Acting in concert is necessary when neither side can achieve its objective acting alone. A long - term relationship also activates principles of reciprocity: one side may not overlap in its immediate interests with what a partner aims at, but will grant support with the expectation of a reward at a later date.

³ President Obama's predecessor, president George W. Bush did not act as a supporter of European integration and exploited Europe's internal divisions to prioritize relations with those European allies who follow US policy on major issues. However, despite the intensive intra-EU disputes over the Iraq War, the US and the EU still managed to pursue effective cooperation on a number of fronts.

What are those objectives that the US cannot meet without partnering with the EU? And what are those objectives that the EU needs the US to achieve? Most importantly, is a robust transatlantic relationship necessary for that to happen or is punctual and transactional collaboration on certain dimensions enough for both sides to achieve their goals?

The answer is not straightforward, but all signs point in the direction of a case by case collaboration on most matters. The only answer that permeates agendas on *why* should transatlantic partners have a dense and coordinated collaboration appears to be their alignment in terms of democratic values. In this way, democracy promotion as a world value (McFaul 2010) becomes the main objective neither can achieve on their own. This is a resurgent concern that worked well to substantiate the transatlantic relation in the past. We see that taking place most prominently during the Cold War and immediately after the fall of the Berlin wall.

However, that may not prove to be a strong enough incentive. As the *manicheistic* model of explaining the world was replaced by the complexity of multilateralism and pluralistic views of democracy, disagreement also emerged between Europe and the United States over how, not whether, to promote democracy (Kopstein 2010). With the migration of the Republican Party further to the right of the political spectrum and the rise of Donald Trump, coupled with the wave of authoritarian leaning politicians and some segments of the population in Europe and the US, not everyone is still in agreement that democracy promotion is part and parcel of the transatlantic community's reasons for existence. One foremost reason is that there is no longer a clear consensus about what democracy should look like. As a consequence, this sole overarching objective is not likely to be strong enough.

In fact, in most cases meeting needs requires more punctual and transactional strategies. Let's take the economy. Both sides are self-interested in their economies to thrive. Together, the EU and the US economies account for about half of world GDP and for nearly a third of world trade flows. Each is highly sensitive to economic instability in the others financial markets and economic systems. Each is the other's main source and destination of foreign direct investment. Having a common transatlantic approach to trade and the economic issues facing the United States and the EU sounds imperative. That end state has not been achieved so far. Trade disputes and trade barriers - such as tariffs – are still working against the creation of a coordinated transatlantic economy.

At the same time, economic incentives increasingly connect both the EU and the US to China. In 2020, China took over as the EU's main trading partner in goods from the US, with an overall

share of 16.1% compared with 15.2% for the US. The US remains EU's main trading partner in services (European Commission 2021). China is the US's third main trading partner for goods after Mexico and Canada, accounting for 13.8% of trade share, and is likely to return as the United States' top trade partner, a position it held for three years before slipping behind Mexico (Roberts 2020). We can expect the complexities of diverging interests in the Chinese market to stall automatic collaboration between the US and the EU on key issues such as fair trade, tariffs, supply chain independence and openness to Chinese investments.

An example of fragile reciprocity can most easily be found in the fragmented defense interests within NATO. As in most other matters, and despite the equality that NATO formally offers its members, the EU and the US do not start negotiations on what constitutes a threat from an equal footing. The US remains the main guarantor of European military security. But US commitment to Europe has changed once Russia was no longer perceived as a significant threat to US territory; for parts of Europe, Russia comes much closer to an existential threat. As Iran elevated its position among security threats for the US, Europeans increasingly questioned the fundamental structure of the alliance and the nuclear guarantee offered by the United States (Jones 2011). The EU followed US's lead in dealing with Iran, but was reluctant to do so once the direction of that collaboration changed under President Trump.

Europeans would be right to expect a pay off in supporting these actions – much like in the case of the European coalition backing up the Iraqi invasion. For some, particularly the countries of the East, that reward circles back to those defense guarantees against Russia. Given Russia's attack on Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and overall revanchism, securing the EU's eastern border reclaimed NATO's attention to the EU's Eastern border for a few years (Anghel 2020). But Americans showed greater lenience and disengagement towards ongoing Russian aggression after initial heated reactions. The absence of strong support against Russia and the politics of Vladimir Putin amplified the security concerns of Europeans and led them to question the principles of reciprocity that underscore the transatlantic relation.

The rise of China as a military power in the Pacific is only the most recent point of division. A strategic security agreement signed by the US, UK and Australia led to a diplomatic row between Washington and Paris. The signed agreement replaced a \$90 billion submarine deal with French-owned Naval Group for 12 diesel-electric powered submarines to acquire eight nuclear-powered submarines produced by the US or the UK. The agreement underscored US determination to elevate the importance of allies in the Pacific in its defense strategy.

They secured this goal behind closed doors, thus limiting potential push-back. This success came at the expense of transparency towards their European allies.

The two-fold conversation about reasons for an all-encompassing collaboration vs. punctual action circles back to our initial question: is there a reason for the transatlantic relations to remain special? The rise of China as an economic model with ideological lure motivates tighter collaboration when it comes to value promotion, but challenges the US and the EU in building common economic and military goals. How to deal with China is one example. Other examples for which similar exercises can be performed are climate change or the geopolitics of technology.

Common standards and regulation: what to do?

What transatlantic partners could promote under the umbrella of democracy is limitless. That approach is wide enough to allow consensus, but it leaves room for ambiguity and creates a vast terrain of uncertainty. Since president Biden's inauguration, both sides agreed on a functionalist approach to democracy and see the promotion of democracy as the key to solving the pressing problems of European and American societies and the standing of these values in the world.

President Biden stated that 'the challenge of our time is to demonstrate that democracies can deliver by improving the lives of their own people and by addressing the greatest problems facing the wider world' (White House 2021). The same press release follows to say that President Biden reinvigorated democracy at home by 'vaccinating 70% of population, passing the American Rescue plan, and advancing bipartisan legislation to invest in our infrastructure and competitiveness.' (White House 2021) That may well deliver quality of governance, but these are not sufficient conditions for democracy to thrive. Věra Jourová, vice-president for values and transparency at the European Commission, declared that there is plenty of work [to do] on both sides of the Atlantic to **convince the people that democracy can deliver a reasonably good life**' (Malloy 2021). Such rhetoric sends strong signals of support for leaders and politicians who support democratic values throughout European capitals. However, democracy is a necessary but insufficient condition to improve inequalities in European and American societies, to deliver climate change policy, and to manage the disruption created by digitalization and new technologies.

A democratic consensus between the transatlantic partners will inform action, but the main elements of democracy are neither self-explanatory nor self-regulating. It is not clear, however, whether everyone agrees on what democracy means. One of its main tools, liberalism, continues to create confusion. This will lead to problems in agreeing to what it means, for example, to rally the world ‘to stand up against human rights abuses’ (White House 2021). It is also unclear whether such interests exist in practice. The withdrawal of American forces and support from Afghanistan sparked a new sense of double standards. While the US no longer wanted to deal with upholding human rights in Afghanistan, the EU does not want to deal with the rights of a potential new wave of Afghani migrants at home.

It is also unclear whether the partners agree on the prioritization of the rule of law as a precondition in the selection of allies and partners. A successful Biden mandate to deliver on rule of law pledges would include advancing democratic processes in the transatlantic community, including Eastern Europe. For the time being the EU is alone in fighting off challengers who are in power in its Eastern half (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia), and currently in the opposition in countries such as France or Italy. The EU may have recuperated its US ally in support of the rule of law, but the brunt of dealing with authoritarian leaning leaders is still on Brussels. The US maintains an important transactional relation for defense purposes with the countries of the East.

Climate change and Tech Regulation

Building common standards on fighting climate change policy may be the most likely area of collaboration at this point. Joe *Biden* took action to reintegrate the US in the *Paris climate* agreement in a matter of hours after being sworn in as president. This action reinforced his campaign pledges to stop the advance of climate change. However, this is not an easy task. At the June 2021 G7 meeting, the U.S. did not support EU attempts to set an end date for coal use and secured the use of vaguer language in the summit’s statement (G7 2021). The EU had to agree. “No specific date could be named, that was not our doing,” German Chancellor Angela Merkel was quoted saying (Mathiesen 2021).

Another point that unites partners may be carbon pricing. But achieving common standards is far into the future. The EU aims to make polluters pay for greenhouse gas emissions; Biden

also hiked the cost of carbon. The rate the Biden administration proposed in February 2021 - \$51 per ton of carbon dioxide - is seven times higher than that used by former president Donald Trump's administration, and go even higher. Yet when it comes to the \$3.5 trillion tax-and-spending bill that could reshape the US energy system, Biden depends on a divided Congress. Opposition from those politicians coming from coal extraction depended regions within the Democratic Party itself could force the party to make significant cuts to the package's climate provisions.

The EU also established itself as the main regulatory superpower in the digital space. This is at odds with what United States model that supports rapid innovation with less regulation of digitalization and technologies. Nevertheless, the US and the EU aim to build a framework of norms and values that will guide the development of a what resident Ursula **von der Leyen** and President Joe Biden referred to as a 'value – based global digital transformation' during the US – EU Summit in Brussels (June 2021).

Policy goals: *How to do it?*

Deciding *how* to act in concert as a force for democracy promotion to achieve common standards and regulations is the most difficult part. The two sides are collaborating again and are rhetorically much closer. There are some mechanisms the Biden administration and the EU aim to develop to meet some of the goals on their common agenda. The organization of topical joint summits to plan towards a common agenda is underway. But the road from planning to set the agenda, to setting the agenda, to upholding it is not automatic or straightforward.

How will the goal of transatlantic security be achieved? One of the main pillars of transatlantic collaboration is the security architecture of NATO. Fear that the US might renege on its NATO Art. 5 commitments was evident under Trump. That is no longer the case. However, the US challenged the importance of working together with their European allies in organizing the withdrawal from Afghanistan (September 2021) and prioritized immediate success over transparency in setting up the AUKUS agreement to the surprise of Europeans. To many, such moves reconfirmed the need for Europe to invest more in building their own defense structures. This would not necessarily mean partners would not act in concert under NATO commitments, but Europeans are developing some new mechanisms without a clear understanding of how these would be connected to NATO strategies.

Since the release of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003, Europe attempted to forge its own path without automatically following America's lead on issues such as multilateralism and the use of military force (Smith 2018). The European Global Strategy (EUGS) called for an end-state of 'strategic autonomy' (European External Action Service 2016). Nowadays, the buzzword is 'open strategic autonomy' (see Timmers 2021). European Commission defines this as a strategy meant to shape 'the new system of global economic governance and developing mutually beneficial bilateral relations, while protecting ourselves from unfair and abusive practice' (European Commission 2021: 1). In its 2021 Strategic Foresight Report, the European Commission has announced a 'long-term and cross-cutting perspective on strengthening Europe's [open] strategic autonomy'. The EU is also developing a Strategic Compass for security and defense, to be ready by March 2022. This Strategic Compass should contribute to a common EU view on threats and risks for security and defense. The path to any type of military autonomy is particularly long for Europeans. From the perspective of a robust transatlantic relation, having in mind the integration of new collaboration mechanisms within the NATO umbrella matters.

How will democracy, climate change mitigation and technology regulation goals be achieved? Such answers should now be in the making and will be presented at dedicated summits. During the EU – US Summit of June 2021, the two sides pledged to work much more closely in a High-Level Climate Action Group. A Trade and Technology Council (TTC) will be underway in late September 2021 in Pittsburg. President Biden will convene a Leaders' Summit for Democracy in December. These meetings should develop a more unified approach to limit the growing market power of Big Tech companies, achieve common regulations to reduce intensified climate change, push back against authoritarian trends in world governance. Whether these meetings will become a common point on the US – EU yearly agenda matters for their success. Such occasions allow (and constrain) diplomats and experts involved to think about joint plans, and bargain. Nevertheless, how ambitious leaders are in setting their goals influences how seriously experts are likely to take these forums.

Conclusion

The only uniquely transatlantic overarching goal is democracy promotion. For this to happen, collaboration between partners should be constant and robust. It should also be understood as eternal; there is no end state in democracy building. In some situations, transatlantic partners need each other explicitly to achieve their goals – the EU needs the US for the military security it provides through NATO arrangements. The US needs the EU for the legitimacy and credibility of a multilateral dimension to policy, which allows the US to undertake the complex mission of counteracting the rise of alternative anti-democratic ideologies, most prominently from China. Yet collaborations do not follow automatically and they would require continuous strategies of collaboration. Those strategies are in the making; that means they are still fragile.

So far, Biden's presidency confirmed that there are independent global processes with long running implications in the future that go beyond the collective intentions and interests of the transatlantic partners. This is where there is room for collaboration. Across the Atlantic, few of those processes are handled jointly, but some have taken center stage. Leaders are now in rhetorical agreement that democracy promotion, collaboration within NATO, climate change mitigation, and regulation of digital technologies should feature prominently on the transatlantic policy agenda.

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Roland Freudenstein⁴

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS, VALUES AND GREAT POWER POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Central Europe, if you define it as more or less the Visegrad Group of Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary, hasn't contained any great power itself since the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. It's been a battleground, however, metaphorically and during WW II quite literally, between other powers all the time since then. During the Cold War, any kind of agency for the countries of Central Europe was gone, and the one superpower controlling – de facto, occupying – the region was the Soviet Union while the other superpower, and its allies in Western Europe, were the seemingly unreachable reference point for the hopes of democrats there.

Once the Cold War ended and the Iron Curtain came down, the possibility of regaining agency seemed to go along with the end of power politics for good. Reintegrating with the West looked irreversible. For the first two decades after 1989, a Europe whole, free and at peace, secured through the two decisive Euroatlantic institutions, EU and NATO, paved the way for Central Europe's phenomenal economic growth and apparent firm anchoring in liberal democracy. Classical power politics seemed absent now from Central Europe.

Fast forward to the second decade of the 21st century, and the third of the hard-won freedom of Central Europe, and enter the global economic crisis, a resurgent Russian imperialism, the migration crisis, the growth of populism across the EU, the rise of a more aggressive China, the COVID-19 pandemic while, in Hungary and then Poland, illiberalism established itself as a purported systemic alternative to liberal democracy: a split opened up in the West itself. It dawned on at least on some in the West that democracy was now facing an existential global

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challenge by authoritarianism, internally as well as by external powers. And Central Europe was caught right in the middle of it.

I will tackle the question of big power politics in Central Europe in five steps: First, asking how exactly the patterns of power and politics have shifted in the generation since the end of the Cold War. Second, describing the threat of external powers to democracy and EU cohesion – focusing on Russia under Putin and China under Xi Jinping. Third, analysing illiberal ‘small power politics’ in the EU. Fourth, charting a roadmap for Central Europe as an integral part of the EU and for the EU to navigate the years ahead with the goal of saving democracy. And fifth, describing how a solid and vibrant Transatlantic relationship is a precondition for the survival of liberal democracy.

1. What politics? What power?

From the End of History to permanent crisis mode

The first observation concerns the nature and content of politics: The end of the Cold War now being more than a generation ago, it is worthwhile to take a step back and look at the whole picture: What was the Cold War all about? More specifically, what did the ‘dissidents’, the anti-communist opposition movements in the Warsaw Pact countries of Central and Eastern Europe, stand and fight for? For which essential goal did they risk their personal liberty and often enough their lives?

Documents from the 1970s and 1980s give a clear answer: The Prague Charter 77 – in the language of the era – advocated liberal democracy and the rule of law (Charter 77 1977). Poland’s first democratic Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, declared in the Sejm 24 September 1989 that the rule of law and the recognition of human and civic rights, as well as small government in order to guarantee maximal creativity of individual citizens, were now the priority (Wystąpienie 2013). The founding declaration of the Visegrad Group of 1991 said the same (Visegrad Declaration 1991).

The second observation refers to the character of power. If power is the ability to bring others to do something they originally did not intend to do, which traditionally worked via military or economic coercion, then soft power (according to Joseph S. Nye, Nye 2004) is the ability to do so by means of incentives, cultural attraction, influence etc.. Describing the new

authoritarians in Beijing and Moscow during the second decade of the 21st century, the term ‘sharp power’ (Cardenal et al. 2017) was coined, signifying an approach in between the classical distinction into hard and soft: an approach where both coercion and incentivisation were intricately combined but mostly hidden – in corruption, elite capture, media control and disinformation, to name but the most important instruments.

For 2 decades, Central Europe looked like it had collectively and irreversibly chosen the West and liberal democracy as its model of political and economic development. In the classical military sense, the security question of Central Europe has been answered. But it turned out that insecurity now came from a different direction: External powers, first and foremost Russia and China, whose ability to play power games in Central Europe was facilitated by an internal authoritarian threat. Often, hostile influence from those powers led to security threats which NATO and EU membership do not, or not sufficiently, address. This is also because they used innovative methods to achieve their goals: The ‘end of history’ gave way to systemic rivalry, and the dominance of soft power over hard power in Europe was replaced by the use of sharp power by external actors and the development of ‘illiberal democracy’ by authoritarians in Central Europe.

2. The new battleground for Russia and China

After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the military withdrawals of the 1990s, Russia grudgingly agreed – actually, had to agree – to Central Europe joining NATO and the EU. That does not mean that networks and business ties equally disappeared, quite the contrary. As Russian foreign policy turned gradually more aggressive under Vladimir Putin and after 2005, Kremlin attempts to (re-)gain ground in Central Europe also intensified.

There is by now a rich literature about Russian influence in Central Europe. Especially after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and military aggression in Eastern Ukraine, Russia has used this influence to undermine the stability of democracy in the EU, and particularly in Central Europe, by sharp power methods such as elite capture, the support of extremist political parties, strategic corruption, disinformation and other tools. The Kremlin’s rationale is clearly based on the idea that the very existence of successful democracies with the rule of law and functioning market economies in the neighbourhood are a direct threat to the kleptocratic authoritarianism that has

developed under Putin in Russia (Freudenstein 2014). That is why weakening democracy in the V-4 and, if possible, teaming up with illiberals such as Viktor Orbán, are such important elements of the Kremlin's foreign strategy.

The most extreme case of Russian influence in Central Europe, and the one with the most obvious collusion by the ruling party Fidesz, is indeed Hungary (Klingová, Milo 2017). This concerns energy dependency from nuclear cooperation in Paks II to the dramatic growth of Russian gas exports in recent years (Szabó 2021). It concerns aiding and abetting Kremlin strategic corruption through admitting Russia's International Investment Bank (IIB) in Budapest and refusing to cooperate with US law enforcement against Kremlin stooges. Add to this the weakening of Ukraine in its struggle against Russian aggression (purportedly defending minority rights for ethnic Hungarian Ukrainians) and very limited V-4 solidarity with Czechia in the response to Russia's Vrbětice terror acts coming to light, and a toxic relationship to Russia is obvious (Vaski 2021). Poland is rather resilient to Russian influence for obvious historical reasons, but in Czechia and Slovakia_(Mesežnikov 2020), there have been some Russian successes recently, including the vaccination diplomacy in the COVID-19 pandemic.

China's case in Central Europe is different from Russia's, although in recent years, Chinese propaganda and disinformation has copied some Russian techniques (Janda, Kraemer 2020). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), for three decades after 1982, seemed to slowly open up the country, and – while intensifying international trade and cooperation – gradually allow for more pluralism. Then came the global economic crisis of 2008 and the ascent to power of Xi Jinping as party leader in 2012 and President of China in 2013. He very quickly dispersed all hopes of a further opening. Domestic crackdowns on freedom of opinion were followed by a more and more aggressive foreign policy. But the spectacular economic growth continued at annual rates of 6-8 % while, in the CCP's eyes, the West went into irreversible decline. In Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative of massive transport and infrastructure investments, Central Europe already played an important role.

China's trade and investment volumes with Central Europe may still be low, compared to Western EU member states. But what makes Central Europe attractive to the CCP is its higher vulnerability to sharp power in comparison to Western Europe and the potential to split the EU by having a separate political dialogue with one part – the one that belongs to the '16+1 Group'⁵

⁵ After the exit of Lithuania on 23 May 2021.

of mostly former communist countries in the EU and the Western Balkans. While Poland under PiS initially saw stronger cooperation with China and more Chinese investment as a tool to ‘counterbalance’ Brussels and Berlin, the increasingly sharp and increasingly public rivalry between China and the US under President Trump has brought Poland recently into the camp of the CCP critics among the EU member states. But Hungary remains committed to close cooperation with the CCP, to the point of repeatedly vetoing EU Council resolutions condemning China’s crackdown in Hong Kong. There are many other examples, such as the classification of all details about the Chinese-built (and partly Chinese-financed) Belgrade-Budapest railway_(Brînză 2020), or granting the CCP-controlled Fudan University a big new campus in Budapest while the liberal Central European University (CEU) had to largely leave town in 2018.

Besides Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia have also been targets of Chinese influence operations but to a much lesser degree. In Czechia, there has been considerable pushback against CCP blackmail (Huang 2020), although President Zeman continues to be an excellent example of both Chinese and Russian elite capture (McLaughlin 2019).

Ultimately, big power politics in Central Europe is a part of the global struggle of ideas: The conflict between democracy and authoritarianism which is likely to mark the decades ahead. Fortunately, after the Trump years, this idea has been closely embraced by the Biden administration. Contrary to the old administration which was generally withdrawing from the idea of using power to promote values, the new US government has already made it clear that it not only sees global democracy support as a formidable task, but has also criticized the governments in Warsaw and Budapest for weakening liberal democracy and undermining the rule of law (Biden 2020, cf. also point 5 below).

3. Small power politics

Of course, the very concept of illiberalism in Hungary (Bíró-Nagy 2017) has significantly contributed both to the weakening of the rule of law but also to the vulnerability of the region to hostile big power influence. One element of Viktor Orbán’s illiberalism is the attempt to transform the V-4 cooperation into a firm subgroup within the EU with an ideological spin. The Visegrad Group dates from the early 1990s when it served as first a mechanism to

coordinate and manage the burying of the Warsaw Pact, and then enhance coordination and avoid competition in joining EU and NATO while taking practical steps in day-to-day political, economic and cultural cooperation. It was Viktor Orbán who tried to give the V-4 an illiberal ideological superstructure in the migration crisis of 2015 and especially after the election victory of Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland that year.

Nevertheless, while the governments of Poland and Hungary could agree on migration policy in 2016 (Joint Declaration 2016), railing against Brussels' interference on rule of law and waging the current culture war against political correctness and LGBTQI rights, they have always been at opposite ends when it comes to Russia and Ukraine policy. It is likely that this will also concern China which is becoming not only more important to all EU member states but also a topic of more and more 'domestic' relevance. Czechia and Slovakia have, in the past 6 years, not only differed in varying degrees from Hungary's Eastern policy, but their elites and public opinions share Orbán's ideology only in a few points, if at all.

Slovakia, for example, has a deeply ingrained political tradition of constructive engagement with the EU institutions and general belief in a strong EU with elements of supranationalism being positive for Slovakia's national interest. This latter Hungarian-Slovak difference is also the backdrop to the recent controversy between Viktor Orbán (Orbán 2021a), who advocates the V-4 to become a strategic counterweight to France and Germany in the EU (Orbán 2021b) and Slovak former Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda who argues for a much more constructive and cooperative definition of the Visegrad Group inside the EU (Csekő 2021).

To construct the V-4 as an ideologically charged illiberal societal alternative to Western Europe, and as a counterweight to Germany and France, will actually backfire because it weakens the cohesion of the EU as a whole. Moreover, the tendency in Poland and especially Hungary, to wage regular campaigns against 'Brussels', if followed by a larger number of member states, could easily bring the EU to collapse. If everyone behaved like Viktor Orbán with his national consultations and referenda, EU integration would come to a grinding halt. In the sense of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, the majority of member states and the EU institutions have to develop strategies against the small power politics that leads to a weakening of the Union and successes to big power hostile influence in the EU.

4. Power, values and a strategy

So far, we have discussed the development and the effects of external and internal threats (and their mutual interaction) to the EU and its founding values. In the final part of this text, I will discuss the proper pushback.

First of all, the seriousness of the threat of big power hostile influence, especially in Central Europe, to the EU as a whole needs to be recognised. Most importantly, Russian and Chinese sharp power must be countered by a plethora of strategies by the EU and its member states, always encompassing EU institutions, national governments and/or civil society (Freudenstein 2021). Elite capture must be exposed, energy dependence reduced, direct investment screened, money laundering prevented and disinformation debunked. The EU will also have to ‘learn the language of hard power’, both by increasing its own military capabilities and improving sanction mechanisms but also by reinforcing cooperation with NATO, and particularly security cooperation with Britain after Brexit.

At the same time, the EU needs to better enforce its fundamental values, democracy and the rule of law, on the inside. This will not be possible overnight, but increasing the cost for undermining those values must become a major function of the EU institutions, and a worthwhile goal of the majority of member states. The rule of law mechanism in the instruments of financial solidarity introduced in 2020, while maybe not the final answer, is already of great importance.

The EU cannot become a global player and support international norms (i.e. ‘export stability’) without internal enforcement of values. It does not matter whether the weakening of the values is caused or promoted more by internal or external factors: It is the undermining of checks and balances in cases such as Hungary and Poland and a group of other member states which has disastrous effects on the Union as a whole.

In a nutshell: In order to ban hostile power politics from Central Europe, Central Europe has to reject power politics within the EU. In order to become resilient to hostile big power influence, the European Union has to become a normative power both inside and in the neighbourhood. In order to effectively become a normative power in the neighbourhood, the EU has to develop its power beyond soft power, and develop hard power tools.

5. The Transatlantic Component

Strengthening the EU to such an extent and in such a way that it is able to ward off authoritarian threats from inside as well as outside presupposes a strong Transatlantic relationship. That includes a strong NATO, but it goes far beyond that. The economic and technological dimensions are equally important, with Transatlantic trade and investment still the most voluminous intercontinental relationship, great potential in jointly achieving greater autonomy in supply chains for IT, pharma and other essential products, and – last but by no means least – the necessity of developing a joint approach vis-à-vis China.

A functioning and vibrant Transatlantic relationship is therefore the best guarantee against hostile great power influence in Europe, especially Central Europe where (maybe with the exception of Hungary) the voice of the US Government still carries a lot of weight. It is a necessary component of a Europe militarily, technologically and economically resilient against authoritarian threats. But it also serves to strengthen liberal democracy against its internal challenges. Identitarian politics and nationalist nativism is a problem not only in the EU, but – just looking at the last five years in US politics and the trajectory of the Republican Party – also in the United States. To make Europe a more responsible partner within the Alliance will also help preventing the worst isolationist tendencies in America. Some of those tendencies even exist in the Democratic Party, as the Afghanistan debacle has shown. But a decisive precondition for a more responsible Europe, which is also recognised across the Atlantic, is higher defence spending, more political will to engage militarily outside Europe, better military capabilities, more decisiveness in pushing back against Russian and Chinese influence and a higher willingness to compromise with the US on economics and technology.

To sum it up: Transatlantic relations are based on values, most of all on liberal democracy. Transatlantic relations are therefore important in upholding liberal democracy within the EU. In order to preserve the Transatlantic alliance, Europeans will have to both strengthen their focus on values and increase their hard power capabilities.

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Thibault Muzergues⁶

THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER, AND EUROPE'S PLACE IN IT

In his course on the origins of war, one of Yale's most popular courses during a quarter century, the late historian Donald Kagan constantly reminded his students that "International balances can never be still, and it is a folly of statesmanship to assume that they ever could be" (Kagan, 1996: p.568). At the time in which Kagan's course was turned into a best-selling book, his argument was running counter to Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* (1992), which hinted that with the end of mankind's ideological evolution, the international system could stabilize into a rules-based international order. If the United States somehow turned their back on this idea after 9/11, after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and following the rise of China, it seems that Europeans were much slower in accepting this reality – even when it kicked in in the early 2010s. After feigning ignorance, the second reflex of European elites was to look inwards and try to isolate themselves from a world that had become more dangerous. Not unsurprisingly, the result of this phase of introspection has been a weakening of European capacities. As a result, the threats have become more numerous, but they have also moved closer to Europe. In this sense, it is right to say that, while in the mid-2000s the European Union was seen as exporter of stability, it now seems to have become an importer of instability.

It is certain that the world has changed over the past decade, and not to Europe's advantage. The 2008 financial crisis, even though it was perceived in Berlin, Paris and other European places as primordially an American crisis, was in fact a Transatlantic one (Tooze, 2018: p.5), and it weakened Europe as much as it divided it between North and South, East and West, Center and peripheries. And while Southern Europe struggled in the first half of the 2010s with slow growth and debt crises, the other side of the Mediterranean provided more challenges, as

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the Arab spring of 2010-2011 was followed by an Arab winter, with in some cases a return to dictatorship (as in Egypt) and others chaos and civil war (in Libya and Syria notably). The latter in turn combined with longer-term factors to cause the migration crisis of 2015, which durably marked European societies and allowed a further rise of populist parties challenging the European Union's internal order.

If the 2010s have marked a *decennium horribilis* for Europe, how does this translate into its place in the international order? This paper will try to provide an answer to this question. Europe will seldom feature in the first paragraphs of this discussion, which will look at the changing global balance of powers between regions of the world, before focusing on the rise of the US-China rivalry and its consequences for the global order, but also the importance of regional actors in shaping the reality on the ground. In the rather fluid environment that tomorrow's world order (or disorder) promises to provide, Europeans find themselves poorly equipped, and for some of them still in denial over the realities of the dangers facing us. It is thus urgent for the EU to work first on its internal coherence, its collective security system and its cohesion if it is to face this brave new world.

The “Rise of the Rest”

One of the most profound and consequential changes to have happened over the past quarter century is the fundamental shift in the global equilibrium of economic power, much to the benefit of Asia and to the detriment of Europe. This is a development that Europeans themselves have found difficult to integrate in their vision of the World: that of a planet that has become somehow less Western, and certainly much less European.

Europeans could be forgiven to have believed, at least for a while, that the world would continue to revolve around them, or at least around a West of which they are part. After all, the ascent of Europe in the 15th Century led to an almost exclusive global domination of Europeans who with “their colonists ruled 84% of the land and 100% of the sea” by 1914 (Morris, 2014: p.168). If Europe was the political and economic center of the World by then, things had already started to move, and the period 1914-1945 not only marked the long suicide of Europe, but also a fundamental shift of economic and political predominance across the Atlantic.

Europe, however, remained an economic center, and its declining significance was somehow relativized by the Cold War, for which Europe was the big prize, and the dynamism of economic and cultural exchanges across the Atlantic, with the West's victory in the Cold War and the re-unification of Europe feeding the narrative that it remained an important region on the World stage.

After the Cold War, this narrative started to unravel, first in an imperceptible way, before accelerating after 2008. From an economic perspective, the rise of Japan and the Asian Tigers in the 1960s and 1970s had already altered the geography of economic exchanges. After the Cold War, with the rise of China and its 1.4 billion consumer market in East Asia, it soon became obvious that the future of World Growth would not have the Atlantic, but the Pacific at its center. This has led to mixed blessings for the United States, whose extensive West (read Pacific) Coast has hosted some of the most remarkable economic success stories over the past decades (Nike in Oregon, Boeing and Amazon in Washington state, and of course the other GAFAM and the Silicon Valley in California), but whose working class has also paid a high price for China's social dumping in the 1990s and 2000s. But for Europe, this has mostly meant marginalization: even though some large companies (mostly in the car-making and luxury industry) managed to catch some of the Chinese and East Asian growth in the 2000s and 2010s by selling their high added-value products into their markets, goods have more often flowed in the other direction, putting European non-skilled jobs under further pressure and reversing commercial balances – the feeling of social insecurity this has produced continues to be felt to this day.

To be sure, the result has not been an absolute impoverishment or decline, as Europe has generally continued to grow over the past 20 years, but that growth has been much slower than in North America or East Asia, and the new social imbalances this state of things have produced have in turn had consequences for the cohesion of European societies (and, down the road, their politics). The feeling of personal and collective insecurity, even decline has much to do with the rise of populism and the polarized politics that further weaken European political systems to this day.

This of course does not mean that Europe has ceased to be rich. As Angela Merkel often reminded her compatriots during her term as Chancellor, Europe may represent only 7% of the World's population, but still around 25% of its GDP (although a bit less now). Only, Europe's global place in the world has become much more marginal, as its share of the World's GDP continues to decrease. This is mostly due to the "Rise of the Rest" (Zakaria, 2011), i.e. non-Western economies catching up (and in some cases already overtaking) European economies. This may have looked insignificant to those in the 2000s who believed that this would have no cultural or political implications, as most of these non-Western countries adopted many practices of the West to catch up with it, but it became evident in the 2010s that this was not going to be the case: as many countries caught up with the West, they logically considered that they no longer had any lessons to take from Westerners, and started to promote their own way of development, may that development be political or economic. As these new (or, more often, resurgent) powers asserted themselves on the World stage, they rejected more openly Western visions that they now consider decadent, after having learnt what they had to from them.

Towards a US-China rivalry

In this regard, 2008 was a key date, as the financial crisis and the Great Recession that followed were read in Beijing, Moscow and other capitals as the sign that the West was now in terminal decline. The spectacular rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) in the 2000s, which meant double-digit growth-numbers in China and led to re-armament efforts by Russia among other things, signaled that the 21st Century might not be an American Century after all (let alone a European one).

The narrative developed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ever since has been that China's time has come to take over the destinies of the World, after a century of humiliation and a half-century of reconstruction under CCP rule. What started as an argument seen mostly in the Chinese press to boost the legitimacy of the regime and project a long-term vision for China's future has since become a much more assertive policy under the leadership of Xi Jinping, whose tenure started in 2012. For a number of reasons, Xi decided to break with the policy of silent and "Peaceful Rise" of his predecessors to become more assertive on the global

stage. From now on, the World would have to count on China at every corner, for it had become a global power, and Beijing made clear it was about to contest America's position as a global leader.

As often when the hubris of a rising power meets the doubts of a soul-searching hegemon, China's rise and public display of intention to overtake the United States as the World's number one set both powers on a collision course (Allison, 2017). The initial reaction in Washington was to stick to the global framework of America's global strategy but to shift resources and attention away from the Middle East and Europe towards East Asia. This was the famed "Pivot to Asia" of the Obama years, which already preoccupied European chancelleries as it meant a further peripheralization of Europe. In 2016, however, US strategy became much more assertive, and the pushback against China became a much clearer confrontation between the two superpowers now understood by most experts to dominate the first half of the twenty-first century – that Europe became further marginalized in the process is a simple fact. As the Trump administration settled in, US policy towards China became much more openly confrontational, with tariffs and economic sanctions imposed on numerous goods and companies, while 5G (among others) and the obtention of installation contracts for Huawei or other companies became a major battleground in the US-China rivalry. In these confrontations, Europeans sometimes found themselves at the heart of the battlefield, notably (but not only) over Huawei's plans to build European 5G networks. In this sense, Europeans' incapacity to see that they were defined as part of the West by China (and therefore as part of those who were already losing and would have to submit to China's ascendancy) further weakened their capacity to exist – in situations where decisive decision-making was required, Europeans' behavior irritated allies before they disappointed their challengers.

Contrary to what some Europeans had hoped, the change of administration following the 2020 US presidential election did not alter the parameters of the relationship, with very tense discussions between senior diplomats in Anchorage, Alaska in March 2021 setting the tone of the future of the relationship under the Biden administration. After four years of tensions, the obviously challenging behavior of China and the COVID-19 crisis finished to convince the last hesitations in the US over China's intentions. With a consensus in Washington over the threat represented by China and a Chinese foreign policy dictated by national pride and the CCP, both

countries are now locked into a long-term confrontation that may usher into war, or may also be played out in the long-term through diplomatic, non-military means or proxy wars (which may be of direct concern to Europe, because its new peripheral position now means that great power competition can play itself out in the open in the Old Continent).

Whether the United States and China fall into Thucydides's trap or escape from it and alternate between periods of détente and cold wars (much as the US-Soviet rivalry in the second half of the Twentieth Century), world politics will be largely defined by the Sino-American duumvirate, as the two countries will likely have to talk to each other to face common global challenges (terrorism, climate change and its consequences, etc.) and confront each other over other issues (trade, technology, Taiwan, etc.). The diarchy will certainly not be perfect, as there are other poles of attraction in the World (India, Russia, etc.), but the relationship between the US and China will to a large extent dominate world affairs, thereby marginalizing other actors and issues – including Europeans and their priorities. The Osaka G20 meeting of June 2019, which turned mainly into a G2 between the two world powers, was very telling in that the discussions that mattered mostly took place between Xi Jinping and Donald Trump at bilateral level, leaving little space for other leaders to weigh in. In this context, the Europeans, whose penchant for multilateralism is well-known, find themselves frustrated because they have become marginalized in the very format that they thought would continue to guarantee them some say in the future of the World.

Imperfect polarity

Europeans might console themselves with the fact that not all World politics will be defined by the relationship between the United States and China. True, much like during the Cold War, some regional issues and conflicts will be analyzed through the lens of the Sino-American rivalry, and will therefore draw both powers to get involved. But the world in 2020 is much different from that in 1970, and third powers will likely have much more autonomy than 20 years ago, as there are many more regional powers nowadays setting the agenda in their own vicinity. India may have operated a spectacular rapprochement with the United States (and some other Western powers) over the past few years as Delhi's worries have grown over China's

assertiveness in its neighborhood, but it is unlikely to entangle itself into a full-fledge alliance in the way Western Europe did in the Cold War, for historical and cultural reasons. While India has purchased Rafale airplanes from France, it also relies for a large part on Russia for much of its military equipment (including its anti-aircraft defense), and this is unlikely to change in the future – this might be taken as duplicity in some quarters, but it is reflective of the fluidity of world politics. In a similar way, Russia’s much more assertive alignment with China should not be seen as a definitive entanglement: true, Moscow and Beijing are currently closely co-operating (in fact, much more closely than the United States and India), and both have a specific interest to weaken the West, but that does not mean that the Kremlin is not weary of China’s growth at its Siberian border, or Chinese in-roads in Central Asia, which threaten what it sees as its own sphere of influence. Without thinking of a reversal of alliance, which will not happen any time in the near future, the relationships between the different regional poles and the global magnets that are the United States and China will be much more fluid than they were during the Cold War.

Fluidity is also a definer of regional politics in the Middle East. Traditional allies of the West, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel, have recently shown that their allegiances should not be taken for granted – and that they were certainly not unconditional. While Turkey and Russia were initially at loggerheads over the Near East and still are supporting different sides in the Libyan conflicts, they did manage to find ways to achieve common objectives in Syria, and Turkey did purchase Russian S-400 missile systems defense, in direct contravention with NATO’s rules. When tensions rose with the United States over the Iran Deal, Israel and Saudi Arabia did not hesitate to re-activate diplomatic ties with Russia and other actors so as to act as a counterweight to decisions made by the US administration that were seen as contrary to their vital interests in the region. This should not mean that either of these countries are no longer allies of the United States (or the West for that matter – Turkey is still a member of NATO), but their behavior corresponds to that of regional powers that are acting according to what they see as their national interest, which may not always be aligned with those of the West. Thus Turkey, who already hosts more than 3.4 million refugees on its soil, may not see the surplus of migrants caused by the Afghan crisis as a blessing, and will therefore seek to share the burden with reluctant Europeans. As on other issues (such as control over the seas in the

Eastern Mediterranean), this sets Turkey and Europe on a collision course, while both Turkey and most of European states are part of NATO.

Adding to this fluidity is the persistence of transnational and non-state challenges, such as jihadism. The phenomenon has regularly made the news in Europe and elsewhere as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and other affiliated (or non-affiliated) entities have destabilized the Near and Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel and beyond, exporting at times their warfare tactics for a limited time to the heart of Europe (in France, Belgium and Germany among others in the mid-2010s). The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban reminded us of the resilience of the jihadist movement despite twenty years of war, and more often than not crushing military defeats early on (whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or Mali). Today, Jihadi groups are fighting everywhere from the West coast of Africa to the mountains of Afghanistan (including between jihadists), to the Horn of Africa, Yemen and Syria. While not necessarily a global threat, the persistence of jihadism across the Muslim world continues to destabilize the heart of the Afro-Eurasian landmass, providing countless headaches and threats not only for the victims of wars and terrorist attacks, but also for neighbors, including Europe. Indeed, many Europeans worry about migrant flows, the persistent threat of low-cost and low-intensity warfare being imported in peace zones. These two factors inevitably raise questions among local populations over the loyalty of Muslim population already settled in – or migrating to – the West, which provides further fuel for polarization of debates. This in turn can provide much ground for further destabilization of European societies, provoking further weakness and, down the road, further challenges by neighbors who do not see the EU in the friendly eyes that some Europeans see them.

Europe's challenge: learning to live in a dangerous world

This quick – and non-exhaustive review of how the world has changed over the past quarter century has thus far avoided, when possible, to mention Europe. This is because, in the European psyche, history had ended sometime between 1991 and 2004, between the fall of the Soviet Union and the biggest enlargement of the EU which brought much of Central and Eastern

Europe into a common structure. It is true that the unification of (much of) Europe under one single set of institution was a unique moment for a continent whose history (but also its geography and culture) has rather been defined by war, conflict and division. In many ways, the European Union behaved like a small island of peace and prosperity, under the illusion that soft power alone could not only protect it from the horrors of the outside world, but also naturally extend the *pax europea* to the outside world. To be fair, those Europeans who believed in this illusions could find proof of this narrative in the events that shaped the late 1990s and the 2000s, with the stabilization of the Balkans and the color revolutions, the seemingly endless enlargement of the EU, and even to a certain extent the Arab spring of the early 2010s, which raised the hopes that liberal democracy could also naturally extend to Europe's Mediterranean neighborhood and beyond (indeed, at the time it was the crowds in Tunis, Cairo and other capitals who were vehemently requesting the fall of their dictators, not foreign soldiers or diplomats). They did not see, or want to see, that Europeans could rely on the invisible hand of their soft power only because they could rely on the (for them invisible) fist of American power.

The wakeup call was as violent, and even to this day, many Europeans still live in denial of the realities of a much more dangerous world around them and the consequences it can have for them. If they – understandably – still wish to protect themselves from it while they wait for better days, they are often found in denial over the basic fact that it is impossible to isolate oneself from the outside world – one just has to engage with it, and shows strength when necessary. It is a fact that the EU has been weakened by more than 10 years of crises during which Europeans have divided themselves over economic help, migrations, the answer to be given to Russia's military aggressions in its neighborhood, etc. During this time, Europeans even lost one of their most important member-state, the United Kingdom. While the EU was often seen as an exporter of stability in the early 2000s, it is now often seen as an importer of instability, with threats closing in on its borders and divisions undermining its coherence, both at the intergovernmental level and inside societies.

This, of course, does not mean that Europe is on the verge of catastrophe – not yet at least. But it is true that the planets are starting to align in ways that could prove deadly not only for the European project, but more largely for the security of Europe in the coming years. If European leaders are to avoid that fate, they must react promptly, and recognize first that the

World they live in is much more dangerous than it used to be. The jungle around them has grown back (Kagan, 2018), and they are surrounded as much by threats as they are by trading partners. This does not mean that Europeans should develop a siege mentality, as they still have allies they can rely on to a very large extent – after all, on many issues they still share common interest and common values, but they should definitely understand that interdependencies are a double-edge swords, in particular when other countries try to turn it into one-way dependencies.

If they are to survive in a World that has become much more dangerous, Europeans need to work on themselves, develop a cohesion that is not possible in the current intergovernmental framework, as well as defense capabilities which they can and should use should they be faced with threats to their vital interests. Relying on allies (and cultivating these alliances) is not an alternative to this strategy but rather provides a surplus of security; but Europeans should understand that they also have to provide for their own security if they are to thrive in this brand-new (and dangerous) world.

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Hajnalka Vincze⁷

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: THE BIDEN OPPORTUNITY AND ITS LIMITS

True to form, the 2020 U.S. presidential elections triggered an avalanche of passions in transatlantic relations. Anxiety amounting to the simple question “Will they love us again, will they not?” was widespread on the European side. Unfortunately, this kind of approach only reinforces the decades-long emotional roller-coaster matrix of the Euro-American bond. It feeds into the unending oscillation between resounding “quarrels” and spectacular “reconciliations”. This is a nefarious spiral, because the more we strive to showcase our alleged harmony, the more even minor clashes will look like a tragedy. And the more those clashes are perceived as world-shattering, the more we must insist on harmony, in order to return back to “normal”, i.e. to another round on the roller-coaster ride.

Although the first encounters between the Biden administration and their European counterparts will certainly fit into that pattern (a happy family reunion, after a four-year falling out), all those emotional upheavals are starting to take a toll. Europeans distraught by some Trump-era outbursts still remember having been traumatized during the much-awaited Obama years too, most notably by the so-called Asian pivot. As a result, the widespread relief, even jubilation, in Europe over the change of U.S. administration is nuanced this time by more caution than twelve years ago, when Barack Obama was awaited and greeted as the “savior”. Speaking before the European Parliament in July 2020, German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer warned in advance that only the “tone” would change following a Biden win.⁸ French President Emmanuel Macron, in his now-infamous “brain-dead NATO” interview, also pointed out: “it hasn’t only been the Trump administration. You have to understand what is happening deep down in American policy-making.”⁹

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⁸ Germany sets up European defense agenda with a waning US footprint in mind, Defense News, 15 July 2020.

⁹ Transcript: Emmanuel Macron in his own words, The Economist, 7 November 2019.

A frozen (més)alliance

The uncomfortable reality is that thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europeans still let the “West” to be as imbalanced as it was during the Cold War. Most European governments hope to continue to free-ride, as much as possible, on the U.S. for their defense – at the cost of what former American and British high officials called “an excessive deference towards the United States”.¹⁰ Over the past three decades, American observers have continually been amazed at Europeans’ unwillingness to step out of their status as a U.S. “protectorate”.¹¹ At the beginning of the 2000’s, Charles Kupchan pointed out: “Despite all that has changed since 1949, and especially since 1989, Europe has remained dependent on the United States to manage its security”. He went on to add: “Control over security matters is the decisive factor in setting the pecking order and determining who is in command”.¹²

Fifteen years later, nothing has changed. As Jeremy Shapiro notes: “The nations of Europe rely on America for its security and America does not rely on Europe. This asymmetric dependence is the fundamental and seemingly permanent feature of the transatlantic relationship, the inconvenient fact at the base of decades of rhetoric about shared values and common history.”¹³ It also inevitably leads to the so-called transactional logic. There is no such thing as free defense; sooner or later, in one area or the other, there is always something expected in return. The Clinton administration’s Bottom-up Review was rather clear: “Our allies must be sensitive to the linkages between a sustained U.S. commitment to their security on the one hand, and their actions in such areas as trade policy, technology transfer, and participation in multinational security operations on the other”¹⁴ In a similar vein, as early as in 1962 U.S. Vice President Johnson threatened to withdraw American troops from the continent, should the Common Market block American poultry exports to Europe...

Although the end of the Cold War did constitute a watershed moment, leaders on both sides of the ocean tried their best to ignore this fact. With the notable exception of French policy-makers

¹⁰ Jeremy Shapiro – Nick Witney, Towards a post-American Europe: A Power Audit of EU-US Relations, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2 November 2009.

¹¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, Perseus Books, 1997, p59.

¹² Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era*, Vintage Books, 2003, pp152, 267.

¹³ Jeremy Shapiro, Dina Pardijs, *The transatlantic meaning of Donald Trump: a US-EU Power Audit*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 21 September 2017.

¹⁴ Report on the Bottom-Up Review, DoD, October 1993.

who strived to awaken their EU partners to the realities of the forthcoming “multipolar” world order – to no avail. During the 2010’s, a unique alignment of the planets (starting with the “Asian pivot” and culminating with the Trump presidency) helped Europeans to open their eyes to post-Cold War realities. German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas spoke about “making plans for a new world order” and warned: “The fact that the Atlantic has widened politically is by no means solely due to Donald Trump. The U.S. and Europe have been drifting apart for years. The overlapping of values and interests that shaped our relationship for two generations is decreasing. The binding force of the East-West conflict is history. These changes began well before Trump’s election - and will survive his presidency well into the future.”¹⁵

Maas went on saying: “Let’s use the idea of a balanced partnership as a blueprint, where we assume our equal share of responsibility. In which we form a counterweight when the US crosses the line. Where we put our weight when America retreats. And in which we can start a new conversation.” The Trump administration’s excesses certainly gave momentum in this direction. During four years, Europeans have been faced with a 24/7 demonstration of the disadvantages of their dependency. It remains to be seen whether they will draw the lessons, and if so, what kind of reaction is to be expected from Washington.

The Biden moment: hit or miss

Despite foreseeable speeches about a “new beginning” and a dramatically improved ambience in transatlantic diplomacy, U.S. policy will first and foremost strive to return to “normalcy”. This is certainly reassuring to allies, but does not automatically mean they will benefit from it. Even on the most welcome policy changes, on multilateral organizations and alliances, a positive outcome, from a European perspective, is far from being granted. Not to mention the long series of persisting disagreements, or policy gaps, where the best one can hope for is a civil exchange of arguments, maybe some degree of rapprochement, but mostly a polite acknowledgment of divergences.

There is no doubt about the Biden administration’s renewed support for multilateralism and reinforced commitment to traditional alliances. Once the U.S. will be back in the game, the question, for Europeans, is whether there will be room for coordination, or Washington only

¹⁵ Heiko Maas, Making plans for a new world order, Handelsblatt, 22 August 2018.

participates in order to lead (some might say dictate). As a recent Congressional Research Service report points out “European officials periodically complain about frequent U.S. expectation of automatic European support.”¹⁶ Indeed, when they hear Joe Biden say that “I will, once more, have America lead the world”, Europeans have mixed feelings. However much they appreciate Washington taking the lead whenever interests overlap, they are less enthusiastic when in other situations they are invited to simply align themselves with the U.S.

NATO is a case in point. To hear Joe Biden state forcefully that “NATO is at the very heart of American security” is undoubtedly music to European ears, especially after the past four years. However, they also know that the next U.S. President will push long-standing U.S. priorities, and expect concessions in return for re-engaging with NATO. The problem is: not all allies are eager to expand the U.S.-led Alliance’s remit to other issues (such as space, cyber, energy), and to other geographical areas (enlargement and the designation of new enemies). Add to it the reinvigorated efforts to reduce allies’ free choice through deeper integration (increased common funding and more automatic delegation of authority to the SACEUR/U.S. Commander in Europe), and you come up with a not-that-consensual mix.

Trade is another area where Europeans are happy with Joe Biden’s initial stance declaring that “the rules of international economy should be shaped to be fair”. Yet, they start to become wary hearing statements from the same Biden: “when American businesses compete on a fair playing field, they win.” It reopens old wounds – especially on extraterritorial sanctions – and casts doubts about how exactly the new U.S. government intends to shape those international rules. Knowing that the Boeing-Airbus dispute, as well as the puzzle over GAFSA taxation, are likely to be recurrent themes in transatlantic negotiations.

Pointing out Russia as “the biggest threat” (as Joe Biden did) might certainly sound reassuring to some Europeans, on the Eastern flank, but will definitely not sit well with others, especially Germany and France. While critical about Vladimir Putin’s regime, they also see Moscow as an indispensable strategic (for France) and economic partner (for Germany). French presidents repeatedly underscore that “Russia is not an adversary”, and former German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel talked disparagingly about NATO’s activities on Russia’s border as “sabre rattling”.

¹⁶ Transatlantic Relations: U.S. Interests and Key Issues, CRS report, 27 April 2020.

On China, Europeans welcome U.S. willingness to seriously deal with Beijing's breaking of international trade rules. At the same time, they are not keen on NATO lining up behind Washington to confront China.¹⁷ The EU's High Representative for foreign policy, Josep Borrell, says: "We don't have to choose between the US and China. Some people would like to push us to choose, but we don't have to choose, it has to be like Frank Sinatra's song, 'My way'".¹⁸ French President, Emmanuel Macron, warned that without an independent policy of their own, Europeans will "only have the choice between two dominations", by China or by the United States".¹⁹

To top it all, the Biden administration will face two, more immediate and more technical, issues in relation to Europe. Both will be scrutinized as a litmus test of U.S. interference versus European autonomy. First, the United States insist on having access to the EU's recently created European Defence Fund, financed from the Union's budget. Europeans are not delighted at the prospect of powerful American companies siphoning out money from the EU's common treasury – one created explicitly with the goal to enhance Europe's autonomy. Under unrelenting U.S. pressure, they came up with a compromise solution that does grant case-by-case access, while maintaining a general condition of "non-dependence". Europeans would thereby at least keep control on exportation and intellectual property rights. A compromise vehemently rejected by the U.S. so far.

The second thorny issue is the Russian-German gas pipeline nearing completion, Nord Stream 2. Joe Biden, as Vice President, called it "unacceptable", and the United States has already imposed drastic sanctions on European companies participating in the construction. Again, this American attitude is seen by many, though not all, EU member states as meddling in European affairs. In 2017, Austria's Federal Chancellor and Germany's Foreign Minister warned: "Europe's energy supply is a matter for Europe, and not for the United States of America." In December 2019, German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz called the U.S. sanctions "a severe intervention in German and European internal affairs", and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that "European energy policy is decided in Europe, not in the United States."

In sum, all the positive change in tone on the U.S. side does not necessarily mean easier negotiations or any benefits for Europe in the long run. Paradoxically enough, the more jovial

¹⁷ Stephen M. Walt, Europe's Future Is as China's Enemy, in Foreign Policy, 22 January 2019.

¹⁸ Borrell: EU doesn't need to choose between US and China, EU Observer, 2 June 2020.

¹⁹ President Macron's speech at the annual conference of ambassadors, 27 August 2019.

the atmosphere, the more some European governments will be tempted to make concessions, abandon common EU positions and drop even the idea of self-assertion vis-a-vis the U.S. That would only add to the relationship's asymmetry. The challenge, for Europeans, is to strike the right balance: seize the opportunity of a less confrontational American stance, without reverting back to old reflexes of excessive deference.

The 'a'-word curse

Autonomy has been, from the outset, the crux of the matter in transatlantic debates. The 'a'-word, as it is sometimes referred to, has been setting the pace of Euro-American relations over the past three decades. Whenever outside events (such as the 1999 Kosovo war or the 2003 Iraq crisis) give momentum to the French-led autonomist line, the U.S. starts to display hostility, poses strict limits, and EU members' related quarrels take place in public. Conversely, when the wind is in the "NATO/U.S. primacy" camp's sails, Washington becomes supportive of EU defense initiatives (within the already determined limits), and Europeans spend their time sweeping disagreements under the rug.

Behind these periodic fluctuations the respective positions remain unchanged. On the American side, the advantages of Europe's dependent status are undeniable. First, due to the ever-present transactional logic, U.S. military protection makes Europeans more accommodating in other areas. On trade issues, for instance, a majority of EU members openly call for attenuating EU positions in order to "not put the broader transatlantic relationship at risk". Second, much-obliged European allies are prone to be enrolled in the service of American global strategy. Former U.S. ambassador to NATO, Robert Hunter said: "Very few European countries believe that winning in Afghanistan is necessary for their own security. Most of them are doing this... to please the United States."²⁰ Finally, American tutelage over Europe is also meant to keep a potential rival under check. In Brzezinski's words: "A politically powerful Europe, able to compete economically while militarily no longer dependent on the United States, could confine the scope of U.S. preeminence largely to the Pacific Ocean."²¹

²⁰ U.S.-NATO: Looking for Common Ground in Afghanistan, Interview with Robert E. Hunter, Council on Foreign Relations, 8 December 2009.

²¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, Perseus Books, 2004. p91.

On the European side, most governments would be happy to not ever have to mention the ‘a’-word. However, over the past decade, it became increasingly difficult to hide that U.S. commitment to European security is highly, and doubly, conditional. It is both uncertain (see President Trump’s qualms about Article 5) and contingent on good behavior from the Europeans’ part. The ambition of autonomy has gained some momentum as a result. The EU’s Global Strategy, in 2016, was articulated around the long-time taboo idea of strategic autonomy; Commission President Juncker’s “State of the European Union” speech of 2018 was entitled “the Hour of European Sovereignty” and the new EU Commission touts itself from the start on being “geopolitical”. That being said, Europeans are as concerned as ever to not take any step that might alienate the U.S.

The German chancellor is the perfect illustration of these ambivalences. One day, Angela Merkel says: “The era in which we could fully rely on others is over. We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands.”²² The next, she assures: “Even more than during the Cold War, maintaining NATO is today in our own best interest. Europe cannot currently defend itself alone, we are dependent.”²³ European autonomy is both the problem in transatlantic relations, and the only solution in sight. Within the traditional imbalanced relationship, the “other” is perceived on each end of the Atlantic either as a burden (free-rider versus interfering outsider) or as a rival (“challenger” versus “dominant power”), but most often the two, burden and rival, at the same time. This incessantly creates resentments on both sides. However counter-intuitive it might sound, European strategic autonomy could be the only way out. It is also virtually the only thing left that haven’t been tried so far...

Conclusion: the virtues of clarification

The Trump administration’s four years have been a transatlantic eye-opener in many ways. If anything, his tenure made it clear how deeply the foreign policy establishments are attached to the relationship, on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, a long series of congressional hearings and votes – meant to shield the Alliance against the President’s furor – revealed an overarching bipartisan backing for NATO. They also had the merit to highlight the

²² Chancellor Angela Merkel’s speech in Munich, 28 May 2017.

²³ Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Bundestag, 27 November 2019.

very rational underpinnings of this support. As Council on Foreign Relations President Richard N. Haass put it: “The United States stays in and supports NATO as a favor not to Europeans but to itself. NATO membership is an act of strategic self-interest, not philanthropy.”²⁴

In Europe, allies’ commitment to the transatlantic link translated into tireless efforts to accommodate, or even appease, President Trump. This approach was spectacularly displayed in a high-level simulation exercise, held in 2019. The Körber Policy Game brought together senior experts and government officials from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Poland, and the United States. Even when Europeans teams had to face a scenario of U.S. withdrawal from NATO, followed by the eruption of crises on the fringes of Europe, most of them were focused, above all, on persuading the U.S. to return to NATO. At the price of “concessions that were unthinkable before.”²⁵

On the basis of this renewed awareness of both sides’ commitment to the Euro-American bond, the natural reflex could be to enjoy the temporary relief following Joe Biden’s victory, go on autopilot, and continue the same old pattern in transatlantic relations. That would be a fault, and doubly so.

First, if Europeans – out of mere gratitude for not having to deal with Donald Trump – give up their ambition for autonomy and refuse to defend their own position in unison, they would miss an unprecedented chance to put the transatlantic relationship on a more balanced footing. They would only perpetuate the emotional roller-coaster matrix: from jubilation to despair, from despair to jubilation, to eternity. Second, the reception on the U.S. side is the key. All too often, the American reaction to disagreements is to engage “our partnership” as such, claiming that this or that European position puts transatlantic relations in jeopardy (or, as on the issue of the Galileo satellite navigation system, would “make NATO a relic of the past”). Most Europeans have this fear already – that is why they shy away from the very idea of autonomy. Washington might show the way: make sure the two sides can converge on some issues, diverge on others, without the U.S. calling into doubt the entire relationship every time Europeans assert their point.

²⁴ Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, on “Assessing the Value of the NATO Alliance”, 5 September 2018.

²⁵ Körber-Stiftung - International Institute for Strategic Studies, European security in Crisis: what to expect if the US withdraws from NATO, 23 September 2019.

For this to happen, it needs to be acknowledged that, contrary to routine accusations, the ambition of European autonomy does not come from some mythical Anti-Americanism. Either one preserves their independence in relation to any third country, or one does not. If Europeans decide to give it up once, notably vis-à-vis the United States, the submission pattern it establishes will put them at the mercy of any other power in the future. A Europe that fails to assume its full autonomy becomes an easy prey for anybody. Emmanuel Macron explains: “If it can’t think of itself as a global power, Europe will disappear.”

Henry Kissinger seems to agree. The living legend of U.S. foreign policy says in the German newspaper *Die Welt*: “I would like to see a Europe capable of conducting a more historic role, which is to say with some affirmations of itself as a global policy maker.” Then he adds: “I would hope that Europe would conduct its global role so that there would be a strong parallel between American and European thinking.”²⁶

Herein lies the Atlanticist paradox. Those who give the most passionate speeches on shared transatlantic values and common interests are usually the ones who most vehemently oppose Europe’s autonomy-driven projects. It looks as if, to them, the transatlantic relationship can only hold up as long as Europeans are dependent, it would not work between equal partners. On the other hand, those who seriously believe in the strength of what is common between our values and interests, have no reason to see European autonomy as a threat. They would rather consider it as a chance...

Quo vadis Central Europe?

As a general rule, Central European countries are not defining players on these transatlantic issues. There are some rare exceptions when their position draw immediate attention, as in the case of the Letter of Eight and the Vilnius Letter, supporting the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq – prompting that famous outburst from French President Jacques Chirac: “they missed a good opportunity to keep their mouth shut”. Traditionally, on NATO-EU and other autonomy-related issues, they are firmly in the Atlanticist camp, since they consider the U.S. as the main, if not the sole, guarantor of their defense.

²⁶ Interview with Henry Kissinger, *Die Welt*, 8 November 2020.

Some of them are now uneasy about the next U.S. administration's democracy-promoting stance, especially when it applies within the Alliance. Joe Biden says that "rising authoritarianism, even among some NATO members" is a threat to the Alliance: "As President, I will call for a review of NATO members' democratic commitments."²⁷ These are not just campaign slogans. In the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the U.S. delegation has already been pushing in this direction, submitting a report that points at "internal proponents of illiberalism", and recommends "that NATO establish a Democratic Resiliency Coordination Centre with the explicit purpose of helping member states strengthen democratic institutions."²⁸

That being said, geopolitical considerations cannot and will not be neglected. Central Europe is the buffer zone between the Western edge of Eurasia and the dominant powers on the rest of this vast, combined continent. Some of the countries of the CEE region have been building up increasingly close relations with Moscow, and all are enticed by China's Belt and Road Initiative, signed up for the 17+1 cooperation, hoping for foreign investment and trade opportunities. That might be frowned upon by the new U.S. administration, whose top strategic priorities will be: isolate Russia, contain China (and of course keep Europe from going on its own). If Central European countries prove to be reliable partners on these issues, their domestic policy will probably be of little interest to Washington. However, if they cozy up to Moscow or Beijing, their internal affairs might receive more attention.

As for their place in the transatlantic conundrum: Central European countries illustrate the easiness of sliding from one dependency to another. The most vocal advocates of the Atlanticist line – consistently sabotaging EU autonomy from within – they are also among the first ones tempted to give in to Russian or Chinese sway. Like a cautionary tale about how thwarting European autonomy might backfire one day.

²⁷ Statement from Vice President Joe Biden on NATO Leaders Meeting, 2 December 2019.

²⁸ Gerald E. Connolly, NATO@70: Why the Alliance Remains Indispensable, 12 October 2019.

Charles A. Kupchan²⁹

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: GRASPING THE BIDEN OPPORTUNITY

Hajnalka Vincze's essay on the prospects for transatlantic relations during Joe Biden's presidency is thoughtful and provocative. She puts a needed spotlight on key areas of potential divergence between Europe and the United States, offering wise counsel that we should all keep expectations in check.

It has been a very tough and painful four years for the transatlantic relationship and building back will be difficult, not to mention the prospects for Biden's call for "building back better." Europeans understandably question the reliability of their American partner; the oscillations from Clinton to Bush to Obama to Trump to Biden have left us all with whiplash. Biden won decisively in the Electoral College, but the margin of victory in critical swing states was too close for comfort. Democrats lost seats in the House and may well not take back the Senate. If so, Biden will be the first Democratic president since 1884 to take office without a Democratic Senate. The likelihood of continuing polarization and gridlock is high. Steady governance will be hard to come by as Biden navigates between his left and right flanks, facing the ascendant progressive wing of his own party as well as the 73 million Americans who voted to reelect Trump.

The United States and Europe alike will be inwardly focused; both sides of the Atlantic will have no choice but to concentrate on taming the pandemic and repairing wounded economies. Biden will of necessity concentrate on domestic priorities, most likely continuing, not reversing, Trump's pullback from Afghanistan and the Middle East (although he may well cancel the planned drawdown from Germany, which makes no strategic or economic sense). And although Biden could cancel the trade tariffs Trump imposed on allies, a push for trade liberalization with the UK or the EU will not be a priority.

²⁹ Senior fellow, Council on Foreign Relations and professor of international affairs, Georgetown University in the Walsh School of Foreign Service and Department of Government

It is also the case that, despite Biden's victory, the political center on both sides of the Atlantic remains dangerously vulnerable. Trump's true colors were on full display for the past four years, but he nonetheless garnered roughly ten million more votes than he did in 2016 – hardly a resounding defeat of his dangerous brand of politics. The UK is bouncing out of the EU, illiberal currents remain ascendant in Hungary and Poland, and the political center has weakened across much of the EU.

The task ahead therefore entails learning lessons from the Trump era, not turning our backs on it. Otherwise, Biden will prove to be only a temporary reprieve from the false allure of illiberalism and autocracy. Europeans and Americans should thus work together to address the underlying sources of the continuing appeal of the populist extremes. A top priority is reducing economic uncertainty by taming the pandemic and mapping out the future of work in the digital era. Another priority is coming up with immigration policies that meet our moral obligations and economic needs but also secure our borders. Without immigration reform, nativist appeals will continue to gain traction. Conditions are not identical in the United States and Europe, but a transatlantic conversation about beating COVID-19, creating jobs, and managing migration is a must. Building back better means getting our own houses in order. Otherwise, the West will neither cohere as a meaningful political community nor have the political wherewithal to confront global challenges.

The above analysis indicates that I share Hajnalka's cautionary assessment of the transatlantic state-of-play. At the same time, however, I also find her essay too pessimistic. One of the most important impacts of Biden's victory is symbolic – in the world's leading democracy, moderation has prevailed over the populist extremes and the pendulum has swung back to the political center. This result is a shot in the arm for political centrism across the Atlantic community and beyond. Populist nationalism has by no means been defeated, but the tide has turned. The West is making a comeback as the reasoned discourse and liberal values that are its oxygen demonstrate their staying power.

The spirit of the West and its institutions are poised to rebound. Biden is an ardent Atlanticist. Whereas Trump repeatedly questioned the value of NATO, Biden will reaffirm the sanctity of collective defense and invest in the alliance. Whereas Trump treated the European Union as

a punching bag, Biden will view Europe as a true partner. Whereas Trump exploited Ukraine for personal political gain, Biden will seek to restore its sovereignty and advance its democratic fortunes.

Biden's preference for international teamwork will extend well beyond the Atlantic community. He fully appreciates that just about every international challenge can be effectively addressed only through multilateral cooperation. Washington will again build coalitions, not pull them apart. America, Europe, and the rest of the world will be better off. The transatlantic community is poised to reclaim its position as the world's anchor (even if a weaker one) of liberal values, practices, and institutions.

Hajnalka is correct that there will be plenty of differences of opinion that will need to be managed. Forging a common transatlantic approach to China, for example, will be an uphill battle. But I disagree that "the more we strive to showcase our alleged harmony, the more even minor clashes will look like a tragedy." Rather, the more we demonstrate and showcase harmony, the better able we will be to manage differences of opinion as mature partners. Indeed, transatlantic institutions and the underlying sense of commonality and solidarity that they rest on have admirably survived the severe tests of the Trump era – a testament to their durability.

In similar fashion, I agree with Hajnalka's call for Europe's ascent as a geopolitical actor, but take issue with her call for Europe's "strategic autonomy." Europeans should without question prepare to shoulder more defense burdens and assume more responsibility for their own neighborhood. Biden will continue the strategic pullback that Trump began; Democrats and Republicans agree that it is past time to end the "forever wars" in the Middle East. Biden will also want to demonstrate to the electorate that allies are prepared to do more not when they are insulted and lectured to, but when they are respected and listened to.

Countries lagging behind on defense spending – such as Italy and Germany – should pledge to increase their military budgets. The EU should step forward with concrete initiatives to advance stability in trouble spots – including Libya, the eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The more capable and active Europe becomes, the better partner it is for the United States, and the easier it will be for Biden to beat back the stubborn unilateralism that has taken hold among Republicans.

But I disagree with Hajnalka's call for Europe to cast its efforts as a drive for "autonomy" – as the realization of a shared European ambition to end strategic dependence on the United

States. That ambition is for now unrealistic; Europe has neither the resources nor the political will to emerge as an independent geopolitical pole. Rather, it should get on with the difficult work of becoming a more capable actor on foreign and defense policy. The main impediment is not the occasional (misguided) utterance from Washington warning Europe not to undermine NATO or rock the transatlantic boat. The transatlantic relationship will for the foreseeable future suffer from too little Europe, not too much. The main impediment to a more geopolitical EU is Europe's own internal divisions and its own ambivalence about taking the difficult political decisions and allocating the necessary resources to acquire more geopolitical heft. Blaming Washington for the slow progress is too easy.

Theological discussions about Europe's geopolitical autonomy or lack thereof are a distraction. Instead, Europe should just get on with the task of becoming a more capable and coherent geopolitical actor. When the time comes, what institutional form European action takes will evolve naturally. More often than not, Europe will act in unison with the United States. If transatlantic teamwork is not forthcoming, then the EU or a coalition of the willing should be ready to rise to the occasion. Reasonable people will figure it out; the core issue is the capability, not the political chapeau for the use of that capability.

Moreover, those calling for the EU's strategic autonomy should be careful what they wish for. A good many influential Americans (including the outgoing president of the country) would prefer to wash their hands of European security; overheated European talk of autonomy should not give them an excuse for doing so. With the United States in retrenchment mode and looking to lighten its load abroad, Europe does not want to find itself on its own well before it is ready. Furthermore, in light of prospective global challenges – Russian and Chinese expansionism, the democratic recession, global pandemics, climate change, nuclear proliferation, cybersecurity, to name a few – transatlantic teamwork remains a must for the foreseeable future.

Update

Almost a year has passed since the original version of this comment. The interceding months demonstrate the resilience of the transatlantic bond, but also underscore the inescapable tensions that it faces. Three specific issues shed light on the nature of the challenges straining

transatlantic solidarity: the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the AUKUS submarine deal, and the travails of U.S. domestic politics.

Biden made the right decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. The United States and its coalition partners were fighting a losing war in search of an unattainable objective. The mission was fatally flawed from the outset. It was a fool's errand to try to turn Afghanistan into a centralized, unitary, democratic state. The country's difficult topography, ethnic complexity, and tribal, clan, and local loyalties produce enduring political fragmentation. Its troubled neighborhood and hostility to outside interference make foreign intervention perilous.

To be sure, the Biden administration dramatically overestimated the staying power of Afghanistan's military and governing institutions. The Taliban took the country much more quickly than expected, producing a chaotic and heartbreaking scramble to evacuate foreign nationals and at-risk Afghans. As a consequence, America's NATO allies complained that preparation and consultation were insufficient and many observers saw the episode as dealing a potent blow to U.S. credibility and reliability. The editorial board of the Wall Street Journal charged that Biden "broke NATO" and lamented "the damage his disgraceful Afghanistan exit has inflicted on America's alliances and reputation." According to James Cunningham, who served as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan from 2012 to 2014, "the damage to the security of the United States, our allies, and the region has been done, as has the damage to the credibility of U.S. leadership."

These are dramatic overstatements. It is worth keeping in mind that within two decades of the ignominious U.S. evacuation from Saigon in 1975, the Berlin Wall fell, the Soviet Union collapsed and the United States presided over the end of Cold War. Yes, Washington failed to grasp how quickly the Taliban would prevail, and communication with allies should have been better. But the ineffectiveness and rapid collapse of the Afghan government largely substantiates Biden's skepticism that continued US-led efforts to prop up the government in Kabul would eventually enable it to stand on its own feet. There was no good reason to believe that had the coalition stayed put for another few years, the outcome would have been significantly different.

In the long run, Biden's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan will work to the advantage of the transatlantic tie. Ending the "forever wars" will enable Washington to pivot its strategic focus from peripheral interests in the broader Middle East to primary interests in the Eurasian

heartland. Allies in Europe and the Asia-Pacific will be the beneficiaries of an overdue strategic realignment that focuses more attention and resources on China and Russia — America’s most formidable challengers. Indeed, China and Russia have been quietly gleeful as the United States has spent much of the past two decades spinning its wheels in Afghanistan — as well as in Iraq, Libya and Syria. Beijing and Moscow are in for a rude awakening as the United States focuses much more on confronting them.

America’s pivot to Eurasia was the main driver of the U.S.-UK deal to sell nuclear-powered submarines to Australia – another move by Washington that stoked transatlantic tension. France reacted with considerable anger to having been left in the dark as the United States negotiated a deal that supplanted Paris’ previously concluded contract to sell submarines to Australia. Washington saw the deal as an effective step forward in its effort to work with democratic allies to counterbalance China’s growing ambition and military strength. Yet the deal was also a step backward in terms of maintaining a united transatlantic approach toward China.

French leaders, as well as top officials in Brussels, saw the AUKUS deal as further confirmation of the need for the EU to develop strategic autonomy and become less geopolitically dependent on the United States. Communication with France was clearly lacking – an unforced error by Washington. Furthermore, especially in the aftermath of Brexit, striking a deal that involves the UK but not France or any other EU members has troubling optics. It makes sense to encourage London to deliver on its promises of a post-Brexit “Global Britain.” But surely there was a way to build a package that involved not just the UK, but also France and other EU members. Going forward, the military and diplomatic elements of U.S. strategy toward China should be more fully integrated. The diplomatic disruption caused by the AUKUS deal is unlikely to do lasting damage to the transatlantic relationship. But it demonstrates the continuing challenges that the transatlantic community will face in forging a common approach to China.

Finally, the ongoing obstacles that Biden faces on the domestic front underscore my above comment that “the political center on both sides of the Atlantic remains dangerously vulnerable.” As I write, the U.S. Congress is taking up Biden’s two major legislative initiatives – the infrastructure bill and the social policy bill. The Democratic Party is itself struggling to stay unified and reach consensus – not an easy task in light of the ideological divisions between its progressive and moderate wings. These legislative initiatives will help improve the welfare of America’s working families, breathe new life into the nation’s political center, and advance

the repair of the country's polarized and dysfunctional political system. The fate of these legislative packages will have a significant impact on who controls Congress after the next year's midterm elections and who wins the 2024 presidential election. Both elections hold enormous importance for transatlantic relations. Biden is right that "America is back." But for how long?

The fate of the infrastructure and social policy bills will have at least as much impact on the future of the transatlantic relationship as the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the effort to forge a common front toward China, or the trajectory of the EU's search for strategic autonomy. The strength of the West depends, first and foremost, on the success of our individual and collective efforts to get our own houses in order.

Julie Smith³⁰

GLOBAL BRITAIN, GLOBAL EUROPE

‘Global Britain is redundant’ or so opined former US Ambassador to London, Matthew Barzun (25th September 2021), in a modern-day reprise of the old adage that ‘Britain has lost an Empire and not yet found a role’.³¹ Such claims belie the hopes and aspirations of the UK government. ‘Global Britain’ is after all precisely the slogan that the Conservative Government led by Boris Johnson has chosen as its mantra in international relations in the post-Brexit era, a term reflected in the UK’s most recent security and defence review.³² Advocates of leaving the EU asserted that doing so would enable the UK to set its own independent policies both domestically and internationally. The UK would be able to determine its own immigration rules and set its own trade policy, or so the argument went. A key focus of the campaign was on international trade, with protagonists advocating going beyond the confines of trade with the EU bloc and its multilateral trading relationships, to forge bilateral trade agreements on British terms, particularly with partners from the ‘old Commonwealth’, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. What was rather less discussed were the wider patterns of the UK’s international engagement, although certain Brexiteers explicitly harked back to a time when it could meaningfully be claimed that ‘Britannia rules the waves’.³³ Post-referendum, as successive Conservative leaders sought to deliver Brexit, the concept of ‘global Britain’ emerged. But what does it mean and is there any substance to the aspiration? This short contribution looks at the UK’s place in the world post-Brexit, noting the continuation of a long-standing desire to play a global role, its relations with the US and Europe and its prospects of success.

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³¹ Dean Acheson quoted by Douglas Brinkley in ‘Dean Acheson and the “Special Relationship”: The West Point Speech of December 1962’, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1, September 1990, pp. 599-608 (599).

³² HM Government, *Global Britain in a competitive age – The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* – Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, March 2021.

³³ These words form part of a well-known but not rather controversial song: ‘Rule Britannia’.

Global aspirations in context

Some background is necessary to help explain how the UK got to where it is politically, militarily and diplomatically. Post-WW2, two European countries, the UK and France, still aspired to global reach but their paths to achieving it were very different. Both aspired to interventionism and military capabilities; both were to become nuclear powers and permanent (P5) members of the UN Security Council. However, the UK saw its role as independent, leading the Commonwealth, and closely allied to the United States with which it enjoyed a 'Special Relationship', or so it believed. By contrast, France recognized the changed geopolitics of the mid-Twentieth Century and bound itself to its nearest European neighbours, recognizing that influence could only come from cooperation on a wider scale. The aspirations of the two were arguably very similar and their national interests closely aligned, yet under General de Gaulle in the 1960s any such claims were pushed aside as the French President castigated the UK as a Trojan Horse for the Americans. Nor, frankly, did the UK believe its position was similar to the French. Each ploughed its own very different furrow, even if the Suez Crisis of 1956 highlighted British differences from the US and that it could not rely on the Commonwealth. Yet, even then, the UK's path remained at odds with its nearest neighbour, which sought to be the leading regional player (itself a good reason for de Gaulle to want to keep the UK out of the European Communities) and indeed pulled out of the integrated military command structure of NATO in 1966, a position that would endure for decades.

French and British security interests were and remain very similar, as are their global ambitions – it is the way the two states sought to achieve these ends that as differed, The UK's position was avowedly Atlanticist, France's quite the reverse. Over the years, however, the two countries have engaged in deep bilateral defence relations, seen mostly clearly in the S. Malo Declaration of 1998, signed by British PM Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, and renewed under the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government at Lancaster House in 2010 as the Lancaster House Agreement, signed by President Sarkozy and David Cameron.³⁴ While Franco-German relations have been a key driver of European integration, German reluctance

³⁴ Officially the 'Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation', agreed on 2 November 2010, the Lancaster House Agreement came into effect on 1 July 2011.

to commit to defence expenditure (in contrast to its willingness to bankroll the integration process in Europe, at least prior to Unification in 1990), its unwillingness to engage militarily and the long-standing prohibition on its acting ‘out of area’ (i.e. outside of the NATO area), meant that on questions of security and defence, neither France nor the EU more widely could rely on Germany to play a decisive role.

Aspirations towards Global Europe to an extent needed the United Kingdom, as a large state willing to commit to the NATO spending target of 2% of Gross National Income (GNI), a nuclear weapons state and a member of the P5, as well as one of the few states to commit to 0.7% of GNI for International Aid, a commitment which it even enshrined in domestic law. As the EU expanded to the east, its members included several countries that were willing to meet the 2% NATO contribution but whose economies were so small that their actual military contributions were destined to be quite limited. Meanwhile their locations ensured that the security of Europe’s borders came under challenge, whether because of a Russian presence in the region (the Baltic States and Poland) or migratory pressures in central Europe (highlighted by the erection of fences by some governments). A wider Europe was potentially less secure – quite the reverse of original expectations - and in need of closer cooperation, not less. While, these changes did not directly impact the UK given its geographical distance from both Central Europe and the Mediterranean, British interests were also at stake, given that the new EU members were also recent additions to NATO, with its Article 5 guarantee that an attack on one is an attack on all.

Brexit

When Boris Johnson, now the Prime Minister, was campaigning to leave the European Union he was very gung-ho about what would happen to the UK in the event of Brexit. He could see only the ‘sunlit uplands’, the great things that he and his fellow advocates of leaving the EU believed could be achieved outside the Union. Following the success of the Leave campaign, which footage at the time seemed to show took him rather by surprise, Johnson had the chance to help deliver the vision he had articulated as he became Foreign Secretary under new PM Theresa May. There was a sense that May sought to put Brexiteers into the various government roles that were dealing most closely with Brexit, on the basis of ‘you broke it; you fix it’. Thus, veteran Eurosceptics David Davis and Liam Fox were made respectively Brexit Secretary

and Secretary of State for International Trade, alongside the rather newer recruit to leaving, Boris Johnson, as Foreign Secretary.³⁵

In that role, Boris Johnson was very keen to talk about global Britain. Shortly before the referendum the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations decided to undertake an inquiry into the UK's role in the world, believing that this would be importance regardless of the outcome of that referendum.³⁶ The UK's place in the world had never been fully resolved in the wake of World War Two and decolonisation; the rhetoric was no longer matched by capabilities and the words of former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson that 'Great Britain has lost an empire but not yet found a role' retained some validity.³⁷ Now was the time to review it. In the event, the inquiry was conducted in the wake of the Brexit vote and in full knowledge of the new mantra of 'global Britain'. The Committee was not impressed, asserting that: 'we conclude that the Government's Global Britain branding needs more definition if it is to be an effective tool in the promotion and re-positioning of the UK in a transformed international landscape'.³⁸ Around this time, Boris Johnson, as Foreign Secretary was very keen to proclaim that the UK was back 'East of Suez' the first time in 50 years, overturning, to some extent, what he considered a policy of retreat to Europe and away from the wider world agreed by the Labour government in 1968.³⁹ His speech on the re-opening of HMS Jufair, a naval base in Bahrain, was a clarion call to those who felt that the UK's membership of the EU had somehow weakened the UK and left it less able to determine its own course in security policy and trade. Somehow, his assertions implied, the European Union had been preventing the UK from trading with other countries, from exporting its values, from exporting its military equipment. In sum, the message seemed to be that European Britain precluded global Britain.

Yet, there was quite a lot of scepticism about why the United Kingdom needed to be East of Suez and what that really meant. Was it merely rhetorical? Did the UK have the capability to

³⁵ Johnson even wrote two articles for his *Sunday Telegraph* column – one supporting Leave, one Remain – before finally swinging behind Leave following his decision to publish the former column rather than the latter.

³⁶ The author was a member of the International Relations Committee (later renamed the International Relations and Defence Committee) at the time of the inquiry.

³⁷ Dean Acheson, see *op.cit.* note 2 *supra*.

³⁸ House of Lords Select International Relations Committee, *UK foreign policy in a shifting world order* 5th Report of Session 2017-19 (London: House of Lords, 2018), p.4.

³⁹ Foreign Secretary speech: 'Britain is back East of Suez', Speech given on 9 December 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-speech-britain-is-back-east-of-suez>, last accessed on 11th November 2021.

expand its role post-Brexit? Certainly, the Government re-committed itself to defence expenditure (meeting the NATO commitments of 2% of GNI) and, initially to the 0.7% of GNI on development aid that was enshrined in UK law. There were significant financial commitments certainly, but not sufficient for truly global aspirations. Of course, the UK has two new state-of-the-art aircraft carriers the Queen Elizabeth class carriers, commissioned a decade earlier by the Labour government but coming into service under the Conservatives. The first of these carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth, was sent to the South China Sea stopping off in the Middle East. Whether it needed to go to the South China Sea for any political or diplomatic reason or in response to existing security concerns, or whether it was just posturing was subject to a degree of debate and speculation. However, it certainly fitted with the symbolism of global Britain. The Integrated Security and Defence Review (ISDR) of 2021 did try to position the UK in a more global perspective.

At the same time that the UK was stressing its global aspirations, it also acknowledged that it still wanted a strong defence relationship with France. During the post-war period only two European states, France and United Kingdom, aspired to wanted global reach. In the case of the UK the hope was global reach on its own or in conjunction with the United States, whereas for France it was via regional leadership in Europe. The two countries in many ways had and retain very similar ambitions but envisaged them quite differently: a European route for France, a transatlantic one for the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, over the last 20 years France and the UK have tried to strengthen their defence cooperation. Both sides claimed this was something that they sought to continue bilaterally even after Brexit. However, the nature of Brexit had meant that many of the relationships that the UK had built up over the last 40 years have been damaged, often in a very high profile way.

No seat at the table, no side conversations either

One inevitable consequence of Brexit is that ministers and civil servants are outside the room when decisions are taken in Europe.⁴⁰ This is the logical corollary of leaving the Union and should surprise no-one. But there is a further, less talked-about consequence: if ministers or officials are not in the room for the formal negotiations, they are probably not in Brussels or other international capitals for the wider, less formal discussions either, and so are not present during the coffee breaks, and other less formal parts of meetings, when they would otherwise be getting to know their colleagues. At the time of writing, there is still quite a lot of connection between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of Germany and President of France, and the same will be true of other ministers and officials and their counterparts. But as time goes by those relationships will become more distant. Simply sending more officials to the UK's Embassy to the EU or the bilateral embassies will not allow it to replicate such vital connections. As Germany finally decides who will replace Angela Merkel as Chancellor, a long-standing figure will leave the stage. With France looking to Presidential elections in 2022, the shadow of change beckons, albeit less likely in the near future.

To understand how this distancing can occur, one occur, one only needs to consider the change in working patterns since the start of the COVID pandemic. One of the consequences of the COVID crisis has been the growth of virtual or hybrid meetings, ensuring that business can continue even if face-to-face meetings cannot. This clearly has some advantages in terms of business continuity and day-to-day decision-making. This might be very helpful in terms of enabling people to interact and move forward on practical matters and can useful in the short-term. What is lost, however, are the side or 'corridor' conversations. However, the situation highlights some of the challenges facing the UK as it becomes established as a third country, completely and unambiguously outside the European Union.

The reason for stressing this point is because such encounters are not just about the social or the personal in a private sense, but about the sort of encounters that typical international relations (and indeed economics and domestic politics) engender. Attending face-to-face

⁴⁰ The lessons of such absence, even as an EU member, could be seen after the British Conservatives' departure from the European People's Party (EPP) in 2009. When the EPP leaders had a dinner prior to the European Council meeting that agreed the fiscal compact treaty in 2011, David Cameron was not invited, as he had voluntarily withdrawn from that club. The consequences were clear at the formal European Council meeting, when the UK was completely outmanoeuvred by those who had been in the room for the dinner.

meetings allows policy-makers, whether politicians or civil servants, or indeed academics, to get to know their opposite numbers from other countries. Sitting alongside fellow ministers or officials from other countries enables people to engage informally, to begin to create personal and professional relationships that go beyond the conference room or the Council chamber. As such encounters become more frequent, individuals can create a deep and complex web of contacts, which can assist enormously when trying to lobby other states for support in international fora. Groups of the 'like-minded' can arise not just because of clearly patterns of national interest or shared party political/partisan values but also because the individual actors in negotiations build up patterns of trust.

Personal chemistry matters in the political and professional as much as in the personal domain and can lead to friendships and a willingness to ring, text, email or WhatsApp colleagues from other countries. In this way negotiations can be continued informally alongside more formal, set-piece meetings. Up to a point this type of contact once forged can be continued remotely, as policy-makers eventually found during the Brexit negotiations that were forced to continue during the COVID crisis. What is much harder is to forge new relationships when in-person meetings are precluded. For the 27 EU Member States, the move to a world of virtual meetings would only be temporary; the relaxation of restrictions allowed officials and politicians to resume their regular contact. For the UK, however, the emergence and cession of COVID-related sanctions and virtual or hybrid proceedings in international relations coincided almost exactly with its departure from the European Union. Brexit formally occurred on 31st January 2020 but the full effects were masked by a transitional phase until 31st December 2020. The 27 might have returned to the table after the worst of the COVID crises was over, but the UK no longer had a seat at that table either literally or metaphorically.

One of the profound consequences of Brexit is, therefore, that many side conversations will no longer happen, informal exchanges and opportunities to forge effective working relationships based on mutual respect and trust will be limited. Of course they will not vanish entirely. The UK will continue to be present in many international institutions and continue to pursue bilateral relations with its neighbours. Yet none of these can replicate the breadth and depth of the interactions arising from membership the EU and there are already signs that in its attempts to pursue global Britain, the UK is endangering its closest security relationships.

Looking Beyond Europe

Outside the EU, the UK's security interests have not changed. Its borders have not (yet) altered nor has its geographical location. It remains 22 miles from France at its nearest point and oceans away from the US and Australia to which it signalled a renewed commitment with the so-called AUKUS agreement of September 2021, which represents a new-found security cooperation between the US, UK and Australia, based around a deal to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. That agreement was symbolic of British ambitions but created a further division in Franco-British relations. AUKUS was hailed by the Prime Minister as part of an important security relationship with one of the UK's most important allies, namely Australia. It was also an important business deal, which was particularly welcome at the time of the bi-annual DSEI event being held in London. The timing was also noteworthy, coming just weeks after the US's rather precipitate departure from Afghanistan, which left the 'special relationship' apparently weakened, with the UK unable to exert any obvious influence over its Transatlantic partner. However, the AUKUS arrangements only arose because Australia broke a trade arrangement to purchase conventionally powered submarines from France, which was inevitably outraged, resulting in France's ambassador's to both the US and Australia being recalled, although the ambassador to the UK was not recalled. In the context of various post-Brexit disputes, most recently over fishing rights, the situation was scarcely conducive to the strong bilateral relations necessary if the UK and France are to cooperate on issues of mutual interest.

The British government was keen to flag AUKUS as a strengthened vital security interests with Australia. The way it was launched could not but inflame relations with France, which despite everything remains the UK's closest neighbour, with shared interests – rhetoric cannot trump geography. Strong relationships with France and with the rest of the EU either bilaterally or through NATO remains important. Moreover, the recent experience of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan suggests that it is more important than ever that the UK should be working closely with France and the European countries. The US remains a hegemon that does not need to listen to the UK. It was easy to assume that under Donald Trump America was shifting from rules-based international order; the assumption was that under Biden the US would revert to its postwar role in the world, yet Biden's foreign policy approach reflects perhaps a move towards isolationism and to the extent that he is interested in multilateralism,

it to the Indo Pacific that he looks. Global Britain's pivot to the Indo-Pacific in terms of rhetoric and the AUKUS arrangements suggests it is following suit. AUKUS is partly about exports to Australia but is being marketed in the UK as this the opportunity for the UK to work with its closest security partner. One might query how far the UK is strengthening its own security by supporting Australia having nuclear-powered submarines near to China. Global Britain may be beginning to take shape but it may not be any safer or more secure.

At the same time, the concept of the global Europe is rather different, predicated less on military capabilities and more on influencing values. Yet, here Europe, like the US and UK faces something of a challenge. All have sought to export values in their neighbourhood or elsewhere. Recent events in Afghanistan highlight the difficulties of doing so. There are thus question marks for both the EU and the UK about international leverage, although the EU's focus on international aid and soft power can be strengths. The UK may aspire to being a soft power superpower but cutting development aid in the light of the COVID crisis sent a poor message, not least to Afghanistan. Rhetoric will not make the UK global, side-lining neighbours will do little to enhance British security. In order to achieve its ambitions, the UK needs to work hard on restoring damaged relations and rebuilding alliances in Europe.

Jacek Kucharczyk⁴¹

THE FUTURE OF CENTRAL EUROPE INSIDE THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GLOBALLY

In today's discussions in Brussels, Berlin and Washington concerning the EU's role in shaping the future of international order, Central Europe is more often perceived as part of the problem and not part of the solution. The reason for this is democratic backsliding in key countries of the region, such as Poland and Hungary. While the authoritarian drift of Hungary has been happening for over a decade, for Poland this is a much rapid change, from poster boy of successful democratization catalyzed by the EU accession to not just European but global leader of dismantling democratic institution following the victory of nativist and populist Law and Justice party in 2015. I have tried to analyze the reasons and consequences of this U-turn elsewhere. In what follows I will focus on the current stay of play as regards Poland's future within the EU, which I think will largely impede or enhance (depending on the adopted future scenarios) the EU's global impact on the future of international order.

I would argue that the EU is now facing a make-or-break moment in regard to Poland and other Central European members. The adoption of the rule of law mechanism at the European Council, in spite of threats of veto from Poland and Hungary, was one of such crucial moment. Then the rulings of TSUE demanding the dismantling of the key elements of the 'so-called judiciary reform', suspending the payments under from the National Reconstruction Funds and the imposition of a fine for non-compliance with the TSUE ruling on the Disciplinary Chamber of the Supreme Court put the Polish government on the defensive.

In spite of the defiant rhetoric from Warsaw, the Polish government does not have any easy way out of this conundrum. This is because the Polish public remains staunchly pro-EU.⁴²

⁴¹ President of the Executive Board, Institute of Public Affairs

⁴² Kucharczyk, Jacek, *Respect the past and look towards the future. Polish, French and German perceptions of the Weimar Triangle and its role in the EU*, Institute of Public Affairs, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Genshagen Foundation, 2021.

https://www.kas.de/documents/279510/11260078/20211110_Weimar_respect_the_past_Web.pdf/505e6e90-0616-5395-e9bd-8c7527d1b8b6?version=1.0&t=1637234891174

It is quite remarkable that after more than five years of increasingly hostile government rhetoric towards Brussels, a vast majority of Poles continue to support membership. This is also true about the majority of the ruling party supporters, although in this group the numbers are less impressive yet even here the number of those who want to leave remains relatively low.⁴³

Opinion research also shows that Poles support the EU membership for a variety of reasons, not just because of the transfer of funds. Freedom of movement and work and education abroad are seen as at least equally important benefits to increasing economic prosperity and infrastructural investments.

This really means that EU membership is not a source of populist democratic backsliding in Poland. On the contrary, the EU remains the single most important factor constraining the authoritarian tendencies of the current government and Poles are willing to take to streets in vast numbers to demonstrate their allegiance to Europe and in defiance of the government's anti-EU rhetoric.

There is also little evidence to substantiate the claim that Euro Atlantic integration has lost its power of attraction to Central Europeans, as Krastev and Holmes pose in their influential book *The Light that Failed?*⁴⁴

On the contrary, it can be shown that Central Europeans on the whole perceive global issues and actors similarly to publics in western Europe. For example, in this year's edition of our annual study "Polish-German Barometer" we asked people in Poland and Germany about their perceptions of key actors shaping the global order – The US, EU, Russia and China.

This survey showed a somewhat surprising convergence of Polish and German views. Overwhelming majorities in both countries think that the EU is an actor contributing to international peace and stability. In both countries there a plurality believes that America is a force for good, although a significant part of the public (one third) thinks the US contributes to conflicts and instability.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ivan Krastev, Stephen Holmes, *The Light that Failed. A Reckoning*, Penguin Books, 2020.

Russia, and also China, are perceived by majorities as underminers of international order rather than force for stability (Germans tend to be more critical of China and Poles of Russia).

Another study of public opinion in Poland, France and Germany shows more similarities than differences in the perceptions of Poles, Germans and the French concerning global and European issues. *Clear majorities in Poland and in the other two countries consider the USA (as well as UK and Canada) as important global partners of the EU.*⁴⁵

Roughly similar percentages in all three countries see Russia and China as strategic rivals of the EU. The most skeptical views on Russia are – again - in Poland while China is viewed most critically in France.⁴⁶

To sum up, this polling shows a remarkable affinity of Polish public opinion to key UE players, such as France and Germany, which in turn means that there is no noticeable support for Poland to seek strategic alliances outside of the EU and NATO. This leads us directly to the seeming paradox of why Poland has a Euro- enthusiastic public and a Eurosceptic government?

The answer is that, since the beginning of the fight with Brussels over the rule of law, the PiS politicians have claimed to be defending “national sovereignty” of European nation states, while denying that they seek to exit the EU. Our research has shown that part of the Polish public is susceptible to this narrative. Notably, similar sentiments are strong in German and French society, once again showing that Poles are not alone in their susceptibility to nationalistic rhetoric.

The debate about the threat of ‘polexit’ has been simmering in Poland for several years now and erupted in recent weeks when key government politicians strongly reacted to the rulings of EU Court of Justice condemning key parts of the so-called judiciary reform in particular the suspension of the approval of Poland’s National Recovery Plan and the payments that should follow, which the right-wing government in Poland badly needs to sustain its dwindling public opinion ratings.

⁴⁵ Cf Kucharczyk, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

A leading member of Poland's governing Law and Justice party said this month: "Brussels sends us overlords who are supposed to bring Poland to order, on our knees," adding that Poland "will fight the Brussels occupier" as it fought in the past Nazi and Soviet occupiers.

However, when the opposition leader Donald Tusk accused the government of secretly planning polexit, Poland's de facto ruler, Jarosław Kaczyński, vehemently denied, stating that Poland's future is in the EU.

His denial did not convince the opposition. Opinion polls show that nearly 50% of all Poles and a vast majority of opposition supporters believe that PIS policy may end in polexit.

The anti-EU rhetoric of PiS politicians followed by denials of polexit plans is the balancing act that Poland's leaders have to play when they are stuck between the EU punitive actions and pro-EU public. It is also a balancing act within the ruling coalition, which includes hard Eurosceptics who want to leave the EU and whose votes Kaczynski needs to stay in power.

This last circumstance, however, brings forth truly scary similarities to Brexit, which also started as David Cameron's balancing act between the factions of the conservative party. The crisis in Poland may quickly escalate, especially that according to the Polish law, to exit the EU the government does not even need to hold a national referendum. A simple parliamentary majority will suffice to invoke article 50 of TEU and initiate polexit. This move would certainly lead to a showdown with the pro-EU majority and force Kaczynski to introduce Lukashenko style repressions, still unlikely for an EU member state (even on the way out).

To conclude, I think that keeping Poland inside the EU is the crucial issue for the future of Central Europe (and Europe as a whole) within the global order. It needs concerted action from both Brussels and Washington. In spite of defiant rhetoric of PiS politicians, the EU holds all the cards. Therefore the way to stop the populists in Warsaw is not by seeking 'compromise' and giving them time (and funds) to consolidate their authoritarian rule within the EU. The way forward is to listen to civil society and the pro-European political opposition and act in concert with these actors to restore democracy and the rule of law. As the old adage goes, you sometimes need to be cruel to be kind and this should guide the international community – and the EU institutions in particular – when dealing with increasingly aggressive democratic backsliders in Central Europe.

Charles Gati⁴⁷

WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE VISEGRAD4?

The answer to the question posed in the title may be reduced to three interrelated propositions:

First, while the Visegrad 4 (V4) once had a common, positive purpose, it no longer has a constructive objective. When it came into being, the four countries of Central Europe comprised an impressive lobby seeking to join the West, specifically NATO and the European community. By the time all members of the V4 achieved their objective, i.e., having joined both NATO and the European Union, there remained some consultation and some cooperation – but the four countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) had less and less in common both in their domestic politics and international orientation.

Hungary and Poland have come to embrace traditions that resemble values typical of the 19th rather than the 21st century. Most important among these values are these two countries' authoritarian tradition, combined now with lip service to democratic formulae. Elections are held, parliaments function, the internet press – and to a much lesser extent the printed press -- enjoy some freedom, but real power is concentrated in the executive branch and actually in the hands of Viktor Orban in Hungary and Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland. In addition, both governments condemn and oppose secular trends in contemporary Europe, uphold so-called family values, and fight against gay rights – even as Budapest and even Warsaw have emerged as centers of porn production and prostitution and gambling. Even by American standards, the dominant political class in Hungary and Poland is deeply hypocritical as they speak of their fine democracies and the values they practice. It should be stressed, however, that they do enjoy considerable if not always majority support, if not in the major cities, then in the countryside.

The situation is quite different in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. There, too, corruption reigns supreme, but the democratic tradition of Czechoslovakia seems to have survived most authoritarian challenges. Slovakia, having adopted the euro, is committed to the success of the

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European experiment. The Czech Republic tolerates a (small) Communist Party in its legislature. As both countries generally look West, their leading politicians look down especially on Hungary's populist acrobatics. Most recently, the Czech Republic, apparently with German support, has even sued Poland for environmental damage caused by Polish mines. If the V4 is not or not yet fiction, their member-states' collaboration is vastly exaggerated, particularly by Mr. Orban. His purpose is to create the impression at home, in Hungary itself, that he and his ideas are more popular abroad than they actually are. His visits to Washington and London are meant to reinforce that impression. Whatever fame he has in Europe – as in Italy and France, for example – stems from far-right parties and politicians seeking rather than holding power at the present time.

The *second* point to make is that exacerbating friction within and among the Central European V4 is the rapidly growing competition in the region by four outside powers: the European Union; the United States, in harmony with NATO; Russia; and China. When the V4 came into being three decades ago, the region's outside world was made up of Europe and the US. China was far, far away, at an early stage of its eventually spectacular economic development.

Russia was not only losing its external empire in East-Central Europe; it was in the process of losing its internal empire in the Soviet Union itself. By sharp contrast, there was general appreciation for the role played by the United States that contributed to the collapse of communism and opened the door for the former satellites to regain their independence. Widespread was the desire to belong to Europe.

Today, China, which seldom demands expressions of political loyalty from its new partners, offers economic benefits that Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia especially welcome. Russia has returned to the region, except to Poland where anti-Russian sentiments remain as strong as ever; this is the only reason why Poland's military contribution to NATO is as important as it is. Elsewhere, Hungary -- despite still-vivid memories of the 1956 anti-Soviet revolution – is supportive of Russian goals in Ukraine and of Moscow's efforts to weaken the European Union. Widely reported is the presence, well-tolerated by the Hungarian government, of Russian intelligence in Budapest. By contrast, the Czech Republic, after new revelations this year that Russian agents destroyed a Czech ammunition depot in Vrbetice in 2014, expelled dozens of Russian diplomats – and the Russians retaliated by expelling Czech diplomats. Worse yet, Moscow has more recently published a short list of countries it considers “unfriendly”; this

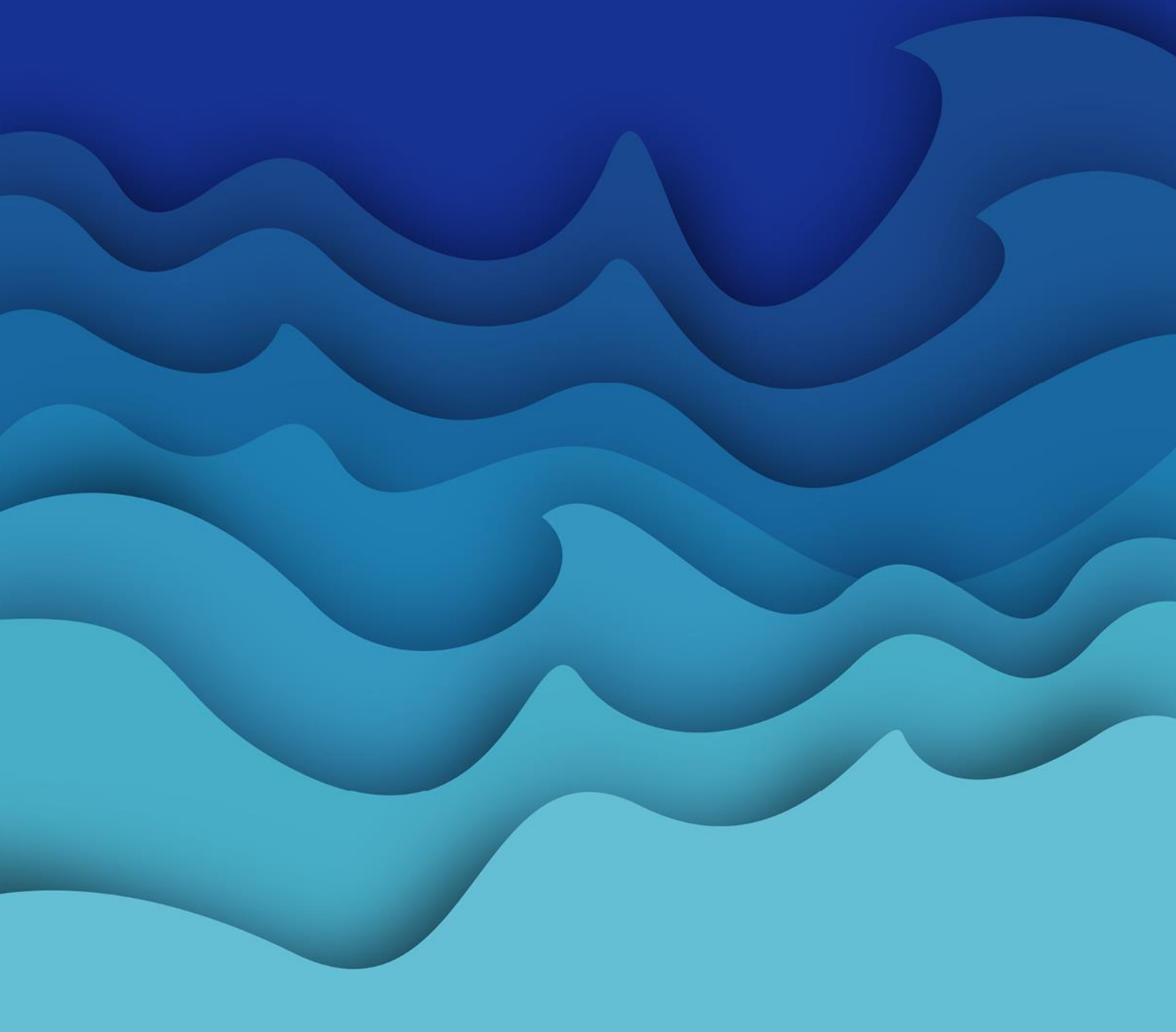
enemies' list of just two states contains the United States -- and the Czech Republic. Adding to the complications, and to the confusion, Czech president Milos Zeman is as pro-Russian as was his predecessor Vaclav Klaus.

All in all, Central Europe -- given domestic tensions, important differences among the V4, and acute competition in the region by international actors --has been plunged into a whirlpool of misplaced expectations, economic underperformance, widespread corruption, unreconcilable differences between populations in the cities and in the countryside, and thus an uncertain future. Long gone is appreciation to the United States, including Radio Free Europe, for its effort to keep hope alive in the satellite countries. Gone is appreciation for the extraordinarily generous support the European Union is still extending to its new members in Central Europe; in Hungary, though not elsewhere, even the Union's flag was ordered to be removed in 2014 (!) from the country's parliament by Laszlo Kover, Mr. Orban's closest friend and longtime head of the Hungarian legislature.

Third, there is an altogether different -- promising and seldom mentioned -- pro-Western trend in the region's cultural and even economic orientation. Throughout Central Europe, including Hungary, there is tremendous interest in West European books, American movies and sports. People follow games and teams of the National Basketball Association of the United States. Even the government-controlled press in Poland and Hungary prints extensive stories, and indeed gossips, about Western film stars' reported love affairs. Significantly, there is absolutely no comparable interest in Russian or Chinese culture.

Members of the European Union, notably Germany, also has a huge economic presence in Central Europe. But, for reasons far too complicated to describe here, this economic presence has not been translated into significant political influence. Neither the European Union nor NATO have done more than verbally protest the region's authoritarian impulse in recent years. The United States, under the Biden Administration, is expected to give the issue more attention, but it is unclear what instruments of policy -- what means of policy -- it can find to implement its professed goal of a democratic, stable, and secure Central Europe. In theory, the European Union could also make a difference and so could NATO in Poland. But the future of Central Europe -- unlike the momentous changes that mainly international circumstances prompted in 1989-91 -- will be decided this time by Central Europeans themselves who value modernity, integration, and Western values.

The Future of Politics and Human Rights



Jan-Werner Müller⁴⁸

REPAIRING DEMOCRACY'S CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE⁴⁹

The transatlantic crisis of democracy discourse has been characterized by two unfortunate tendencies. Some analysts have more or less reasserted the status quo plus some policy tweaks here and there. Others, however, have argued that representative democracy is inherently elitist or even oligarchic, because political parties and even elections as such favor the entrenchment of inequalities; they have suggested that we innovate radically and replace parties and elections with lottocracy: decision-making bodies composed of randomly chosen “ordinary” citizens.⁵⁰

The other tendency has been to assign blame for democracy's troubles either to the many or the few. Some think that the people themselves are to blame, as, after all, they brought Brexit, Trump, etc. on themselves. Conversely, others argue that nefarious elites or the de facto emergence of oligarchy even in Western democracies are the problem. Different as these diagnoses are, they have one thing in common: they focus on groups of people (be it the many or the few) and pay scant attention to institutions. My suggestion is that we reorient our gaze to institutions.

In particular, I want to suggest that we pay more attention to what I would like to call the critical infrastructure of democracy. “Infrastructure” has become a very popular term to allude to all kinds of things one wishes to designate as desirable. But here it has a very specific meaning: it refers to the institutions that allow citizens to connect – reaching others and being reached by them – and thus also to make effective use of their basic communicate freedoms for political ends: freedom of speech and freedom of association, to mention only the most obvious.

This critical infrastructure still primarily consists of political parties and news media organizations (which is not to belittle the role of NGO's, think tanks, trade unions, etc.). This infrastructure has been in a state of disrepair in a number of countries. My claim is not that

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⁴⁹ This contribution draws heavily on my book *Democracy Rules* (London: Allen Lane, 2021)

⁵⁰ Hélène Landemore, *Open Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2020)

this is the sole cause (or even necessarily the most important cause) of democracy's troubles today. But it is an aspect that has received comparatively little attention. When it has been discussed, there has been a notable tendency to swing from one extreme to the other: some of us are old enough to remember a time when Twitter was celebrated as a political liberation technology and when Facebook held out the promise of democratic revolutions everywhere. Today, of course, social media are routinely blamed for the decline of a democratic public sphere or even outright "truth decay" more broadly.⁵¹ The fact that we've gone from one extreme to another is a sure sign that we lack criteria for judging these institutions; sometimes, it also is a sign that we more or less tacitly rely on an image of a golden age for democracy's infrastructure, which, like all golden ages, never existed.

My short intervention here aims at reminding us of two crucial functions of parties and news media organizations. I will also suggest three criteria for evaluating their health more broadly. Obviously, as always, context matters, but these would be a starting point for repairing or even significantly improving one important aspect of representative democracy.

Core Functions I: Staging the Political Battle

Both parties and, to a lesser degree, news media organizations stage the political battle, as the political theorist Nancy Rosenblum once put it. In other words, conflicts in a society are never completely self-evident; they need to be presented to citizens and made fit to be processed by democratic procedures. Parties and news organizations play a crucial role in allowing citizens to find each other as they group themselves on different sides of a conflict. As Tocqueville observed in the nineteenth-century about the United States, where both parties and a partisan press flourished at the time:

In democratic countries ... large numbers of men who feel the desire and need to associate may often find themselves unable to do so, because all are insignificant and none stands out from the crowd, so that they cannot identify one another and have no idea how to meet. But let a newspaper come and give visibility to the feeling or idea that has occurred simultaneously but separately

⁵¹ Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael D. Rich, *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2018)

to each of them, and all will immediately rush toward this light. Wandering spirits that had long sought one another in darkness will meet at last and join forces. The newspaper brings them together, and they continue to need the newspaper in order to stay together.⁵²

Free press and free association were dependent on each other; and in the America Tocqueville witnessed both served the ends of partisanship. We might find the idea of an unashamedly partisan press objectionable; but this erstwhile fusion points to an important function that both parties and professional media can fulfil: parties are not just what Edmund Burke described as “a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed;” they also, just like the media, offer representations *of* society, and in particular, of its political conflicts, *to* society. They create what Pierre Bourdieu called a “vision of divisions.” He specified that “the power of imposing a vision of divisions, that is, the power of making visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is the political power *par excellence*: it is the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society.”⁵³ Of course, parties do this with a view to motivating and mobilizing their actual and potential followers; media, in general, do not appear to have an agenda of distinctly political mobilization – though, as I argue further below, this impression is deceptive, and, normatively, things are more complicated than this contrast with parties would initially lead one to believe.

Parties do not just mechanically reproduce given conflicts, then; they consciously structure them, and sometimes they even create them. In fact, on occasion, only new claims to representativeness can actually make people realize some of their interests, or even identities. Traditionally, representation has been conceived in two ways: representation of substantive interests (such that represented and representative establish something like a principal-agent relationship) or some form of descriptive representation (such that the representative shares

⁵² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 600-1.

⁵³ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 138.

important traits with the represented).⁵⁴ In both cases, representation can be understood as the more or less mechanical reproduction of an existing reality.

Yet there is another, more dynamic and creative, understanding of representation. Here representation is not conceived as substantively or descriptively reproducing something that already exists; it is not a matter of mechanical reproduction. Rather, it is a process in which individuals or groups offer to a possible constituency an image of themselves – based on so far unrecognized ideas, interests, or aspects of their identities. As a result, citizens might perceive themselves and the politics they need in a novel light. A constituency is not so much reproduced, or even revealed, as talked into existence – and, as a result, might use its basic political freedoms in novel ways.⁵⁵

This isn't somehow manipulative; it is also not anything new that only started with "identity politics:" workers know that they are workers, but they don't spontaneously discover that they form part of the working class (according to some estimates, today only a quarter of French workers understand themselves as members of something called "the working class"): neither identities, nor, for that matter, interests naturally suggest themselves to us; they have to be organized to result in something like political solidarity.⁵⁶ Parties articulate different interests and ideas, but also identities; they can suggest terms of political engagement and then take the fight (at the ballot box, on TV and Twitter, etc.) from there. The nature of the fight is not simply given; the conflict is partly about how to define conflicts.

The media, for the most part, have no choice but to follow major parties in how they present conflicts, for instance by accepting a basic left-right schema. But media can also suggest different ways of looking at conflicts, for instance through investigative reporting that uncovers hitherto not so obvious forms of social and political discontent: think of British journalist W. T. Stead who saw himself as a tribune for the people.⁵⁷

The point is that intermediary institutions have a choice in how they present and structure conflicts. They obviously might have reasons that are not directly related to the overall health

⁵⁴ Hannah Pitkin. *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1967)

⁵⁵ Michael Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010)

⁵⁶ Adam Przeworski and John Sprague, *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁵⁷ Frank Bösch, "Volkstribune und Intellektuelle: W. T. Stead, Maximilian Harden und die Transformation des politischen Journalismus in Deutschland und Großbritannien", in: Clemens Zimmermann (ed.), *Politischer Journalismus, Öffentlichkeiten und Medien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2006), 99-120

of democracy as such: to put it bluntly, parties want to win elections; media owners (for the most part) want to make money. But these more particular goals are not incompatible with the requirement to stage political battles in such a way that the political system can cope with them, or, if you prefer, process them peacefully, or, even more bluntly: so that losers can live with the outcome.

Representative claims by parties which set up conflicts are *not* primarily claims about truth. As Hannah Arendt famously argued, opinions ought to be constrained by facts, but they are clearly *partisan* perspectives – and that is perfectly fine thing, too.⁵⁸ As John Rawls pointed out, a free society is very likely to be characterized by reasonable pluralism: citizens come to different judgments depending on different life experiences, a different sense of how to weigh various facts, and different subjective dispositions (I am risk averse; you’re not).⁵⁹ Hence, democracy cannot be a project of instantiating a single whole truth in politics; in fact, as Arendt insisted, *the* truth in politics is bound to be despotic.

The point can easily be misunderstood -- but the legal theorist Hans Kelsen was right to argue that democracy has a deep philosophical affinity with relativism: different people see the world in different ways, and pursue different ends; when they differ, it is not necessarily because they are selfish or stupid, or just ignorant of the facts; by contrast, according to Kelsen, forms of philosophical absolutism are bound to legitimate autocratic forms of rule.⁶⁰ Elections are not about finding the truth; if they were, there could never be such a thing as a loyal and legitimate opposition. Instead, we would have to assume that losers who persist with their positions are simply liars.

Representative claims – and election choices -- should of course be constrained by what we can plausibly call facts. The “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” is also a particular “representation” of society and “conflict,” in fact about as clear-cut a “vision of divisions” as one can imagine - - but it is obviously not a legitimate part of democratic politics. Things are different when, for instance, all sides agree about the basic scientific consensus on global warming, but then come to conflicting judgments as to how important the fate of our children and grand-children is (the Let’s-Just-All-Have-A-Good-Time-Now Party will have a distinct view on this), or how optimistic we should be about the probability of technological breakthroughs that would save

⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics”, in: *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 227-64.

⁵⁹ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993)

⁶⁰ Hans Kelsen, “Foundations of Democracy”, in: *Ethics*, vol. 66 (1955), 1-101.

large parts of the planet, or whether preventing climate catastrophe is at all possible under a capitalist economic system etc. etc.

Wanting conflicts to be constrained by facts does not mean that establishing all the facts is a precondition for public argument. As Christopher Lasch shrewdly observed:

What democracy requires is public debate, not information. Of course it needs information too, but the kind of information it needs can be generated only by vigorous popular debate. We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our own ideas about the world to the test of public controversy. Information, usually seen as the precondition of debate, is better understood as its by-product. When we get into arguments that focus and fully engage our attention, we become avid seekers of relevant information. Otherwise we take in information passively—if we take it in at all.⁶¹

Core Function II: External and Internal Pluralism

Intermediary institutions at the heart of democracy's critical infrastructure do not mechanically replicate particular realities (let alone reveal the truth). They should offer choices – which does not mean that everyone gets to choose their own reality, but that everyone, ideally, finds a perspective on particular realities informed by different value commitments. That is another way of saying: they ought to enable both *external* and *internal* pluralism.

External pluralism refers to having a significant range of both political parties and professional media available: entities that are not just in economic competition, but also in significant normative opposition to each other, such that citizens (and, for that matter, consumers) have clear-cut options differing in substance. The point here is not the conventional one that a competitive “marketplace in ideas” will make the truth win out; on many political questions, disagreement is not about the fact of the matter as such. Rather, at issue is the multiplication of

⁶¹ Christopher Lasch, “Journalism, Publicity and the Lost Art of Argument,” in: *Gannett Center Journal* (Spring 1990), 1-11.

creative representations of groups in society; those who have new ideas about interests and identities ought to be able to test them out freely and get to see if there are any takers.⁶²

Internal pluralism is less obvious. What I mean is that it is desirable to have a diversity of viewpoints also *within* individual intermediary institutions. Concretely, this implies that political parties ought to have proper democratic processes on the inside – such as primaries or extensive debates preceding the election of party officers. This practice is in fact prescribed in a number of constitutions, the thought being that parties which lack internal democracy are likely also to be authoritarian when they come to power. Professional media generally do not have internal democracy; in fact, a number of countries exempt them from standard labor laws that are supposed to enable employees to be involved in decision-making. In Germany and Austria, they fall under the category of *Tendenzunternehmen* -- literally “tendentious enterprises,” meaning organizations with an orientation to ideals, which, rather obviously, also includes churches.⁶³ But media can of course still present a variety of views – the kind of imperative that, in the United States, was once codified in the Fairness Doctrine. The latter obliged broadcasters to present opposing views on controversial issues of public importance (and to grant to those who felt misrepresented a right to reply).⁶⁴

One can ask whether such regulations might not misunderstand what particular directly *political* institutions are really supposed to be about: after all, are internal pluralism and partisanship not on one level incompatible? Parties aren’t debating clubs, and maximal “openness” could allow market libertarians to join Social Democratic parties and completely change their direction (which is one reason “blanket” and “open” primaries” in the US have been opposed by parties: their “brand” could be seriously undermined by partisans with entirely different agendas – who would also be utterly unaccountable for the outcome; they also worry that their own followers could start voting in primaries of minor parties and develop an attachment to them).

While Kelsen was right about the affinity between relativism and democracy as a whole, those who join political parties obviously do not do so because they think that everything is relative. Rather, they are precisely committed to certain political principles, and they wish to associate

⁶² Bryan Garsten, “Representative Government and Popular Sovereignty,” in Ian Shapiro, Susan C. Stokes, Elisabeth Jean Wood, and Alexander S. Kirshner (eds.), *Political Representation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 90–110; here 91.

⁶³ Mathis Fischer, *Der Tendenzbetrieb im österreichischen und europäischen Recht* (Vienna: Linde, 2008)

⁶⁴ It does not follow that every single institution which conceivably contributes to democratic political will formation does itself have to be democratic.

with others to promote the realization of those principles by passing laws. Parties are supposed to make that sort of sustained commitment possible; and the freedom of association from which they benefit includes the freedom *not* to associate with citizens who have very different principles.⁶⁵ Parties might even come as close as is possible under modern conditions to an Aristotelian ideal of civic friendship, based not so much on personal sentiment, but on shared pursuit of principles. It requires loyalty and patience and even forgiveness up to a point – giving each other some slack – as well as a memory of past struggles; and it is not just about trying to stand for principles, but also standing with others trying to realize them.⁶⁶ Obviously, one cares about the particulars of one’s actual friends, not about maximizing the diversity of people one claims to be friends with (which is not to deny that some people acquire token friends).⁶⁷

Partisans are by definition committed to particular shared principles; but sooner or later their precise meaning will become contentious. Lyndon Johnson, not a pol with philosophical pretensions, once opined: “what the man on the street wants is not a big debate on fundamental issues; he wants a little medical care, a rug on the floor, a picture on the wall.” But, as his party has learnt the hard way, even “a little medical care” will eventually become a matter of principled conflict. In any case, principles do not implement themselves, nor do they magically generate actual political strategies. Moreover, hardly anyone is ever committed to one principle only, and if they are, others will probably get tired of their going on and on about it fairly quickly. So, even beyond the question of practical implementation, there is a question of how principles coherently connect with each other.

What follows? Arguments must take place, and a proper pluralist internal party democracy allows partisans to have them. There is also a potential learning effect: more views will be on the table, and the pressure to justify them and, ideally, make them mutually acceptable for partisans, will render them more refined. But there is also a less obvious side-effect: internal debate habituates partisans to the notion that others might just *possibly* be right – and that those who lost the debate or at the ballot box can remain in loyal opposition (members whose side lost a mass plebiscite within a party are much more likely to head for the exits; those who could

⁶⁵ As an extreme case: In *LaRouche v. Fowler* (1998), the DC Circuit Court held that the Democratic Party could exclude delegates for Lyndon LaRouche (whom they had failed to keep off the ballot), because the latter was not a Democrat (and, more particularly, he was a racist).

⁶⁶ Russ Muirhead discusses the pros and cons of such “epistemic partiality” in “The Case for Party Loyalty,” in: Sanford Levinson *et al.* (eds.), *Loyalty* (New York: New York UP, 2013), 229-56.

⁶⁷ Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016).

make their case in discussion and then lost tend to stick around). What results might be something like critical, but thoroughly loyal opposition that can also serve as an important check on leaders. his, in turn, might improve the chances of accepting that democracy as a whole depends on the existence of legitimate disagreement and loyal opposition. Put more concretely: one could observe on January 6th what happens when a party has become a personality cult (and no longer features programmatic commitments other than to support the leader unconditionally); evidently, by that point, there was no such thing as being a good Republican and a Trump critic at the same time.

Now one might object that my vision of internal party debate is highly idealized. Not least, there is the problem not often articulated in the polite company of sophisticated democratic theorists, but never put more elegantly than in Oscar Wilde's quip: the problem with socialism is that it takes too many evenings (those who've attended the party branch meetings of socialist parties know exactly why that is). As usual, there is a serious point behind Wilde's seemingly frivolous remark: social scientists find that a large number of "amateurs" and "hobbyists" might indeed become a problem for a party, which is to say: folks who love endlessly debating big ideas, but who cannot be bothered to do the humdrum work of canvassing, stuffing envelopes, or whatever other boring practical tasks might need to get done. Such aficionados are usually educated and economically fairly well-off; for them the party really is a kind of party – a fun thing to do in the evening and on weekends. By contrast, citizens who really have a lot at stake and an urgent sense of a shared political fate – for instance, the prospect of having their health insurance taken away – will care about principles no less, but also have their minds focused on winning the battle for power here and now.⁶⁸

There is something inherently problematic about parties that have only one member – an example being Geert Wilders's right-wing populist party in the Netherlands (in fact, there are two members: Wilders and a foundation of which – one might have guessed it – Wilders is the only member). A vast improvement in pluralistic democracy appears to be the Brexit Party, which boasts about being a "people's party" with more than a 100 000 "supporters." Except that the party is actually a limited liability company, with only four officers, and only *one* person registered as having "significant" control: Nigel Farage. The supposed people's party is thus another one-man party. Such forms of intraparty autocracy arguably signals a profound aversion

⁶⁸ Eitan Hersh, *Politics is for Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020)

to the idea that the other side could *possibly* be right -- for no other side is admitted to begin with.⁶⁹ In some countries, such autocracy would even be plainly illegal: Germany and Spain have constitutions and special legislation on political parties which make a minimum amount of pluralism obligatory.⁷⁰ The justification is the concern that a political association that is autocratic on the inside will also be likely to act in undemocratic ways when it gets hold of the levers of power.⁷¹

In common-law countries, by contrast, such a norm appears inherently illiberal: parties are the result of people associating freely each other, and that freedom extends to the question of how to regulate the inner life of parties.⁷² Yet political parties are not like private clubs in which individuals can contract with each other as they see fit; they exist in the hope that at least some of their members, as a result of free and fair elections, get hold of the legitimate means of coercion; plus, whether successfully or not, they make claims to representativeness in a way a private tennis club does not.⁷³ And these representations can be illegitimate, or even plainly illegal: a for-whites-only-party is prohibited even in common-law countries: the British National Party, for instance, was ordered to open itself to British citizens of whatever descent, as opposed to “Indigenous Caucasians;” in the US in the mid-twentieth-century, old-style Democrats in Texas were told they could not hold a whites-only primary.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ On the wider significance of intra-party democracy, see also Kim Lane Scheppele, “The Party’s Over,” in Sanford Levinson, Mark Graber, and Mark Tushnet (eds.) *Constitutional Democracy in Crisis?* (New York: Oxford UP, 2018), 495-513.

⁷⁰ Article 21 of the German Basic Law states: “The political parties participate in the formation of the political will of the people. They may be freely established. Their internal organization must conform to democratic principles. They must publicly account for their assets and for the sources and use of their funds as well as assets.” The Party Law in turn regulates the specifics of internal democracy to a degree of detail that one might well consider as an infringement of the right of free association. In general, constitutionalizing parties has become the norm in Europe, see the excellent overview by Ingrid van Biezen, “Constitutionalizing Party Democracy,” in: *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 42 (2012), 187-212. As Van Biezen points out, only in three European countries (plus the UK, for obvious reasons) do parties receive no mention in the constitution: Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands. The earliest constitutionalization occurred in Iceland in 1944, followed by Austria in 1945, then Italy, and then Germany.

⁷¹ On the wider significance of intra-party democracy, see also Kim Lane Scheppele, “The Party’s Over,” in Sanford Levinson, Mark Graber, and Mark Tushnet (eds.) *Constitutional Democracy in Crisis?* (New York: Oxford UP, 2018), 495-513

⁷² Technically, they are unincorporated private associations. At the same time, courts, and not internal arbitration panels, decide many cases about who can join, who gets to vote in primaries, whether parties can have all-women-shortlists, etc.

⁷³ Of course, private clubs, in many contexts, are also not at liberty to discriminate, even if some associations (religious ones, above all) can be exempted from some provisions of anti-discrimination law.

⁷⁴ *Nixon v. Herndon*, 273 U.S. 536, 540 (1927)

Of course, that's just saying that what's illegal outside a party is also illegal inside a party. It does not follow that internal party democracy has to model full political equality in the sense of equal opportunity all the time. Parties may have internal hierarchies; just as representatives have more power than ordinary citizens, party committees may have special control over party affairs. That is a concern because parties have a particular vulnerability that does not apply to states: a massive entry of people into a party might change its character completely, subverting its original partisan commitments.

This peril underlines the need for intermediary powers within intermediary powers: at least sometimes, those who have spent time working their way up the party's ladder will have good reasons to exclude new entrants, or, for that matter, presidential hopefuls who seem primarily interested in building their own commercial brand. Party elders can serve an important function of *peer review*; it's a function that should not lightly be outsourced to consultants or TV stations, whose rationale will be ratings, as opposed to keeping faith with core partisan commitments. As Les Moonves, then CEO of CBS, famously acknowledged, Trump was bad for America, but damn good for CBS.

Intra-party democracy can be open, but it can't be open-ended; parties must be able to reach conclusive, binding decisions (and members have to be willing to be a loyal opposition, something that British Eurosceptics in the Conservative Party spectacularly failed to do). As Labour party leader Lord Bevan once put it bluntly, "we do not want to be in the position of having to listen to our own people."⁷⁵ But that can only be the case once "our own people" have had a chance to say something, and then are bound by something like a common program. The problem in so many countries today is precisely that citizens are highly partisan – and feel they haven't been listened to – while parties are hollow and weak, and unable to serve as laboratories for a coherent conception of the world, to pick up Gramsci's term again.

Obviously, professional media are not primarily dedicated to the promotion of political commitments or the fostering of political friendship. Here it is much more straightforward to argue that both external and internal pluralism are important; we want a wider range of views across the media, and within any given institution (though, as said above, a "tendency" can also legitimately limit internal media pluralism). The trouble is rather that sound criteria for media pluralism are hard to come by (nobody is ever officially against media pluralism, but that stance

⁷⁵ Quoted in Adam Przeworski, *Crises of Democracy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2019), 63.

is facilitated by the fact that nobody can really say what it is). As so often, we might see it more clearly, when it's gone: the staffing of public service media with pure loyalists, as has happened in Hungary and Poland; the concentration of ownership among the bosses of what is sometimes called the "construction bourgeoisie" in Turkey (that is, the beneficiaries of the building boom, which, as a thank-you to the president, used their resources to acquire what had been critical or even just broadly neutral newspapers); and the total withdrawal of state advertising – crucial for struggling newspapers in particular – as long as journalists do not toe the line.

Three criteria for judging the Critical Infrastructure of Democracy: Access, Autonomy, Assessability

Democracies should be open to new representations. That is another way of saying that both party and media systems ought to be accessible. Here one needs to distinguish, though, between institutions and individuals. It is easy for me to join Facebook to make my views known; it is not easy for anyone to found another Facebook with different proprietary algorithms. In both cases, barriers to entry should be low so as to avoid the emergence of "party cartels" on the one hand and platform monopolies on the other. I do not have the space here to elaborate on what this would mean concretely in terms of regulation; I just want to flag that the issue is an important one to address.

Observers often worry about too much access, though, because, with too many players on the scene, it becomes difficult for audiences to figure out who is who and which game is really being played. For instance, an institution is not really autonomous: a party can serve as the instrument of a nefarious oligarch. Some other times, popularity of certain views can be faked; arguably, the problem is not that particular views are spread by Russian bots or sockpuppets; the problem is that people don't understand that they're looking at bots and sockpuppets. According to one study, half of Twitter accounts discussing "reopening America" in the spring of 2020 may have been bots – a potentially massive influence operation of which very few citizens will be aware.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ See

<https://www.cs.cmu.edu/news/nearly-half-twitter-accounts-discussing-%E2%80%98reopening-america%E2%80%99-may-be-bots> [last accessed 20 August 2020].

And having fake followers – and pointing to them as evidence of popular support – is akin to publishing opinion polls falsified in your own favor.⁷⁷

Transparency would appear to be the answer. But then again, transparency is a bit like education: everyone's in favor of it, and it always happens to be the solution to everything. But with parties and media, the concern is justified. What we see is not always what we get in politics; and what we see should really be what we see. Citizens need some assurance about the autonomy of what they're opting for, be it a political formation or a source of news and opinion. This call for autonomy is not the same as a demand for impartiality: by definition, parties are not impartial, but media can also legitimately place their reporting in a frame of values they pursue – *as long as* that frame is clearly acknowledged and assessable. Timothy Garton Ash has coined the term “transparent partiality;” an example would be an Orwell who made it absolutely clear to the readers of *Homage to Catalonia* that his reporting on the Spanish Civil War was presented from a particular point of view, an engaged partisan – there was no pretense of a “view from nowhere.”⁷⁸ As Garton Ash observes, we believe him precisely because he does not claim to be “fair and balanced.”⁷⁹

In the end, all possible improvements of the infrastructure of democracy depend on one thing: intermediary institutions must be not only accessible and autonomous; they must also be *assessable*, as Onora O'Neill has put it.⁸⁰ If they are to contribute to citizens' judgments, it matters that citizens can also judge them: how are they financed (who owns them, in the case of media)? What agendas do they have? Might it be the case that a party is just the instrument of an individual with nefarious interests (think of Berlusconi's party Forza Italia, invented by marketing specialists, organized like a soccer fan club, devoted one man, and used not to advance some half-way plausible account of the common good, but as a means to keep the founder out of prison)? Might the real power behind a party's candidate be what in the US has been called “shadow parties” or “para-parties” – for instance campaign committees pushing a candidate without limits on spending, injecting unaccountable “dark money” into the political

⁷⁷ Julia Cagé, *The Price of Democracy: How Money Shapes Politics and What to do about it*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2020), 239.

⁷⁸ Timothy Garton Ash, *Free Speech* (London: Atlantic, 2016), 204.

⁷⁹ To be sure, the self-presentation of Fox oscillates between objectivity (“we report, you decide”) and supposedly transparent partiality, as when Bill O'Reilly claimed to offer news and analysis from a distinct working-class point of view. Reece Peck, *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class* (New York: Cambridge UP 2019).

⁸⁰ See Onora O'Neill, “The Rights of Journalism and the Needs of Audiences,” at: <http://kingsreview.co.uk/articles/the-rights-of-journalism-and-the-needs-of-audiences/> [last accessed 1 March 2019].

process?⁸¹ In turn, a “para-media” organization might appear impartial, but not truly independent (it’s potentially at the whim of an oligarch); conversely, it might be independent without being impartial, a state of affairs that could be perfectly acceptable as long as there is no pretense otherwise. The problem with a station like Fox is not that it tries to speak from a “conservative working-class perspective” (according to former presenter Bill O’Reilly) – whether or not that’s the case, the working class can very well decide on its own – but that it presents matters in a way that, charitably put, is inaccurate (claiming, for instance, that an unspecified “they” had dead people vote in US elections, thus backing up Trump’s long-debunked assertions about widespread voter fraud).

A media company might also say one thing while doing another; and, alas, it’s again one particular TV station that comes to mind: in spring 2020, Fox anchormen clamored for “opening the economy” and for people to mingle in the middle of a pandemic; meanwhile, Fox’s own offices were closed, and employees were instructed to stay at home. To judge the former public claim, it helps to know about the latter, private one.

Transparency is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for judging intermediary powers. The internal workings of both media organizations and parties have to be assessable: there has to be a clear enough sense of who ultimately makes decisions about the direction of an institution as a whole.⁸² Ostensible democratization – “let the members decide!” - can be meaningless if party elites tightly control shortlists, in line with the famous observation of Boss Tweed, the nineteenth-century US machine politician: “I don’t care who does the electing, as long as I get to do the nominating.”⁸³

⁸¹ Samuel Issacharoff, “Outsourcing Politics: The Hostile Takeover of our Hollowed-Out Political Parties,” in: *Houston Law Review*, vol. 54 (2017), 845-80; Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld, “The Hollow Parties,” in: Frances E. Lee and Nolan McCarty (eds.), *Can America Govern Itself?* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2019), 120-50.

⁸² It also must be possible to come to some reasoned judgement about its internal pluralism (even if we saw that pluralism is a tricky criterion: it’s possible to see whether there’s a real possibility for debate; but we can’t mandate that partisans or journalists, for that matter, disagree).

⁸³ The basics of democratic political conflict of course also apply: an opposition must have its say, a majority gets its way. Parties not observing such basics will rightly be seen as squabbling and pay a price at the polls.

Ákos Róna-Tas⁸⁴

GLOBALIZATION, DEMOCRACY AND THE NATION STATES

Introduction

Every day the world reminds us, in case we forget, that in an interdependent world we face global challenges, from pandemics to global warming, from refugee tsunamis to financial market meltdowns, from cyber-crime to terrorism, from access to water to responsible use of new technologies. What these global challenges have in common is that they cannot be resolved within the boundaries of a single country, because they cannot be contained within the territory of a single nation state or even a group of nation states.

The pandemic is driving this point home with brutal force. Nation states have tried to stop the virus with public health measures of their own, overriding the desperate efforts of coordination by a toothless WHO. Yet the only success, the vaccine, emerged from one of the truly global efforts we have today, the thing we call science and technology. Yes, scientists got state funding in countries like the U.S. or Germany. But even China and Russia, that tried to come up with their own national vaccine solutions relied on the global network of scientific knowledge. Although here science and technology came to our rescue, the inability of states to control and regulate scientific developments and their technological applications from gene editing to artificial intelligence, present their own set of frightening global challenges.

Global crises are problems of scale: there is a mismatch between the scale of the challenge and the scale of state power that currently the best positioned to address it.

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The Nation state and the problem of scale

The nation state itself developed to address problems of scale, and therefore its careful examination holds important clues about how to scale up to global challenges. As it emerged in the last centuries, the modern nation state created the unifying frame for national markets integrating small local economies, for national armies replacing groups of mercenaries, guard troops and private militias, and for a national language supplanting local dialects. National culture emerged with the help of a standardized, compulsory education and the promotion of national cultural production. The imagined community much larger than anyone can experience directly, we call a nation, resulted from these projects. The phenomenal success of the nation state hinged on its ability to widen and coordinate networks of social interaction by creating a new institutions and broader sense of belonging, thus a new form of identity that stretched all the way to the borders of one's country, but not much further. Scale well managed brings many benefits. Larger markets allow for more specialization and thus higher productivity. Wider webs of communication facilitate more creative encounters and faster circulation of ideas. But scale also delivers something else, it allows for a system of social insurance. By spreading the risks of everyday life across a large population, be that the risks of old age, sickness, loss of job, or physical violence, people get some relief from the anxieties of modern life. A village cannot have its own flood insurance, nor can it have its own pension system or army. It is too small for that; the cost of protection against and mitigation of risk must be dispersed across a larger population.

History has seen were several attempts to scale up nationalism itself to reach beyond its own geographic borders, continuing the process nation states had begun. Imperialism and colonialism tried to expand particular nationalisms into foreign lands with disastrous results we know all too well.

The Cold War

In many ways the post WWII years were the golden age of the nation state. In the Third World, liberation movements asserted the right of national self-determination against colonial rule.

The two main blocs of the Cold War hammered together by the global threat of nuclear annihilation provided another way to move up from the nation state to face global challenges. Both blocs forced their members to cooperate militarily and economically. The nuclear standoff between East and West did not dismantle nation states just made them compliant with the leader of their own bloc. In Eastern Europe, with the exception of the Baltic states, nations under the thumb of the Soviet Union still kept their fortified borders even between each other, their own language, state apparatus, domestic labor market and currency. The only important exception was the army, which was absorbed by a larger military alliance. Forced into the Warsaw Pact and the less successful COMECON, East European countries, all with short histories of nationhood, were dreaming of regaining their national sovereignty.

The devolution of state power

The fall of communism brought high hopes for the nations of Eastern Europe. Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria celebrated their newly gained independence, while Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, two federal republics, disintegrated, -- one peacefully, one violently, -- into smaller national states. But just as these formerly communist countries began to enjoy their newly gained powers of self-determination, they quickly encountered three constraining forces from different directions.

The three-way squeeze

First set of restraints were imposed by democratization through checks and balances on the executive of the state distributing its power sideways: the national executive had to share its power with other autonomous, national institutions. Autonomous judiciaries, presses and opposition parties, along with others such as chambers of commerce, trade unions and professional organizations claimed different pieces of the state's discretionary power. Second set of new limitations arrived as many decisions moved from the national level to localities. Regions, towns, villages could now make their own decisions about local matters from taxes, licenses, and zoning, to schools, roads, and policing. Finally, global processes also began to step in limiting the capacities of the state to act, passing powers to international players, such as the World Bank, the IMF, the WHO, WTO, the Bank of International Settlements, the UN,

and NATO. The influence of the European Union became palpable much before these countries joined, as the preparation for the eventual accession required compliance with basic EU rules many years in advance. The new political elites, therefore, inherited weak states, squeezed from three directions, hollowing out its capacities to deliver to electorates.

The paradox of democracy

A distinguishing feature of democracy is the allocation of state power through competitive elections. The ultimate prize of democracy is state power. Elections are about getting hold of the capacities of the state. Political parties run on promises about what they will and won't do once they have at their disposal all levers of the state apparatus and its resources.

New political elites soon found out that the means they gain by winning elections were much more meagre than they expected rendering them unable to deliver policy results their voters were expecting. This set off a vicious political cycle. Governments got elected, found an underpowered state, failed to keep promises, and disappointed the electorate. The electorate then unceremoniously threw out the governing political elites, new elites came to power to fail for essentially the same reason, and they too were sent packing at the first opportunity to bring in the next government, that could not do much better either. With each election, the electorate became more and more frustrated, leading some to lose interest in politics and others to radicalize and express their dissatisfaction with increasing ferocity.

Populism as a regressive solution

When defeated in 2002, Orban, for the first time understood that with a diminished state, political elites will cycle in and out of power, indefinitely. He concluded that the way out of this downward spiral is to restore the powers of the state. When his party won in 2010 a two-third majority in the legislature, he grabbed the unique opportunity to launch a backward-looking project to reclaim the earlier capacities of the state from all three directions. He began to unshackle the state executive from its checks and balances by taking over the press, putting party loyalists in the judiciary, and reducing opposition parties to hapless props in the legislature. Eliminating limitations from below, he vastly curtailed the authority of local

political bodies and used his party to gain influence in whatever decisions still remained at the local levels. And finally, to claw back power from global actors, he aggressively moved against international institutions asserting national sovereignty, which, of course, meant asserting the sovereignty of the Hungarian state, or, to put it with even more clarity and precision, asserting the sovereignty of the executive, that is, of Victor Orban.

Orban's decision was not just the self-serving whim of a power-crazed politician. It was one response to a structural contradiction between globalization that stretches and tears open the frame of the nation state, and electoral democracy that currently has no meaning outside the frame of a country. Not seeing this tension between globalization and democracy will doom any future government that may replace authoritarian regimes to failure and result in a return to a statist dictatorship. The depth of this tension is reflected in the fact that it affects, albeit in different forms, even countries like the US and the UK, with much stronger states that draw much more benefit from and have much more control over globalization than small Hungary. Trump's America First, or Brexit respond to this same problem of popular frustration with the impotence of the nation state.

Notice the importance of elections in these authoritarian regimes. Not that these elections are fair and square. In the Hungarian case, they are clearly rigged. But they are a prerequisite of authoritarian rule, and as such they are a reminder, that it is democracy shackled to a deficient state, that brought us this modern form of populist authoritarianism.

EU as a progressive solution

But regressive nationalist statism is not the only solution to this problem of the insufficient state. The European Union is another response, which that attempts to construct a larger political unit above nation states that would be effective in dealing with this problem of scale. From this forward-looking perspective, the nation state in its current form has outlived its usefulness. In this pursuit, the EU must take over and weaken further the nation states, which, as we know, leads to political conflicts. The nation state is too weak to meet global challenges but currently, it is too strong to allow for alternatives to develop. Then the question one must ask: how can the nation state be recast to allow effective global institutions to emerge and avoid global disasters?

This is a, if not *the*, fundamental question of our times and if there were an answer that can be delivered in a 30-minute talk, we would have this question been answered long ago. But we can make a modest step forward if we realize that we can usefully distinguish between two obstacles on the way. One is popular appeal of the nation state, the other is the resources national political elites can deploy to keep the status quo. In the time that remains, I will address the first obstacle and will conveniently ignore the second. I am a sociologist and not a political scientist, after all. Furthermore, I will restrict my attention to the European Union and will have nothing to say about other, regional formations. Finally, while I think that regional institutions are a big and much needed step towards the final goal, I will have nothing to say, how we get from a handful of regional players to collective, global solutions.

How to recast the nation state

The popular appeal of the nation state is that it is a unique source of security and identity. The first appeal is physical and economic, the second is cultural. Any attempt to recast the nation state must offer an alternative on both fronts.

Nation state as a source of security

One way of thinking about the nation is that it is a risk community, and the nation state is the organ that manages risk and delivers security for its nationals. The welfare state is the form in which the state most explicitly embraces its role to provide security, but since at least the 19th century, even the most minimalist states saw as their duty to defend the country from external, military attacks, maintain the security of property, mitigate natural disasters, and prevent deadly epidemics. Modern states now deliver insurance against unemployment, ill health, and old age economic destitution. Most state regulations are designed to eliminate risks from license requirements to product safety.

Being part of the nation means that one can count on these protections, even if the history of delivering them has been very uneven and complicated. Importantly, these protections in recent history have been furnished only by nation states. As long as these protections are available only from national governments and from nowhere else, nation states will remain powerful.

From this it follows, that if the EU wants to successfully integrate its member countries, it must offer all or most of these protections. There has already been one important step that would have been unimaginable in an earlier era. The idea of a nation state without its own sovereign military would have struck most people in the first part of the 20th century as completely fanciful. Today, most nation states of the European Union gave up their national armies. Their external security now entirely rests with NATO. Even the half dozen EU countries that did not join NATO depend on the military alliance for their security.

The first, and most feasible next step could be an EU-wide unemployment insurance system. Currently, unemployment insurance varies greatly across member states in terms of the maximum length of the period to qualify for and to receive the benefit, the percentage of the wage being replaced, the rules of eligibility and job-search, and availability-of-work-conditions. With an EU-wide system, initially these differences could be kept, as just the payment would move in and out of a single EU office. The next step would be to standardize the rules by gradually equalizing conditions upward. As wages will still differ substantially across countries, the benefits that are tied to wages will not have to be equalized. With rapid automation, unemployment is likely to become a central problem in the coming years. A well-designed EU-wide system of dealing with unemployment would go a long way to mitigate this crisis.

The second next step could be an EU pension system. Here people should be offered the option to choose between their domestic and an EU pension portable across countries. Again, as pensions like unemployment benefits are tied to salaries, there would not have to be a choice between everyone getting the highest pension currently available and asking the highest pension holders to take a cut. Moreover, people would have the choice to stay within their national pension system. The main problem here is the transition from one pension system to two parallel pension systems. As the domestic pensions are Pay-As-You-Go, the payments those opting for the new, EU system, will be missed from the nation pension coffers. Yet if both systems are PAYG, the transition can be resolved by creative accounting, whereby countries would get a part of the payment the EU receives and would pay a tax to the EU depending on the number of retirees who get their pension from the EU and who states do not have to serve. The expectation would be that over time, more and more people would move into the EU system. A European pension system would also increase the mobility of labor, another way to ease unemployment.

To create a European healthcare system would be harder to achieve. Unlike unemployment and pension, a common EU healthcare system would have to deliver the same level of service in each country. Yet as a first step, the EU already introduced a healthcare card that allows members of the European Economic plus Switzerland to receive necessary medical treatment “without returning” to their home countries upping the standard from the usual travel insurance for emergency care.

As COVID made it clear, a common public health authority with powers of coordination and enforcement, even if limited to infectious diseases, is urgently necessary to deal with the Corona virus and manage pandemics better in the future. One way of thinking about pandemics is that they are like wars, that require the sudden mobilization of large resources that lay idle for long periods of time. Just as an army does little in peace time but we cannot disband it, and train soldiers and purchase equipment once the enemy attacked, a pandemic force would stay on alert for years to deploy on hours’ notice. This pandemic force should be created, trained, and equipped by the European Union to fight epidemics.

Nation state as a source of identity

Identity is a self-definition via membership in a fictitious group. The group is fictitious because its members do not know each other nor are connected. Identity is always a link to people we don’t know and never met. *Being* a father is a position in a group of intimately related people. *Identifying* as a father describes the person not as a member of his family but a member of a category of fathers. This group or category includes a very large number of unrelated people, who nevertheless share some set of traits and experiences that they consider central to who they are. Seen from the opposite direction, identity is what enables people to develop a sense of belonging to groups too large for personal connections.

Nation will remain an important source of identity, but one’s identity always contains multiple layers and facets. National identity is only one of many identities in the self-understanding of people. While new forms of security provided by the EU would to some extent substitute national programs, the building of EU identity does not have to displace national identity, but would add and amplify another form identification.

There are several efforts already underway to foster a European identity, from a European media (e.g., Euronews) to common cultural events. These would have to be expanded. One of the most successful programs building European identity is the Erasmus program that allows college students to study elsewhere in Europe. Yet this is limited to the best educated. As the main tool of national identity building has been compulsory education, the next logical step would be the creation of a network of European elementary, middle, and high schools in all countries. These should exist side by side with state, religious and private schools, but should be free. Parents should be able to choose whether they want their children to go to a public or a European school without financial consequences.

The curriculum of these European schools should be adjusted to the host country's history and culture, but should emphasize European identity, and have mandatory language requirements and short exchange programs between schools across borders.

Most importantly, European identity must have a clearer focus. It originally centered on avoiding the next European war, and by now that goal has spent its emotional force. The new European identity must take on new causes and that could start with the list of truly global challenges no nation state is able to solve on its own: climate change, pandemics, regulation of financial markets, cyber-crime, terrorism, internal and incoming migration, regulation of technology, but also social and economic security.

The problem of politics

Currently, European politics is simply the extension of national politics. The European Parliament is created by national parties that contest in national elections for the opportunity to serve their country in Strasbourg. This is one of the reasons why European politics is conceived as far from the reach of voters.

To influence decisions made in Brussels, voters must first influence national politics that they already perceive as ineffectual. The lack of popularity of Brussels is not the result of people's satisfaction with their own national polity. To the contrary, it is the consequence of their deep dissatisfaction with national political elites.

Electoral politics in Europe must become truly European. Parties must run on European issues and gather votes across national borders. That demands the clear answers why certain issues are European, and why their solutions need the scale of the European Union.

We need a new democratic structure. One that is not wedded to the nation state, one where voters can directly control politicians charged with making global decisions. In this new democracy, representation and participation should both find its place, together with local autonomy at each level. For the European political project to work, it must also promote the autonomy of the political units below the state. Local autonomy is the EUs best friend.

The problem of time

The global challenges we face are urgent. We have only the window of a few years to slow down and stop global warming. Defeating COVID and preventing the next pandemic has even a shorter time frame. In fact, none of our global problems can wait until a new European identity not just develops but also becomes dominant. This creates a quandary that takes us back to the political resistance of national elites.

Conclusion

The world is in danger and democracy is in peril. The two risks are related. Both are connected to the obsolete form of the nation state. We must create executive institutions that can be effective above the scale of individual nations, and political institutions that can democratically control them. The nation state will not go away anytime soon and will remain an important source of identity, culture and executive might. And this is not a bad thing, just it should yield some of its sovereignty to larger institutions like the European Union (and also to localities). Even in a world, where strong, supranational units manage global challenges, solutions to global problems will depend on states to implement and monitor global policies. Moreover, not all problems are global. In fact, most can and should be solved at the national (or local) level without direct involvement of supranational institutions. The diversity of differences among countries serves Europe well in many areas. Even solutions to global problems can benefit from learning from variation in national policies.

The global scale of some of our immediate and most dangerous problems require a reassessment of democracy and the role of the nation state. The European Union must learn from nation states and bolster its capacity to become a principal source of security and identity of its citizens. It should also show that democracy and politics is not the exclusive realm of the nation state by fostering pan-European parties, public discourse, a hierarchical political structure with strong local autonomy, and new electoral institutions.

If it fails, we are facing a world of authoritarian states jockeying for the highest ground on a sinking ship.

Dániel Hegedűs⁸⁵

WHY DO AUTHORITARIAN PLAYERS LEARN FASTER?

*Limits and Best-Practices of Policy Learning among Pro-Democracy
Forces in Central and Eastern Europe*

Looking back to the past ten months, 2021 appears to be a rather positive year for democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

The October 2021 Czech parliamentary elections can be—and will be—celebrated as a triumph of pluralist liberal democracy over populist illiberalism. However, Andrej Babis is not the only populist strongman in the region ousted from power. Although repeated Bulgarian elections may have not resulted in stable government majorities, but they expelled veteran illiberal leader Boyko Borisov from the Prime Minister office who have been dominating Bulgarian politics since 2009.

Key changes in global power centers, like the inauguration of President Biden and the September 2021 German elections also sent the message that illiberal leaders might expect less coddling and more commitment to democratic values and rule of law at the European and Transatlantic stage.

The pendulum of political dynamics that during the past decade has moved in illiberal and authoritarian direction appears to be swinging back. However, positive developments shall not deceive observers. One cannot see the re-consolidation of democracies in Central and Eastern Europe; only the pendulum is in swing. Notwithstanding this, democratic successes stories might offer important lessons learned for pro-democracy forces struggling with autocratizing regimes throughout the CEE region.

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Policy learning among democrats and authoritarians

One striking feature of advancing authoritarianism and democratic opposition to it Central and Eastern Europe over the past decade has been the asymmetry in policy transfer and policy learning. Observers were repeatedly surprised by the pace and extent of learning and knowledge transfer among illiberal players, which greatly overshadowed similar performance in the pro-democracy camp.

Regarding the intimidation and suppression of critical civil society, the Russian foreign agent legislation became the blueprint for anti-NGO bills throughout the CEE region, from Hungary through Romania to Bulgaria.

With regard to the fight to neutralize critical coverage and establish the dominance of illiberal narratives in social media, the Polish and Hungarian ruling parties PiS and Fidesz were happy to deploy paid trolls in a highly organized and sophisticated manner, once pioneered in the famous Russian troll-farms, in order to confuse public discussions in the social media or to intimidate users with a liberal democratic mindset. Trolls are today not only essential instrument in the disinformation toolkit of authoritarian powers like Russia or China, but of the EU autocracies like Hungary and Poland as well. Furthermore, the playbook Prime Minister Orbán used to establish a government-friendly media empire in Hungary through acquisitions conducted by cronies also became a regional bestseller. Its chapter on seizing control over local and regional media in the countryside was copycatted by Polish leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski and state-owned energy giant PKP Orlen. Furthermore, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša also mobilized significant resources to implement the playbook in his small Alpin country as well.

When it comes to scapegoats and concepts of public enemies, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's rock-solid anti-emigration position has spread with lightning speed during the Autumn of 2015 in the other three Visegrad countries. In 2020-2021, the anti-LGBTQ campaigns of the Polish government not only set the stage for Orbán's Hungary to follow-suit, but also deeply inspired radical-right parties throughout Central and Eastern Europe, triggering anti-LGBTQ legal initiatives and violence in countries like Romania and Bulgaria.

Overall, illiberal and authoritarian players demonstrated an astonishing learning ability in Central and Eastern Europe, significantly enhancing through exchange and policy transfer

their toolkit for undermining checks and balances, dividing society, and suppressing vulnerable groups. In contrast, pro-democracy actors, during the nineties and early 2000s the pioneers of transnational policy learning, were unable to convert international exchange into any meaningful resource at the domestic political stage. Although key advocacy and watchdog NGOs are better integrated into transnational networking than ever before, democratic political players—often in opposition in countries with increasingly illiberal settings—struggle to maintain meaningful and purposeful networking relations with their regional and international peers.

The explanations for this remarkable but contrasting development are manifold.

First, with Western democracy support and assistance coming to a halt in Central and Eastern Europe after countries in the region joined the EU in 2004, 2007 and 2011 respectively, the culture of transnational policy transfer and learning slowly evaporated in CEE as neither EU conditionality nor dedicated funds were in place to demand or available to support it.

Second, the format of policy learning illiberal players successfully achieved to conduct and those of pro-democracy actors have to conduct is different. The main policy learning pattern of authoritarian actors is instrumental learning, with legislative solutions, acquisition and organizational patterns, and campaign strategies in its focus, which are both easily transferable and simple to be implemented from power position.

In contrast, the knowledge pro-democracy players are looking for is deeply political; it touches upon the questions how to organize or how to reorganize a political community, and how to mobilize it in order to forge new majorities in deeply divided societies with often skewed political playing fields. Simple, easily transferable policy instruments do not provide answers to these questions. Even if certain best practices exist, their policy transfer is rather difficult if not impossible. Mainly because these best practices are deeply rooted in a particular social and political context (including the attitude structures of the society, the constitutional framework, the broader political agenda, and the number and positions of the relevant political players) which they were tailored to and in which context they work. Uprooting these strategies and placing them in a different context hence often simply does not make any sense.

Third, the potential directions of democratic policy transfers became blurred. To put it simply, the question ‘who should learn from whom’ is extremely difficult to answer. During the nineties and early 2000s the direction of democracy assistance was simple and clear. Western

democracies shared their experiences, institutional solutions, and democracy support resources with the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. Today, such an approach to policy transfers would not necessarily make sense anymore. Even if certain old democracies made their own experience with the specter of illiberal populism, like the US did, they were unable to find effective and sustainable social and political responses to the challenge. There is barely any relevant best practice they could share.

In a certain respect, rather the old democracies should learn from the experiences of autocratization in Central and Eastern Europe. However, such learning processes have their own limitations as well. Although a shared threat perception appears exist in certain particular areas, like the challenge posed by the populist radical-right to pluralist democracies, most Western observers refute the idea that illiberal tendencies could lead to such an institutional breakdown of democracy in Western Europe like it happened in Poland or Hungary. In the eyes of many Western observers, the illiberal and authoritarian tendencies in countries like Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, or just until recently in Bulgaria represent the teething troubles of unconsolidated democracies. In their eyes, Western and Central and Eastern European democracies face qualitatively different challenges; a rather shortsighted position in light of the developments in the U.S., France or Italy.

Best Practices of Combating Autocratization in CEE

From the perspective of opposing illiberal and authoritarian developments in Central and Eastern Europe, horizontal learning-processes among the countries in the region would be the most crucial. While such an active exchange definitely takes place between experts and CSOs from Poland and Hungary, it is mostly absent in other relations. The main reasons behind this lack of communication and policy exchange is 1) the emphasize deliberately put on the existing differences among the countries, especially within the V4, when it comes to challenges to democracy, 2) the weakness of expert networks and exchange between the V4 countries on the one hand and Romania and especially Bulgaria on the other, and 3) the general Westward orientation of pro-democratic elites.

However, do important best practices of the fight against authoritarian tendencies exist in Central and Eastern Europe that are in some form transferable and hence deserve the close attention of pro-democracy forces throughout the region?

One can identify at least three distinct best practices that played a crucial role in political changes and dynamics that contained illiberal developments in Central and Eastern European countries over the past few years.

First, the organic electoral cooperation between civil society and democratic forces is obviously such a best practice. This pattern emerged during the 2019 Hungarian municipal elections and the 2019 Slovak presidential and 2020 Slovak parliamentary elections. These elections demonstrated that CSOs can play a crucial role in candidate nomination, mobilization, and campaigning and can also provide higher legitimacy and extra mobilization resources for the democratic players they are allied with. Obviously, such partisanship of civil society is not sustainable in the long run, as it weakens the perceived independence and hence the legitimacy of CSOs, but it can provide a distinct advantage for pro-democracy forces in the heat of neck-on-neck electoral races.

Second, the successful mobilization of diasporas, which was developed to perfection by the Romanian pro-democracy forces, can be deemed as best practice as well. The Romanian diaspora played an undoubtedly crucial role in the 2018 anti-corruption rallies and the 2019 Romanian presidential elections. Diaspora mobilization also had some sporadic forms during the December 2018 Hungarian labor code protests.

With an eye on the 2022 Hungarian and 2023 Polish elections, the importance of diaspora mobilization can hardly be overestimated. More than 300,000 Hungarian citizens have left the country since 2010, who constitute an important electoral pool for the opposition parties. Conducting appropriate campaign in the diaspora communities and supporting their members that they are able to live with their right to vote in practical terms is an important task for both opposition parties and civil society in Hungary. The approximately 2 million large Polish diaspora might have an equal importance for the Polish democratic forces as well.

The third best practice is a political dynamic, when elections are successfully reframed by pro-democracy forces as referenda against an autocratizing strongmen. The phenomenon could be simply called ‘good polarization’. The buzzword is often not democracy, but anti-corruption, like in case of the 2020 Slovak, 2021 Bulgarian or 2022 Czech elections. However, to be

successful, campaigns aiming at good polarization do not need to be centered around a single message. What is important, that the different campaign messages and topics, may that be pro-democracy, anti-corruption, or social welfare issues, refer to and reinforce the same cleavage line: being with or against the strongman.

Polarization is often perceived as a negative phenomenon that undermines the stability of established democracies. This might be well true, but polarization dynamics can bring down autocratizing regimes as well. Mitigating the negative impacts of polarization can be an important task for pro-democracy forces in government, but they have to learn to instrumentalize polarization in the election campaigns. This might be the key to the success if they would like to reclaim the political space from illiberal, autocratizing leaders.

Policy transfer among pro-democracy forces might be more challenging than the relatively simple instrumental policy learning among illiberal, autocratizing forces. Notwithstanding this, pro-democracy players should not leave this option unexploited to enhance their political weaponry. With regard to policy learning, democratic forces from Central and Eastern European countries have to look at each other. Lessons learned from Bulgaria, Czechia, Romania or Slovakia might be both more relevant and more crucial for the Polish and Hungarian opposition, than experiences from Western Europe. Only if Central and Eastern European pro-democracy elites start actively learning from and coordinating with each other does Central and Eastern Europe have a chance to a proper re-democratization and that the pendulum will not swing back again in authoritarian direction.

THE RULE OF LAW, DEMOCRACY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS – STATE OF THE ART

The rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights have a special place in EU law. They are all enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) along some other values, on which European integration is based, such as human dignity, freedom, and equality. These are the values that capture the very essence of Europe as a peace project, based on solidarity, humanity, tolerance and pluralism. And these are the values that all Member States are expected to share and promised to respect and promote when signing the Treaty of Lisbon.⁸⁷ The rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights are singled out as the most important foundational elements that are also co-constitutive, and inherently interconnected. Once one of them is violated, harm to the other values is inevitable, too (Carrera et al., 2013). The rule of law without democracy is a contradiction, while democracy without the rule of law may easily lead to the dictatorship of the majority. Also, fundamental rights are closely interlinked with the other two values (Bárd et al., 2016). Take for example the relation between freedom of expression, the right to receive information and informed participation in a democracy. One can only make informed choices during elections, or meaningfully participate in public debates in the possession of knowledge about the facts (Bayer et al., 2019: 62).

Even though Article 2 TEU values had been taken for granted for a long time in the EU, a solid decline started a decade ago in Hungary and other Member States are now following suit. The EU is by now harboring Member States that are no constitutional democracies anymore. According to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), Hungary is simply not a democracy any longer, while Freedom House stopped putting Hungary among the “free countries”. According

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⁸⁷ Cf. Article 2 TEU: “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”. Article 3(1) TEU: “1. The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.”

to the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) Hungary was among those countries that had the most significant drops in rule of law matters. Also the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index showed a devastating picture: Hungary and Poland declined the most of any country in the EU/EFTA/North-America region, and in 2020 Hungary reached its lows: it had the region's lowest scores for constraints on government powers, open government, fundamental rights, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and the rule of law in general (*v-dem.net*; Freedom House; BTI, 2020; WJP Rule of Law Index). Hungary and Poland could not join the EU, were they to apply today.

Naturally, no state is immune to individual violations of Article 2 TEU values. But we must distinguish these sporadic instances from systemic rule of law decline. Hungary, and more recently Poland belong to the latter category. They introduced processes “through which elected public authorities deliberately implement governmental blueprints which aim to systematically weaken, annihilate or capture internal checks on power entrenching the long-term rule of the dominant party.” (Pech and Scheppele, 2017) Little wonder that these two countries are currently subjected to Article 7(1) TEU procedures designed to determine a clear risk of a serious breach of Article 2 TEU values.

Ruling by cheating

“Ruling by cheating” is the title of András Sajó's (2021) most recent book, where he claims that an illiberal democracy, or as he puts it, a plebiscitarian leader democracy, or “PLD, née Führer-Demokratie”⁸⁸ will do everything to conceal its true, authoritarian tendencies. Such a regime is necessarily based on a “theory of cheating” in its constitutional law, whether straightforward lies, deceit, fraud, tricks, etc. “Cheating” is defined as “pretending to observe a rule in order to depart from it, often reaping undeserved benefits from those cheated [...] In the act of cheating, the cheater – the plebiscitarian leader – (mis)represents himself as normobservant. The illiberal regimes relying on systemic cheating pretend to satisfy the requirements of the RoL [rule of law] by following specific rules that seem applicable, but they do so in disregard of the relevant standards or principles of the RoL. A regime that cheats in its

⁸⁸ Borrowing from Max Weber, PLD is considered to be an “authority and regime type with authoritarian traits, like charismatic leadership, generated by the internal logic of modern mass democracy per se.” (Körösi, 2019: 283 cited by Sajó, 2021: 5)

use of the law breaches a promise of ‘truth’ or authenticity that the underlying norms of the game will be observed.” (Sajó, 2021: 5) Cheating can be observed in relation to all European values, but in the following examples of cheating with regard to the rule of law and in relation to human rights will be singled out.

The semblance of the rule of law

Albeit illiberal governments do everything to do away with checks and balances constraining power, they claim to be adherent to European values. Being a rule of law violator is a great stigma, so value infringements have a veneer of legality. Relying on the above mentioned “theory of cheating”, they seem to be embedded in legal rules. Instead of admitting what is actually happening: changing laws and institutions with the sole aim of retaining power and money (*The Economist*, 2018),⁸⁹ illiberal governments make efforts to mix legality with the rule of law, and argue that everything they do is legal. Showing these veiled attempts to destroy the rule of law, systems are characterized by oxymorons such as constitutional populism (Blokker, 2019a, 2019b; Halmai, 2019) or abusive constitutionalism (Dixon and Landau, 2019). These terms illustrate that the rule of law is just a semblance, in these systems law does not serve as an opposition to arbitrary power, and these systems cannot be labelled as democracies based on the rule of law anymore. The constitutional court is compromised, the most experienced judges are removed from the top courts, the ombudsman system as we new it, ceases to exist, media pluralism is seriously jeopardized, academic freedom is curtailed, NGOs’ space is shrinking, human rights defenders are stigmatized, vulnerable minorities are scapegoated (for an early account of the Hungarian saga see Tóth, 2012), and even the thinnest understanding of the rule of law fails to be met (Schumpeter, 1950), since elections are not considered to be fair anymore by international observers (OSCE, 2018).

⁸⁹ Hungary is often labelled as a kleptocracy.

The semblance of human rights protection

Just like being a rule of law violator became a stigma, similarly, at least since the Shoah, the human rights paradigm became very powerful, and gained a strong legitimizing force in national politics. No government in any part of the world today would openly challenge it. Therefore state-mandated violations of human rights – just like rule of law decline – are disguised. Illiberals, instead of openly acknowledging rights infringements, try to argue for the need of limitation of fundamental rights in the interest of legitimate state aims, that are allegedly necessary and proportionate. Take for example the justifications for the need of punitiveness in the form of three strikes legislation (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2009), life imprisonment without the possibility of parole in the name of security (Lévay, 2016), or the prolonged states of emergencies since 2015 (Drinóczi, 2020), where the balance between freedom and security is allegedly to be struck differently than what we are used to in normal times. An alternative method to violate human rights is to pretend to have a conflict of rights, such as for example having a clearly homophobic law packaged as a children’s rights legislation fighting paedophilia (Polgári and Dombos, 2021).

Human rights violations happen all over the world, including democratic states, one may say. This is indeed true. What makes the illiberal Hungarian case unique is (i) the quantity and quality of these violations, (ii) that rights infringements are used to veil power and money grab, and (iii) human rights violations are rubber-stamped by captured institutions.

Ad (i) The greatness of a nation can be judged by how it treats its weakest members, or so they say. The Hungarian illiberal system heavily underperforms in this respect, to say the least. Support by the electorate is enhanced through emotionalism, revolutionary rhetoric, and identity politics in general. Emotionalism has a nationalistic connotation unifying an allegedly homogenous Hungarian nation along ethnic lines, and at the same time – by way of a negative definition – excluding from its members “others” including traditional unpopular minorities (for example suspects, convicts, LGBTIQ+ persons, the Roma, the poor) or anyone diverging from the “ordinary” (for example members of small churches). Hostility against minorities is partially embedded in Hungarian society, but is to a great extent is artificially created (Bárd, 2017).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ See for example the Hungarian anti-migrant billboard campaign and its consequences.

Ad (ii) Another characteristic that makes the Hungarian case unique is that minority bashing is used as a red herring to divert attention from power and money grab. Some of these red herrings do not harm any individual or group of society directly. An less harmful example was suggesting the reintroduction of the death penalty by the prime minister. There was immense and immediate international reaction and the idea was abandoned soon, without infringing upon anybody's human rights. Other red herrings however come at great costs for the minorities, and for society's decency and humanity, such as the recently adopted and above referenced homophobic law adopted under the disguise of children's rights (Polgári and Dombos, 2021).

Ad (iii) The last uniqueness of the Hungarian case is that human rights violations are rubber-stamped by captured institutions. The ombudsman system as we used to know it, ceased to exist. The data protection ombudsman's office has been scrapped entirely, and was replaced by an authority with a government-loyal head.⁹¹ The recent ombudspersons are rather passive, and the Equality Body was merged into this weak ombudsman's office. But it is the Constitutional Court that not only passively, but also proactively, by way of its interpretation becomes complicit in fundamental rights violations through the rise of abusive case law (Dixon and Landau, 2019). Take the criminalization of homelessness, which was not only constitutionally entrenched (which is itself unprecedented), but rubber stamped by the Constitutional Court (Lévay, 2021). Or take the regulation of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, in clear violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The case was pending for a long time before the Constitutional Court, and there was a majority for declaring it unconstitutional, and quashing the law. But the Constitutional Court waited with the passing of the judgment until it was packed with people loyal to the government and ultimately it rubber stamped that law, too (Lévay, 2016). The Constitutional Court could have prevented a Strasbourg condemnation by declaring the law null and void, but failed to do so. And when the condemnation happened, the state amended the respective law in a manner that clearly violated the Strasbourg test, so Hungary was held to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights for a second time.⁹²

In sum: in lack of a strong Constitutional Court, an independent court, ombudsman system, and equality bodies, one is left with external *fora* to enforce values that the Member States and the

⁹¹ CJ, C-288/12, Commission v Hungary, 8 April 2014.

⁹² Case of Sándor Varga and Others v. Hungary, Applications nos. 39734/15 and 2 others, 17 June 2021.

EU were presumed to share. As I will argue in the next chapter, albeit the EU has the tools to enforce the values it is based on, these are heavily underused by the institutions. And even when they are used, the gist of the matter is execution of judgments, whereas there are more and more cases where enforcement is faulty, incomplete or non-existent (see e.g. Amnesty International Hungary, 2021: 8-9). So in the end, state capture and systemic human rights violations happen in broad daylight in the heart of Europe, and become normalized by the lack of efficient external responses.

Rule of law decline in a Member State is an EU matter

Violation of the rule of law in any Member State is an EU matter. The EU must intervene in such cases. True, problems identified primarily affect Hungarian citizens living in Hungary. Having this in mind, EU action would correspond to the expectations of citizens who had high hopes to join the West not only economically, but also in terms of the rule of law, democracy, and fundamental rights, when Hungary acceded to the European project in 2004. And let us not be fooled by the two third majority of the current governing party in the Hungarian parliament. Less than 50% of the votes are translated by the election laws – that had been changed over the past ten years to benefit the winner even more – into a supermajority in parliament. In addition, the election is said to be unfair by international observers (OSCE, 2018). Even though the current government's recurring theme is secession from the EU (for an English language summary see *dw.com*, 2021), Hungary is still one of the most-pro EU Member States and people believe in values enshrined in Article 2 TEU (European Commission, 2021).⁹³ But rule of law decline does not only affect Hungarians. A state's departure from European consensus on rule of law standards will have EU-wide consequences. If Members of the European Parliament EU delegates of the national government were voted in unfairly, this will delegitimize the EU's decision-making mechanism. Another problem is rule of law violations becoming contagious, in case EU institutions fail to respond to backsliding. Furthermore, once the values of Article 2 TEU are not respected, the essential presumptions behind the core of the Union do not hold any more. The single market, an investment-friendly environment or effective cross-border

⁹³ According to the most recent Eurobarometer survey, 68% are optimistic about the future of the EU, and 62% demand "more EU".

judicial cooperation in criminal matters are all in danger, if basic tenets of the rule of law, such as an impartial judiciary are not guaranteed.

It is not only existential for the EU to react to rule of law violations and other value deficiencies in the Member States, but the EU also possesses a sufficient number of tools to counter these problems. The Copenhagen dilemma (having strong scrutiny before accession, but no dissuasive responses after) exists on the one hand because these mechanisms have a scattered and patchwork nature and on the other because the powers which are entitled to use the tools they have available are unwilling to do so. In the following the main instruments will be listed that could be employed for a dissuasive responses against rule of law decline. (The list is far from exhaustive. For details see Pech et al., 2019).

EU tools to enforce Article 2 TEU values in the Member States

In this chapter some of the EU's tools will be listed that are capable of enforcing Article 2 TEU values. Monitoring and benchmarking instruments, platforms for discussion and debate, such as Article 7(1) TEU, the Commission's EU Justice Scoreboard, the Commission's Rule of Law Framework, the Commission's Annual Rule of Law Report, the Council's dialogues on the Rule of Law, the European Semester, will therefore not be discussed. Instead Article 7(2)-(3) TEU, infringement procedures, and conditionality will be presented.

Article 7(2)-(3) TEU

Article 7 TEU, which is designed to enforce Article 2 TEU values, has a preventive and a sanctioning prong. The preventive prong enshrined in Article 7(1) is a so-called *lex imperfecta*, meaning that it does not foresee any sanctions. Such proceedings are currently ongoing against Poland and Hungary.⁹⁴ It can only be regarded as a platform for a dialogue between EU

⁹⁴ European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018 on a proposal calling on the Council to determine, pursuant to Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded (2017/2131(INL)); European Commission (2017) Reasoned Proposal in Accordance with Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union Regarding the Rule of Law in Poland – Proposal for a Council Decision on the Determination of a Clear Risk of a Serious Breach by the Republic of Poland of the Rule of Law COM(2017)835 final.

institutions and Member State governments, at the end of which potentially the Council may determine that there is a clear risk of a serious breach of Article 2 values in the national setting. This determination is all foreseen by the provision. Article 7(2)-(3) TEU in contrast, is designed to introduce sanctions by suspending certain rights of the problematic Member States, including – but not limited to –the respective government’s voting rights in the Council, in case of the existence of a serious and persistent breach of Article 2 TEU values. The scope of application of Article 7 TEU is broad and, unlike other tools, it is not limited to Member States’ actions when implementing EU law, but also covers breaches in areas where they act autonomously.⁹⁵

Infringement

Articles 258 and 260 TFEU provide for Commission-initiated infringement procedures. These are currently heavily underused in the enforcement of the rule of law.

In the face of the Commission’s silence, Member States that are friends of the rule of law could make use of Article 259 TFEU, which gives them the right to act in place of the Commission. The contours of such a first attempt are already visible (Morijn, 2020; for the details on Article 259 see Scheppele et al., 2020). The Commission could also bundle cases in the frame of infringement proceedings, and point to the systemic nature of various problems (Scheppele, 2016; Blauberger and Kelemen, 2017: 321). Another vital element that the Commission should put a greater emphasis on is enforcement of CJEU judgments. The decision in *Lex CEU*,⁹⁶ concerned a Hungarian piece of law, which allowed the government to arbitrarily refuse to grant a license to the Central European University to offer educational services in Hungary. The law in question which violated several pieces of European and international laws, is still in force, almost a year after the CJEU judgment had been rendered, and the government plans to amend the law are also dubious as to their EU law compliance (Inotai et al., 2021). Similarly, the

⁹⁵ Article 354 TFEU provides that the Member State subjected to the Article 7 TEU procedure is excluded from voting. A problem may arise with regard to multiple Member States simultaneously subject to various Article 7 TEU procedures. They might cooperate by vetoing Article 7 procedures. Another problem is that the voting threshold for the adoption of such sanctions is extremely high. Whereas the affected Member State is excluded from the voting, in all other respect qualified majority has been defined in line with Article 238(3)(b) of TFEU. In other words, the population threshold seems to be unaffected, i.e. the votes – that now exclude the votes from one Member State – still have to represent 65% of the population of the EU. For various readings of this provision see Kochenov, 2021: 143. Sooner or later the issue will need to be decided by the CJEU.

⁹⁶ Case C-66/18 *Commission v Hungary (Higher Education)*, 6 October 2020, EU:C:2020:792

judgment in *Lex NGO* (for an immediate analysis see Bárd et al., 2020),⁹⁷ about the stigmatization of civil society organizations has not been properly followed up either (Amnesty International Hungary, 2021: 8-9).

Conditionality

Finally, several studies show at the power of the purse as the single most effective legal response containing rule of law backsliding. Even without the Commission's recent "generalised deficiencies" law, in line with Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (Common Provisions Regulation, CPR),⁹⁸ the Commission could suspend European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) where a Member State does not uphold the rule of law.⁹⁹

Instead of just making better use of the above tool, European institutions came up with a more general rule of law conditionality proposal.¹⁰⁰ The European Council and the German presidency watered down the original proposal and shifted the focus to the importance of the protection of the Union's financial interests from the protection of the rule of law. Rule of law breaches will now be sanctioned if they affect or seriously risk affecting the budget in a sufficiently direct way. Instead of the original plans of a reverse qualified majority to block the Commission, in the final version a qualified majority in the Council must support the Commission's decision for it to go into effect.

Hungary and Poland, the most likely candidates to be affected by the new rules, in a response to the adoption of this law, threatened to block the approval of the EU's seven-year budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Next Generation EU COVID-19 recovery fund (NGEU) (Valero, 2020; Herszenhorn and Bayer, 2020). Therefore, as a compromise, the final text was accompanied by application guidelines (for a criticism of this "unprecedented disregard for the rule of law," see Alemanno and Merijn, 2020; Scheppele et al., 2020b). But even this was not sufficient for Hungary and Poland, which attacked the Regulation before

⁹⁷ C-78/18 *Commission v Hungary* (transparency of associations), 18 June 2020, ECLI:EU:C:2020:476.

⁹⁸ See Article 142(1)(A).

⁹⁹ There have been few instances, where the instrument was triggered though. See Government of Romania, 2019: 146. See also the European Parliament resolution of 19 June 2020 on the reopening of the investigation against the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic on the misuse of EU funds and potential conflicts of interest (2019/2987(RSP)).

¹⁰⁰ For the final text see Regulation 2020/2092 of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget.

the CJEU. The European Parliament emphasized that it is the duty of the Commission to ensure the application of the Treaties and other pieces of EU laws, and that the Commission must “abide by law, *dura lex sed lex*”,¹⁰¹ and threatened it in case it fails to apply the mechanism as of 1 January 2021. The Commission ascertained the European Parliament to apply the law, and is expected to launch proceedings making use of the new instrument soon.¹⁰²

Conclusions

As proven on the above pages, violations and in particular systemic attacks on the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights in any of the Member States have direct consequences for the European idea, and more specifically for EU law. Therefore it is of existential importance for the EU to react and contain such problems. It has been argued that the EU has sufficient mechanisms to tackle the problem, and the solution is not in the invention and creation of more tools (Pech and Wójcik, 2018). Should existing mechanisms be used in a “promptly, forcefully and in a coordinated manner” (Pech et al., 2019), the EU could provide efficient responses to rule of law backsliding, or slow down the destruction, or at the very minimum put an end to the absurdity of financing governments building regimes in violation of EU values out of EU money.

¹⁰¹ European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2020 on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the InterInstitutional Agreement, the EU Recovery Instrument and the Rule of Law Regulation (2020/2923(RSP), point 6.

¹⁰² See actions for annulment according to Article 263 TFEU. (Rogal, 2021). For an academic account of the reasons for which the Conditionality Regulation could be triggered see Scheppele et al., 2021.

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Zsolt Boda¹⁰³

POLARIZATION AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE POLITY. REFLECTIONS ON POPULISM AND THE FUTURE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

I was asked to elaborate some thoughts on the topic of “The future of liberal democracies: The rise of populism”. The title of the topic suggests that populism is and will continue to be on rise. It also implies that the future of liberal democracy is intertwined with the populist phenomenon. Although I am uncertain about the growing prospects of populism, my prediction is that it will indeed stay with us for some more time, and I agree that it will impact liberal democracy, for better or worse. Therefore, I focus on the second implication of the topic title. I share those wide-spread concerns which consider populism a potential threat to liberal democracy and I will point to a specific consequence of populist politics which is the polarization of the polity and the erosion of democratic norms. However, I also argue that populism is more than simply a threat to liberal democracy: it is also a warning sign of some deep, structural problems of today’s socio-political systems and, as such, will presumably not go away until those problems, like growing inequalities in income and influence, persist. From this perspective the paradox of populism lies in that it is a reaction to the disintegration of the polity while it is also contributing to its further fragmentation, which, I believe, is one of the greatest challenges of today’s politics.

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Populism and liberal democracy

Populism is a contested concept even within political science and has several, partly competing, partly overlapping, definitions, though it was already discussed in one of the classical works of modern political science. In the *Political Man*, Lipset (1960), inspired by examples of post-war Latin American politics, treated populism as an emerging extremist mass movement that relied on the lower classes. The original 'populism as a movement' perspective was later developed into three different approaches: first, populism as a political logic or political strategy 'through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers' (Weyland, 2001:14). Second, populism as a political communication style or discourse (Laclau, 2005; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014) characterized by a Manichean logic ('elite' vs. 'people'), adversarial narratives targeting the 'enemies of the people' as well as the depiction of crises that justify immediate political action. Third, maybe the most widely used approach conceptualizes populism as a thin-centred ideology without an elaborate ideological and programmatic core that expresses a heavily moralising Manichean worldview and considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite', arguing that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people (Mudde, 2004).

What is the relationship between populism and liberal democracy?

Populism expresses the inherent tension between the democratic and non-democratic components of the modern political systems. Some argue that populism is an essentially democratic phenomenon, because it takes the common people as its political base and expresses a dissatisfaction with the ruling elites, institutions and politics, a dissatisfaction that may become a frustration or even resentment. Majoritarianism is a basic feature of democracy as well as populism (Pappas, 2014). In her seminal article Canovan (1999) argues that populism is a necessary 'redemptive' face of democracy and the 'legitimacy of democracy as a pragmatic system (...) always leaves room for populism that accompanies democracy like a shadow' (Canovan, 1999:16).

However, today's liberal democracy is much more than a majoritarian decision making mechanism: it is a complex institutional arrangement with check and balances, the division of powers, multiple veto players, constitutional safeguards as well as the protection of human rights and minority interests. It is generally argued that populism has an antagonistic relationship with the institutional and normative complexity of liberal democracy. First, populism is antithetical to pluralism: while the latter allows or even expects different interests and ideologies to be present in society and politics, the former posits a homogenous people (Mudde, 2004). Therefore, populist politics has a tendency to become exclusionary and intolerant, rejecting any compromise. Second, populist politics is generally based on the direct relationship of the leader and their followers as well as the direct translation of popular will into decisions. This is against the logic of liberal democracy with its complex institutional machinery (Bartha et al., 2020). Third, the protection of human rights and minority interests clashes with the idea of supreme popular sovereignty advanced by populism (Alston, 2017).

Populism is a diverse and malleable phenomenon therefore it is difficult to make generalization about it. Some populist movements may strengthen democracy through filling a representation gap, as some Latin American examples illustrate the point, or promote more participative decision making models, as the Italian 5Stars movement does. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) argue that populism might be exclusionary (building on a nativist, nationalist conceptualization of 'the people') or socially inclusionary and while European populism is predominantly exclusive, Latin American populism is chiefly inclusive. Both Canovan (1999) and Mudde and Rowira Kaltwasser (2013) assign some positive democratic effects to populism, chiefly in terms of filling the representation gap, reinvigorating popular rule and politically mobilizing people.

Still, despite the great variety of populism we can safely posit that populism has a difficult relationship with liberal democracy, especially with its 'liberal' aspects: constitutionalism, rule of law, division of powers and protection of human rights. Both theoretical arguments and empirical studies demonstrate that populism is leaning towards illiberal politics (Huber and Schimpf, 2017; Pappas, 2014). That is, if populism will stay with us, let alone rise further, we have reasons to worry for the future of liberal democracy.

Populism may affect the liberal institutions mostly when in power; however, it can influence democratic norms as well as the practice of democracy even from the opposition. The next section points a particular feature of populist politics which has a definitely negative effect on democracy: increasing polarization.

Polarization and the erosion of democratic norms

Polarization refers to the division of the polity along ideological lines. It is not evident that this should pose any problems – after all, democracy is based on the competition of different ideologies, values and policy proposals. There are actually arguments in favor of at least some extent of political divergence. Politics, as Karl Schmitt convincingly put it, is about conflict. In fact, if the policy and ideological position of parties converge, elections have no real stakes and mobilizing potential. Conversely, polarization has a mobilizing effect on citizens (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008) which is, *ceteris paribus*, good for democracy: without mobilization and participation democracy may hollow out and decisions will increasingly be taken by either non-elected institutions or political bodies with low legitimacy. The 2020 US presidential election offers an illustration to the mobilization potential of polarization: after four years of polarizing politics by Donald Trump the turnout at the elections was record high.

However, even the pluralist democratic polity needs some ties that bond citizens together, the “sentiments of sociability” as Jean-Jacques Rousseau put it. They need to share a common identity, and feel to be part of the same community: identity is a strong predictor of cooperative behavior, and norm abidance (Tyler, 2011). People need to trust each other in order to be able to engage in collective action – self-interest is not a sufficient motivation (Ostrom, 1998). Citizens need to have some basic values in common and accept the “minimal consensus” on the principles of democracy (Downs, 1962). It is also needed that their political and policy preferences converge to some extent: otherwise “(...) half the electorate always feels that the other half is imposing policies upon it that are strongly repugnant for it. In this situation, if one party keeps get reelected, the disgruntled supporters of the other party will probably revolt (...)” (Downs, 1957: 143).

Anthony Downs is maybe the first who warned about the dangers of extreme political polarization. Some level of polarization is bearable, or might even be beneficial to democracy – but we don’t have exact measures of the ‘healthy’ level of polarization, and today it appears that increasing and excessive polarization is more menacing than the lack of it in a number of countries, including the US as well as Eastern and Southern European countries (Patkós, 2019; Somer et al., 2021). Somer et al. (2021) coined the term ‘pernicious polarization’ to describe the extreme division of the society into mutually distrustful ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’. They argue that there is a negative relationship between the level of polarization and the democracy ratings

of countries. Patkós (2019) has a similar finding: political polarization erodes democratic quality, increases the risk of corruption, and diminishes the overall level of satisfaction with democracy as well as trust in political institutions.

What is the mechanism through which political polarization leads to negative democratic consequences? Körösényi (2013) argues that polarization undermines public accountability of politics, therefore good governance and democratic quality through the following effects: *information selectivity* (polarization fosters parallelism in the media system as well as media use – common understanding of what ‘is’ is vanishing); *moral bias* (common understanding of what ‘ought’ to be is undermined); *patronage effect* (frequent dismissals in the public administration erodes its attractiveness and ultimately its quality); *delegitimizing politics* (contributes to spreading political cynicism); *poor policy-making* (policy reforms are stopped if politics changes).

Extreme polarization leads to a disintegration of the polity in which the members cease to share a common understanding of the political reality; cease to accept a minimal consensus on democratic norms; and cease to respect the other camp. Again, the four years of Donald Trump in office as well as the 2020 US presidential election and the bitter fight over the result offer a shocking illustration to these arguments.

Polarization has several causes – and populist politics is among them (Pappas, 2014; Schulze et al., 2020). Although the populist discourse posits and constructs the concept of the homogenous people, they are contrasted to the enemies. The enemies are first and foremost elite groups, like old political elites (the ‘Washington swamp’), George Soros, the banks and financial institutions, or the European Union. But their supposed internal allies might also be easily targeted by populist politics, thus conducting to an effective division and polarization of the polity. Venezuela is a strong example where the populism of Chavez caused the extreme political division of the country, and led it to the verge of a civil war – and a total economic breakdown.

Populism has a subversive nature. It has a penchant for questioning established institutions and norms, overstepping boundaries, and among them the limits of civility and political correctness. While this may seem liberating to some, it hurts those minorities (immigrants, LMBTQ people etc.) which are also often targeted by populist since they do not fit into the idealized and normalized concept of ‘the people’.

Polarization, the erosion of democratic norms and the growing incivility of political camps towards each other is a deep wound on democracy. Populist politicians may lose their appeal, they may be defeated on elections – but polarization is hard to heal because it exploits deep psychological mechanisms and creates social identities that are difficult to change. For me this is one of the most alarming consequence of populism.

On the Roots of Populism: Inequality

However, while populism contributes to social and political polarization, it is also a product of social division. The roots of populism are manifold. Hawkins and Rowira Kaltwasser (2019) argue that populist attitudes are widely present in the society, but specific context and factors are needed to activate them. The latter refer to the ‘supply-side’ of populism in terms of politicians and political entrepreneurs who exploit the existing problems and frame them along the populist discourse. The former, according to Hawkins and Rowira Kaltwasser (2019: 8), is usually an intentional failure of democratic representation, a “situation in which politicians’ act knowingly against one set of constituents in order to benefit others. The result is a feeling of indignation and resentment.” That is, in terms of social context the authors blame populism on the division of the polity by the ruling elites.

However, division can happen not only along political, but socio-economic lines as well. There is overwhelming evidence on the role of socio-economic problems, like marginalization, joblessness and inequality in fuelling populist sentiments. Burgoon et al. (2018) argue that positional deprivation and inequality increases the support for radical right populist parties. In the DEMOS project¹⁰⁴ we found that the lack of activation policies and the exclusion of a significant proportion of young people from the labour market clearly feeds populist attitudes.

A dramatic illustration of this point is that during the 2016 US presidential election Donald Trump over performed the most in counties with poor health conditions, and the highest drug, alcohol and suicide mortality rates – strongly linked to economic distress.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ See at <https://demos-h2020.eu/en/>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2016/11/19/illness-as-indicator> and https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2016/12/09/daily-202-trump-over-performed-the-most-in-counties-with-the-highest-drug-alcohol-and-suicide-mortality-rates/584a2a59e9b69b7e58e45f2e/?utm_term=.8639211d5cf4

The problem of growing inequalities in most of the countries is well known. Its causes are, again, complex, the explanations ranging from the capital accumulation mechanism of capitalism (Piketty, 2013), the increasing return of knowledge and education (Rodriguez-Pose and Tselios, 2009), the inherent logic of globalisation (Reich, 1991). Its dire consequences are also well documented. In their convincingly written study Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) show that income inequality is a factors behind a number of social ills, including substance abuse, health problems, shorter life expectancy, homicide rates, teenage birth rate, poor school performance. In their recent book, *The Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* Case and Deaton (2020) argue that in the US life expectancy has fallen for three years in a row which is mainly due to the fast-increasing death rates of working-class Americans struck by economic hardship and joblessness.

Compared to the US the European welfare-states provide more social protection to vulnerable groups, but the growth of inequality did not spare them either. These problems fuel populist sentiments and political entrepreneurs are ready to capitalize on them. An illustration is provided by the long struggle of the ‘gilets jaunes’, the French grassroots movement originally mobilized against the introduction of a new environmental fee by President Macron, turning into a general populist revolt. The ‘gilets jaunes’ expressed deep resentment about their socio-economic problems and criticized the establishment with typical populist arguments.

Unless mainstream politics is able to meaningfully address the problems of growing inequalities and social precarity populism will continue to have a solid basis to build on. This is, of course, not to say that inequality is the only factor that shapes populism or the single most important problem to deal with in this context. Other phenomena, like the role of social media in spreading populist messages, fake news and contesos as well as creating ‘echo chambers’ that also contribute to political polarization, is also an extraordinary challenge to deal with. But I wanted to emphasize that if blame populism, and rightly so, for polarizing the polity we should keep in mind that our societies are already highly divided. This is a serious problem on its own right – and it contributes to strengthening populism as well.

Conclusion

Liberal democracy is more than a specific institutional arrangement of political rule and collective decision making. It comprises a set of norms, values and acceptable behaviours – a kind of political culture. Liberal democracy cannot properly function without some level of unity, integration and cooperation inside the polity. Populism undermines the unity of the polity through its highly polarizing logic and therefore it undermines democratic quality as well. However, our societies must face the challenge of already existing and deepening socio-economic divisions which effectively fuel populist sentiments. In this perspective populism should be considered not only as a threat, but also as a warning sign.

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Edit Zgut¹⁰⁶

MULTIPLE RISKS POPULISM POSES TO DEMOCRACY IN CEE

This paper is a reflection on Zsolt Boda's essay on "*Polarization and the disintegration of the polity. Reflections on populism and the future of liberal democracies*". He is discussing two specific consequences of populist politics, namely the polarization of the polity and the erosion of democratic norms.

Whereas the literature is fragmentary and the empirical work on populism is almost invariably confined to specific countries or regions, the discussion about the impact of populism on democracy has been reinforced by a new wave of radical leftist populism from the beginning of the 2000 (Castañeda and Morales, 2008; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). It was mainly driven by leaders such as Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, who implemented institutional reforms that seek to diminish the power of established elites and incorporate excluded sectors.

By 2021, democratic backsliding, concerns about the rule of law and populism seems to be most prominent in the Central-Eastern region in the European Union. Whereas this year marks the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the quality of democratic governance has fallen the most in Hungary and Poland.¹⁰⁷ This contribution examines how the populism of Fidesz and Law and Justice (PiS) eroded the quality of democracy in both countries, and what are the main systemic risks of populism amidst the pandemic crises in CEE.

Zero sum game

Robust research (Akkermann, 2003; Arditì, 2004; Bang and Marsh, 2018) has been conducted on the link between populism and democracy. While most studies agree that populism is not

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¹⁰⁷ Varieties of Democracy Report (2021) Autocratization Turns Viral. Available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/publications/democracy-reports/> (Accessed 20 May, 2021)

anti-democratic per se, the authors also agree that populism challenges the so-called liberal pillar of democracy. As Sadurski (2019, p. 248) has noted, liberal democracy is a composite concept, where the word “liberal” means the utmost protection of individual rights, the maintenance of checks and balances and constitutional restriction on politics. He rightly argued that if these variables are eroded of substance, the system loses guarantees of self-protection and democracy becomes merely a facade. Thus, regimes with civil-liberties violations do not meet procedural minimum standards for democracy.

I agree with Boda’s main argument that not only populism may affect the liberal institutions when in power, but it can influence democratic norms as well. He is rightly claiming that populism can erode democracy by fostering increasing polarization. Populists not only promote antagonism between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elite”. They claim that they are the only voice of the real people, and that any resistance to their rule is simply illegitimate. Thus, the political struggle between “us” and “them” is conceived as an endless series of moralized zero-sum conflicts in which the gains of one collective identity is only possible with a loss of benefits of the other.

Moreover, as Jan-Werner Müller (2019) put it, populists “speak and act as if the people could develop a singular judgment, a singular will, and hence a singular, unambiguous mandate”, which is obviously nonsense. Imposing the assumption of such an unrealistic uniformity threatens the rights of minorities and enables autocratic-minded leaders to dismantle the checkpoints on the road to autocracy (Galston, 2018).

“Illiberal” impatience in populist context

History has taught us that tension between populism and democracy is most pronounced once populists get into power (Mudde, 2016). Arguably, populists weaken crucial institutions such as the independent judiciary, undermine the freedom of the press and civil society if they obstruct the implementation of their policy agenda. The Hungarian and Polish governments that started their illiberal remodeling in 2010 and 2015 respectively are profound examples in this regard. They have been building up their legitimacy upon the notion that the democratic transition was a failure, thus, a new illiberal transition is needed. In this arrangement, a

“normative” “neo-Weberian” state replaces the illegitimate post-communist elite that is “capable of pursuing the national interest” (Buzogány and Varga 2019).

Both Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński are branding the liberal notions of democracy as a Western imposition. Therefore, the Hungarian government constantly amended the new constitution adopted in 2011 which fits nicely into a populist agenda. Populists see ‘the people’ more as constitutive as opposed to constituted power (cf. Kalyvas, 2005), and thus, often challenge existing constitutional frameworks which do not represent the interests of the people. (Csehi and Zgut, 2020). The Hungarian Prime Minister rejects debates simply because he considers autocracies “to be often more efficient than democracies” (Orbán, 2015).

In the name of the “Good change”, Jaroslaw Kaczyński was supposed to think that the rule of law in the modern democracy bound the hands of the reformers and defended the old communist elites and privileges”(Bunikowski, 2018, p. 295). The informal leader of PiS portrayed the courts as the ‘corrupt elite’, as remnant institutions that ‘have nothing to do with the interest of the vast majority of Poles’, that stood in the way of liberating, democratic developments in Poland.

According to Bugarcic (2018), there are four main symptoms that showcase how authoritarian populists downgrade democracies. The first is the attack on essential checks and balances of the executive and legislative branch.

The second is the attack on the media independent of the government. The third is the assault of civil rights and liberties and the fourth is the degradation of the quality of the elections. According to the global democracy indexes, the reports of the EU Commission and the OSCE, all four symptoms apply to Hungary and Poland to a different extent.

In Hungary, Fidesz succeeded in deconstructing the components of a consensus-based liberal democracy in the name of the majoritarian democracy (Lijphart 1999). Not only has it been blaming liberalism and liberal democracy for all hardships. While promoting the concept of illiberal democracy, the Orbán regime undermined the liberal pillars of democracy in practice by weakening the protection of individual rights, the maintenance of checks and balances and constitutional restriction on politics that are indispensable to the democratic process itself. Furthermore, in the spirit of “illiberal impatience”, both governments are depicting checks and balances as obstacles of “getting things done” for “the people”. The main narrative is that

democratic institutions are not considered to be the right representatives of the right people, so populists often advocate a majoritarian takeover, as a justification of the capture of the polity. This trait of populism was best reflected by Kaczynski's notion of "legal/constitutional impossibilism" (Sadurski, 2019), signifying the obstacles which make it impossible to implement necessary reforms.

As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) have written in their book *How Democracies Die*, two norms stand out as fundamental to a functioning democracy: mutual toleration and institutional forbearance. The former refers to the idea that – as long as our rivals play by constitutional rules – we have to accept that they have an equal right to exist, compete for power and govern. Despite mutual disagreement and strong antipathy, those in power have to accept them as legitimate. As Levitsky and Ziblatt remind us that in every case of democratic breakdown, would-be autocrats have justified their consolidation of power by labeling their opponents as an existential threat.

The approach of Orbán and Kaczyński is authoritarian not only because they reject pluralism and depict critical actors independent of these governments as enemies of the "people". The Hungarian government has rewritten the constitution nine times to capture the state's referees, to create a grossly uneven playing field, favoring Fidesz, and to restrict civil society, the opposition, and the independent media (Bozóki and Simon, 2019). Whereas systemic corruption and politically selective law enforcement are key features of the Hungarian government, it is systematically abusing its power to hinder the opposition to be elected. While Poland is ranked much better in global corruption indexes, PiS is a quasi-oligarchical network linking political and corporate power and the political playing field became skewed for the benefit of the incumbent during the presidential elections.

Cultural wars in CEE

In his paper, Boda Zsolt is invoking the common explanation of the rise of populism, by pointing out the growth of inequality in most developed economies. The "economic insecurity perspective" provides fertile soil for populists who are exploiting the growing expectation of the majority of the disadvantaged, which have not been met.

But the recent electoral success of Fidesz and PiS indicated that structural explanations placing economics at the heart of the matter and treating other issues as derivative distorts a more complex reality. In the case of Central Europe, drawing upon Inglehart and Norris (2016), the social preconditions of populist success could be rather explained with a conflict-driven cultural backlash against modern values of globalism, multicultural tolerance, and openness to difference.

Economically, this region has witnessed a slow but steady convergence towards the EU average before the pandemic outbreak, due also to the net beneficiary status of both Hungary and Poland. In 2019, 68 percent of Poles and 54 percent of Hungarians judge the economy of their country as ‘Good’, compared to 25 percent of French and 20 percent of Italians.

Drawing upon Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), the essence of Orbán and Kaczynski’s populism is framed in the context of how “the people” have been marginalized and robbed of their nation and sovereignty by a corrupt and self-centred, globalist establishment.

Poland is an interesting candidate to examine where economic and cultural dimensions are mutually reinforcing in the populist arguments of the government. As Bill and Stanley (2020) noted, the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) has successfully mobilized voters with non-economic cultural arguments by consistently referring to a betrayed legacy of Solidarity in both domains, claiming to restore what it presents as the movement’s dual emphasis on national identity and social solidarity.

Similarly, Kotwas and Kubik (2019) argued that PiS’s political narrative should be understood in the context of a longer-term “cultural backlash” in response to fears of social and cultural transformation after 1989. While ordinary Poles were depicted as losers of democratic transition who have been excluded from the process, the main argument of PiS is that altering the political system is necessary in order to replace the elite, represented by communist judges, civil servants and journalists appointed by the previous government led by Civic Platform.

Blaming the “imperial West” - a regional drive of populism

Furthermore, Caramani and Manucci (2019) argued that re-elaboration strategies of the national past can influence the development of populism in a country. Although their analysis focuses on Western Europe and its fascist past, adjusting their framework to the CEE region reveals potential ramifications. Instead of culpabilisation, victimization, and cancellation, in the case of Hungary and Poland heroization is used as a re-elaboration discourse.

Similar to the reasoning made by Petrović (2018), we argued with Róbert Csehi that opposition to an oppressing, communist regime not only allowed right-wing populism to develop. It also prepared the ground for an anti-imperialist narrative vis-à-vis the EU, where the EU is criticized not mainly for its market liberalism, but rather for its policies that presumably act against the notion of national sovereignty displayed through national identity and culture.

Having analyzed Jaroslaw Kaczyski’s and Viktor Orban’s speeches, we identified that their populism integrates Eurosceptic narratives into a populist worldview. They also claim that the EU operates against the principles of democracy inasmuch as it fails to represent the general will of ‘the people’ as they “served the interest of ‘the corrupt elite’”. Thus, Eurosceptic populism is a distinct type of populism where critique against the EU is used to crystallize anti-elitism and people-centrism.

This has accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic crises when not only specific policy competence that is questioned by Eurosceptics but also the EU’s willingness to financially support nations in need. Already at the outbreak of the crisis, both the Hungarian and the Polish prime ministers were falsely claiming that “the EU hasn’t given a single cent yet to fight the coronavirus”. Furthermore, in 2021 PiS went as far as legally questioning the supremacy of the EU law while the Hungarian pro-government expert floated the issue of Hungary leaving the EU.

Blaming the “corrupt Western elites” that “undermines national sovereignty” and “the traditional way of Polish/Hungarian life” has practical advantages on the domestic level. This way these governments seek to delegitimize the rule of law criticism by depicting it as a “pretext” for the corrupt Western elites to attack CEE for defending traditionalist values while rejecting immigration and LGBTQ rights.

Crisis factor - accelerating polarization and democratic erosion

It is often claimed that crises or simply the evocation of an emergency situation play into the hands of populists (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013; Rooduijn, 2013). It was mirrored effectively by the establishment of the AfD in Germany and Brexit that came in the wake of the European sovereign debt and refugee crises.

While the COVID-19 shock was unprecedented both in terms of the scale and speed of its effects, a particular negative trend prevailed in 2020 in CEE. As Petra Guasti (2020) has noted: where democratic institutions were hollowed out before the global pandemic crisis, populist leaders instrumentalized the pandemic to strengthen exclusionary rhetoric and weaken institutional safeguards.

The Hungarian Prime Minister's handling of COVID shows how political leaders have used the pandemic crisis as a pretext to further weaken the role of the parliament and skew the playing political field by undermining the opposition and civil society.

Besides introducing a state of emergency and ruling by decree, the Hungarian oppositional local governments were stripped of their autonomies and were restricted financially after the outbreak of the pandemic crises in 2020. The Orban government amended the constitution for the 9th time to narrow the definition of public funds: claiming that “public funds are the income, expenditure, and claims of the state.”

The amendment enacted a law on creating ‘public trust funds’, and the important thing here is that money the government gives to any Hungarian foundations ceases to be public. Due to the constitutional changes, it would no longer be public money as it no longer belongs to the state, but to the above-mentioned foundations. Moreover, all this could be only undone after a potential change of government and by means of a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly.

Furthermore, Viktor Orbán has decided to further exploit identity-based anxieties regarding traditionalist values: the populist frame consists of antagonism between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in

relation to the conservative anti-LGBTQ narratives, as an alleged fundament of national identity became more evident in the last months.¹⁰⁸

The Hungarian Parliament adopted a Russian-style anti-gay law that conflates LGBT people with pedophiles and incites violence. Although, Fidesz has been connecting pedophilia to homosexuality for a while in the political discourse, the child-protection became a new element.¹⁰⁹ While the Russian law does not connect homosexuality to pedophilia, the Hungarian law does. Another inspiration must have been Poland where the gov pushed that “LGBTQ ideologies” are an existential threat to children.

Whereas systemic misuse of EU funds was not part of the EU criticism until now, the Batory Foundation (2021) revealed that the Polish government’s Local Development Fund had distributed disproportionately higher amounts of money to PiS local governments under the COVID-19 financial support programme. A committee packed with party loyalists decided to distribute six billion Polish zlotys largely along party lines and in a completely non-transparent way.¹¹⁰ On top of that, the Polish government accelerated the “repolonization” of the media on various levels. Besides considering a controversial advertisement tax, one new approach is that state-owned companies should buy media wherever it is possible.¹¹¹

Hence, PKN Orlen purchased the Polska Press media organisation from its German owner media group Verlagsgruppe Passau. As a result, Daniel Objtek, who is Kaczyński’ close ally, now controls 20 out of Poland’s 24 regional newspapers, more than 120 local magazines, 500 online portals with an outreach of 17 million users.¹¹² Then on August 11, the Polish Sejm accepted the so-called “Lex TVN”, which to ensures that media outlets cannot be owned by entities from outside the European Economic Area (EEA). The Lex TVN targets the biggest

¹⁰⁸ Reuters stuff (2020) Hungary government proposes constitutional amendment mandating Christian gender roles. Reuters Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/hungary-lgbt-constitution-idINL1N2HW2HV> (Accessed January 12, 2021)

¹⁰⁹ Die Welle (2021) Hungary's anti-LGBTQ law comes into effect. Die Welle. Availabe at: <https://www.dw.com/en/hungarys-anti-lgbtq-law-comes-into-effect/a-58198511> (Accessed July 8 2021)

¹¹⁰ Katka, K (2021) A committee packed with PiS loyalists distributed PLN 6 billion in aid for local governments along party lines. Gazeta Wyborcza. Availabe at: <https://wyborcza.pl/7,173236,26710171,a-committee-packed-with-pis-loyalists-distributed-pln-6-billion.html> (Accessed February 1, 2021)

¹¹¹ Notes from Poland (2021) State-owned firms should buy media outlets “wherever possible”, says Polish minister. Availavle at: <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/10/13/polish-minister-calls-for-state-owned-firms-to-buy-media-outlets-wherever-possible/> (Accessed 13 January, 2021)

¹¹² Konopczyński, F (2021) Digital Empire in the Making. Visegrad Insight. Available at: <https://visegradinsight.eu/digital-empire-in-the-making-media-poland/> (Accessed January 20, 2021)

private broadcaster, in Poland, which has been US-owned since 2015 and is disliked by the government for its often critical coverage of the ruling camp. It also fits the populist logic of “us versus them” since Kaczynski perceived the television as a hostile channel that is a political tool of his arch enemy, Donald Tusk who has just returned to Polish domestic politics recently.

The Polish government has not only taken the opportunity of the pandemic to strip the oppositional local governments of financial support and introduced new types of disciplinary offences for judges. After the politically captured Constitutional Tribunal further restricted one of Europe’s strictest abortion law in Poland, and thousands of people have taken to the streets in protest, Jarosław Kaczyński said the country is in the midst of a “cultural civil war” and he urged to defend the church “at all costs,” or Poland will be “destroyed.”¹¹³ By framing the fight as one that centers on the church, the ruling party is portraying the protests as an attack on a pillar of Polish society and, by extension, an attack on “the people.”

The most profound risk posed by such populist manifesto is that it potentially spread the seeds of political violence and further polarize the ever divided Polish society two years after the tragic murder the liberal mayor of Gdansk, Pawel Adamowicz. A similarly dangerous statement was made by President Andrzej Duda even before the pandemic who said that “judges need to be abolished otherwise Poland would never be a normal country”.¹¹⁴

Thus, Zsolt Boda rightly argues that the most alarming consequence of populism is that polarization is hard to heal because it exploits deep psychological mechanisms and creates social identities that are difficult to change. Moreover, extreme political polarization and stalemate can further enhance public disenchantment with the performance of democratic institutions. Latin America provided a great example that even when the populists leave office, difficult legacies are lingering and moderate successors are most often struggling to rebuild trust within deeply polarized societies. As Oneil (2016; 267) put it: as the gaps between social groups have widened, it becomes harder to forge compromise into the lifeblood of democracy as well.

¹¹³ Scislowska, M (2020) Poland's leader wants churches defended, condemns protests. Associated Press. Available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/polands-pm-defends-abortion-ruling-condemns-protests-73850706> (Accessed 25 January, 2021)

¹¹⁴ Flis, D (2020) Duda shocks with hate speech attack on Polish judges. Rule of Law Poland. Available at: <https://ruleoflaw.pl/duda-shocks-with-hate-speech-attack-on-polish-judges/> (Accessed December 20, 2020)

Conclusion

Populism in CEE has taught us various lessons with regards to liberal democracy during covid. Amidst the ongoing pandemic crisis, democratic publics are seeking policy changes that give them hope for a brighter future. Left unmet due to the economic downturn, their demands could evolve into pressure from populists waging cultural war against minorities, blaming foreigners and the EU to further exploiting identity-based anxieties.

Given the high level of polarization, bridging the divisions will require intellectual clarity and political leaders who are willing to take risks to serve the long-term interests of their countries.

The second risk is that populists are justifying their crisis management during the pandemic crisis with further power grab by claiming that this is the only way to combat coronavirus in an effective way. It is particularly alarming since citizens are more likely to tolerate or support authoritarian measures during security crises, when they fear their own safety. Thus, antidemocratic measures taken during crisis situations could remain in force easier, simply because societies become tolerable with time.

Therefore, democratic forces have to challenge this particularly dangerous notion. Populists embed the global pandemic crisis into a false, misleading dichotomy that stipulates that people have to choose between their health and safety and democracy. On the contrary, consolidated democracies, enhanced rule of law and the protection of human rights are what help us best to coordinate in this global crisis.

Another lesson is that the global pandemic provided a perfect storm for Eurosceptic populists to weaken the credibility of the EU. The Fidesz' propaganda has strengthened anti-Western and anti-European public attitudes for years and Poland is rapidly shifting in a similar direction. Thus, democratic forces should use the Conference on the future of Europe as an opportunity to reboot trust and to combat Eurosceptic propaganda.

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Roger Casale¹¹⁵

THE FUTURE OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND BREXIT

America is back but democracy is fragile

Europeans often forget that Americans look West, as well as East. To those who matter in Washington DC, Europe looks weak. That doesn't stem the flow of perorations about the transatlantic relationship. But nostalgia is no substitute for a forward strategy. It will take more than declarations about "strategic autonomy" to overcome scepticism in both the White House and the State Department about Europe's true capabilities.

NASA's Mars mission is a case in point. The European Space Agency's role will be to 'pick up the (rock) pieces' and return them to Earth. The Americans are the ground-breakers, Europeans the scavengers. Is this a metaphor for the transatlantic relationship? Is Europe anymore ready to defend its borders than it is to put a robot on Mars? Spending money on the military is not the same as having hardware that can be deployed effectively. Europe has some star players, but does Europe know how to play as a team?

At the Munich Security Conference, President Biden sought to reassure America's allies with the words "America is back." But did America ever really leave? Trump took the USA out of the WHO and the Paris Climate Agreements. He did not withdraw from the NATO alliance.

¹¹⁵ Executive Director, New Europeans

Historic ties

Biden also referred to NATO's historic role as the cornerstone of peace. He also made clear his focus is the challenges for this generation not the last. A kind word does not mean respect. That will only come when Europe increases not just spending but also capability.

What can be said about the economic ties that bind? In value terms the US-EU trade relationship is still the largest in the world. But patterns of trade can change quickly. The EU does more trade in good with China than it does with the US. In November, 2020, EU Trade Commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis described the current period in EU-US trade relations as one of "extraordinary turbulence". Biden may be flying the plane but that does not mean Europeans should start unbuckling their seat belts.

Will Biden leave EU steel and aluminium tariffs in place or work with the EU to tackle unfair competition from China? What will happen to Biden's pledge to "buy America"? Will European's ambition to assert "digital sovereignty", be perceived by Americans as an asymmetric tax policy designed to target their own digital companies?

Old and new

Henry Kissinger once remarked that "the old order is disintegrating while the shape of its replacement is highly uncertain. Everything depends on some conception of the future."¹¹⁶ Can the US and European politicians of today still articulate a shared vision of the future, given the constraints imposed on them by their respective constituencies? How should we judge the success of the partnership between the USA and Europe given its past achievements? The mood music has changed in Washington, but how will things actually change within the institution of the transatlantic relationship? Who has a vision for how the relationship might look tomorrow and how to get there? Is there still time?

Some of the answers to these questions will depend not on what happens on Mars, or with military spending or even on developments in global trade. The enduring strength of the transatlantic relationship has always been the fact that it institutionalises not just a common set of interests - peace, security and prosperity - but also a common set of values.

¹¹⁶ American Foreign Policy, Three Essays, Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Community of values

Zbigniew Brzezinski once said that “there is something transcendental about shared values that should not be subordinated to tactical requirements”¹¹⁷. The partnership between Europe and America has survived by adapting to changed circumstances while staying true to its core ambitions. That is the key to its resilience.

Without NATO, it is hard to imagine EU coming into being in the first place, let alone being able to expand into East and Central Europe. The reverse is also true - or at least Vladimir Putin seems to think so. Break up the EU and you undermine NATO – hence Russia’s well-documented support for Brexit and many right-wing populist movements in Europe.

Europe 1, 2 and 3

What is easy to miss it that the European Union is more than just a territorial union. In fact it is a triple union – a union of nations and states (Europe 1), a Europe of markets and money (Europe 2) and a union of citizens (Europe 3). Europe 3 – the Europe of citizens - is the key to the resilience of the European project. That is why it is so important to defend and strengthen the civic space in Europe, as a key strategic objective for the transatlantic alliance.

In the 1950s and 60s, the creation of the Coal and Steel Community and the Common Market, served the twin purpose of securing peace, and rebuilding the European economy. This was the Europe of nations and states, whose architects were Adenaur and de Gaulle, Henri Spaak, Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi – Europe One. It is hard to imagine even right-wing populists in Europe like Orbán, Salvini or Marine Le Pen, abandoning Europe One. In fact some of them would like to go back there, to the Europe of Nations de Gaulle spoke of in his dreams: a Europe of shifting alliances, powerful in defence of fundamental values such as liberty, stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals.

Europe One was constructed in the permissive environment of the so-called Golden Years of the post-war economic boom – rising living standards rise, expanding public services, low inflation and full employment. Europe was rebuilt not as a federal union as the visionaries in the resistance movement had hoped but Europeans – at least those in the West of Europe – knew

¹¹⁷ New American Strategies for Security and Peace, The American Prospect

they were free again. America invested heavily through the Marshall Plan and its military commitments in Europe (“boots on the ground”). The miraculous rebirth of the European nation states after the trauma of the Holocaust, fascism and WWII was a triumph of the transatlantic relationship. West Europeans enjoyed rising prosperity and security. Americans saw a Europe that could do what it was supposed to do – act as a bulwark against the USSR and a trading partner for the United States.

As the post-war social contract broke down, a new international paradigm emerged which also driven strongly from Washington – in fact it later became known as “the Washington Consensus”. Drastic and sudden reforms were required to curb deficits, liberalise markets and control inflation and these measures were applied not just in the developing world but also in Europe – in 1976, the UK government had its economic policy vetoed by the IMF. The name Washington Consensus suggests it was imposed by America, but this is misleading. There was a transatlantic consensus and by the early 1990 it seemed as if the Europeans were the most hard-line advocates of the new orthodoxy. Structural reforms became hard-wired into the European project, through the Growth and Stability Pact. This was the birth of Europe 2, not the Europe of nations and states, but the Europe of markets and money. In 1987, the Single European Act was passed, creating an (as yet incomplete) single market liberalising the movement for capital, goods, services and people and making the world, so its proponents claimed, “safe for freedom and democracy”. As Europe was reborn for a second time after WWII, the Berlin Wall came down leading not just to the unification of Germany but an end to the East-West division of Europe.

Today, Europe is once again in a process of profound crisis and transformation, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the social and economic consequences of the lockdown and the challenge to the rule of law, democracy and human rights, core values of the European project, posed by the rise of populism, nationalism and right-wing extremism. The pandemic masks the fact that this was an accident waiting to happen. For the thirty years following the fall of the Berlin Wall, democratic consolidation and the strengthening of civic space took second place to the demands of reforming the economy. Despite huge gains in per capita income in some parts of Europe, the distribution of economic benefits as a result of liberalisation has been very uneven. Today we experience the backlash from those who feel left out or left behind. Democracy is fragile.

For a while though it did feel in 1989, as if the future would belong not just to the bankers but also to the bridge-builders to the campaigners who had brought changes about. Or as Vaclav

Havel, put it at the time: “Could not this be a time for our country to be the scene of events to pave the way toward a better future for the whole of Europe?”¹¹⁸ As a new generation tore down the walls and barriers that separated East from West in Europe, they cried “We are the people”. Words that were soon became “We are one people!” deflecting the impetus for a deeper change into the drive towards unification.

On both sides of the Atlantic “there is no other way” became a mainstream trope. Instead of seizing the collapse of the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence as an opportunity for democratic renewal, too many bought the “end of history” myth. But history has caught with up “the end of history era” and brought it to an end. There is always another way in a democracy. The failure by elites to recognise this may partly explain why we face such powerful populist upsurges in Europe and America today.

Brexit and Trump

Much has been written about voter manipulation during the Brexit referendum¹¹⁹. But it wasn't Facebook, it was 17.1 million UK citizens who actually voted to leave. The fact that the *Vote Leave* campaign told lies does not matter as much as the fact that some people believed them. We have to ask, why the lies were believed. The lies had currency not as products of reason but as articles of faith. It felt good to be told and to believe that life would be better if Britain left the EU. But there was no evidence that this would be the case, nor have we yet heard any plausible argument for how it could be.

In contrast, the Remain Campaign battered the British population with facts, statistics and arguments about what was good for them. The campaign was in broadcast mode from the outset. At the first press conference, even journalists were not allowed to ask questions. Nobody from the Remain side wanted to listen to what voters, particularly those from disadvantaged communities had to say. That made things much easier for Vote Leave.

In fact, had the British Government organised a public consultation in 2015 to find out what the single issue in that referendum should be, Europe would not have featured in the top ten wishes on the list. The trick played by the Eurosceptics was to offer a referendum, and then to make

¹¹⁸The Safeguard of Stability and Peace in the Euro-Atlantic Region, in *European Security: Beginning a New Century*, eds. General George A. Joulwan & Roger Weissinger-Baylon, papers from the *XIIIth NATO Workshop: On Political-Military Decision Making*, Warsaw, Poland, 19–23 June 1996.

¹¹⁹ ‘If you’re not terrified of Facebook, you haven’t been paying attention’, Carole Cadwalladr, *The Guardian*, 26 July 2020

that referendum about Europe. That opened a Pandora's box of issues. A referendum campaign is an opportunity to voice every imaginable gripe and grievance - concerns about lack of economic opportunity, access to public services, the Prime Minister of the day, migration, council services, even the composition of the England football team. None of these were addressed. It is not a way to decide the destiny of a country. What happened next had very little to do with Europe, Nobody on either side of the debate was very interested in or seemed to know much about how the European Union was run. Google searches from the UK for the words European Union spiked one hour after voting stopped and the exit polls had indicated that the UK had voted to leave.

Brexit was not so much the cause as a symptom of a decline in British democracy. There has been an erosion of trust not just in Westminster and Whitehall, but in many of the UK's institutions, including mainstream media such as the BBC, the church and the Royal family. It is difficult to restore trust in politics once it breaks down. Combined with the decline of deference, many in politics, from both sides of the political divide, are left knowing what they right thing do so is, but not how to do it and still be re-elected. Both the Labour and the Conservative parties in the UK have been captured by their extremes. This has been facilitated by the fact that it is a tiny minority of the population in Britain who play an active role in the life of political parties. It leads to polarisation, to the fury not the wisdom of the crowd, and undermines the democratic foundations of society.

The strength of a democracy should is measured not just by how far it respects the will of the majority, but critically how it at the same protects the rights and interests of minorities. Nowhere was democratic backsliding more evident than in the failure by the Conservative government to immediately give comprehensive and unilateral guarantees to the 3.4 million EU citizens resident in the UK at the time of the referendum.

We also saw it in the way the Government shut down parliament to avoid debate on the Withdrawal Agreement, has given itself extraordinary powers to pass legislation without proper scrutiny. And we see it in the way in which public contracts are handed out to companies run by individuals with close personal ties to members of the government. And yet the Conservative government retains its popularity in public opinion polls.

There is clear evidence of Donald Trump's complicity in the sickening scenes of violent insurrection that took place in Washington DC on 6 January. However, over-whelming number of Republican voters still want him to run again as their candidate in 2024. To understand why

this is the case, requires a level of empathy that many political insiders, analysts and commentator don't seem to have. It's not just that his supporters seem to like Donald Trump. Those, who turned out not just to answer his call to arms at the Capitol on 6 January 2021 but also to vote for him in November, love Donald Trump. They identify with Donald Trump. They feel validated by Donald Trump. Some would take a bullet for Donald Trump. The dilemma for policy-makers was painfully on display when the Senate Republican Leader, Mitch McConnell, denounced Trump after voting not to impeach him. It now appears he would be willing to endorse a Trump candidature in 2024 if he is he nominee.¹²⁰

Civic space

In Europe, even within the European Union, we are witnessing a systematic effort by some Governments, through legislation as well as the use of administrative and fiscal measures, to deny human rights, curb civil liberties, undermine the rule of law, abuse media freedom and stifle protest. Hungary and Poland are but the most noticeable examples. The COVID emergency is exacerbating these tendencies. In some cases, states are taking advantage of the pandemic to pass laws that are unrelated to the need to protect public health. There is a ratchet effect whereby powers that are introduced to control the spread of the virus are left in place indefinitely and used for other purposes, including surveillance.

At the same time as repressive measures have increased, we have witnessed inspiring examples of an awakening of citizen activism, most notably in Belarus and Russia but also in many EU member states such as Poland, Hungary and Romania. Joseph Stiglitz has argued that “countries around the world that believe in democracy... will have to build a new international order, one that does not rely on US leadership. In this crucial moment, Europe's full-throated support for democracy and human rights is vital.”¹²¹ How is such a vision to be achieved in practice? How can states embrace citizen activism without placing the institutions of representative democracy in jeopardy?

Some of the answers to these questions might be found by returning to the experience of those who challenged communist rule in Europe in the 1980s. This generation understood what it meant to no longer be the victims of history but instead to become the protagonists. It may be

¹²⁰ [‘Mitch McConnell says he’s absolutely support Trump in 2024 if he was the party’s nominee’](#), The Guardian, 26 February 2021

¹²¹ Lessons of the American election for Europe and the World, Joseph Stiglitz, The Progressive Post, 6 November 2020

that from the depths of the pandemic, a new paradigm will emerge, which places citizens at the heart of the recovery. Citizens have been on the frontline of the fight against COVID-19 and are the key to what will come after it. Huge change is on the way in how we organise our lives and live together in society and citizens will be at the forefront of these developments. Citizens are driving the demand for an European Health Union and a Universal Basic Income. Civil society organisations are monitoring human rights abuses during the pandemic and consulting with their constituencies about the deployment of the recovery funds. Cities like Amsterdam are experimenting with new economic models of sustainable development.

Revitalising our democracy at every level of society will be the key to ensuring the resilience of the European model and the stability of the transatlantic relationship. This must mean going beyond traditional forms of consultation and ensuring that citizens have a greater voice in shaping the agenda, and contributing to decision-making processes. Without such radical change to how we do politics, opening the space for real citizen engagement, decision makers will neither understand what policies to adopt nor how to win consensus for their implementation. Autocratic leaders seize their opportunity when consensus breaks down. They shut down the civic space by undermining freedom of the press and the rule of law, silencing the voice of citizens, violating human rights, and weakening democracy. A collapse of the civic space leads to an irreversible decline in sovereignty and in Europe's capacity and reputation as well as to a weakening of the transatlantic relationship. The challenge is to recognise this is happening and to take action before it is too late to do anything about it. After a year and more of draconian lockdown measures, citizens will expect governments to earn their consent. The methodology, technology, and examples of best practice are available to sustain a new era of citizen-led democracy. What has been lacking on both sides of the Atlantic is the political will. Biden's election should open a new chapter in transatlantic relations, focussed on investing in civil society, the empowerment of citizens and the safe-guarding of civic space.

Where next for the transatlantic relationship?

The Ryder Cup is a reminder that Americans and Europeans are good friends who love to compete – what does this tell us about the future of the transatlantic relationship? Strong relationships endure when there is not just a common purpose (the defence of democracy) and

shared interests but also a sense of mutual respect and equality. However, Europeans should not take future US support for granted. America looks West (i.e. across the Pacific) as well as East (across the Atlantic). The new security pact in the South Pacific between the USA, UK and Australia is a timely reminder. France lost a 66 billion US dollar submarine contract as a result. French and European reactions were swift and rebarbative – ambassadors were recalled and threats made to boycott the inaugural Trade and Technology Council in Pittsburgh. Both sets of reactions were short-lived, and with time a more measured response is to be expected. The key question will be whether France will remain a member of NATO. That in turn begs the question of European sovereignty. We might ask whether Europe and America have now reached the “can’t live with you, can’t live without you” moment in their relationship? As with an institution like the British monarchy, the transatlantic relationship has succeeded by constantly reinventing itself. It will need to do so again now.

I identified several iterations of the transatlantic relationship since the Second World War, each corresponding to a distinct phase in Europe’s post-war reconstruction. In the first phase, the priority was to rebuild the West European state system so that it could act both as a bulwark against the USSR and a bridgehead for NATO. The emergence of a European Union of nations and states – Europe 1 – was central to this enterprise. From the 1980s, the USA renewed its security commitment to Western Europe but economic policy shifted towards market reforms. This found expression in a European single market and later a single currency– Europe 2 – a union of markets and money. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO faced a crisis of identity. The transatlantic relationship was left with a sense that its mission had been fulfilled. An opportunity was missed to build Europe 3, the Europe of citizens.

Over thirty years on from the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe is finally addressing the need to build a more citizen-led democracy. The rise of illiberalism and extremist politics in Europe has made many Brussels insiders as well as those engaged in national political arenas rethink their relationship with civil society and with citizens.

Conference on the Future of Europe

EU institutions have responded to this challenge by launching a Conference on the Future of Europe, an exciting innovation in bringing citizens into the policy-making process. The Conference works through an online digital platform, as well as assemblies of randomly

selected citizens from the 27 European member states. It is early days, but the signs are encouraging that the conversation about the policies need to shape Europe's future can be widened to include citizens. The Conference is arranged around nine themes, including health, digital transformation, democratic renewal and the economy and there is also the possibility under a tenth 'open' heading to bring new issues to the fore. Proposals from the citizens panels will be worked up into a final report by the conference plenary which draws on representatives from the European institutions as well as from civil society organisations and citizens themselves.

The problem is that so far only 25,000 from a possible total of 450 million EU citizens have engaged with the conference (either through the platform or the panels). This represents a tiny minority of EU citizens, and amongst those who have engaged, only 15% are women and nearly half of the participants are under 35. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the Conference on the Future of Europe, which will last for twelve months, marks a significant new development. It remains to be seen whether citizens' assemblies will become a permanent feature of transnational democracy – but if they do, they may prove to be the key to the renewal of the European Union.

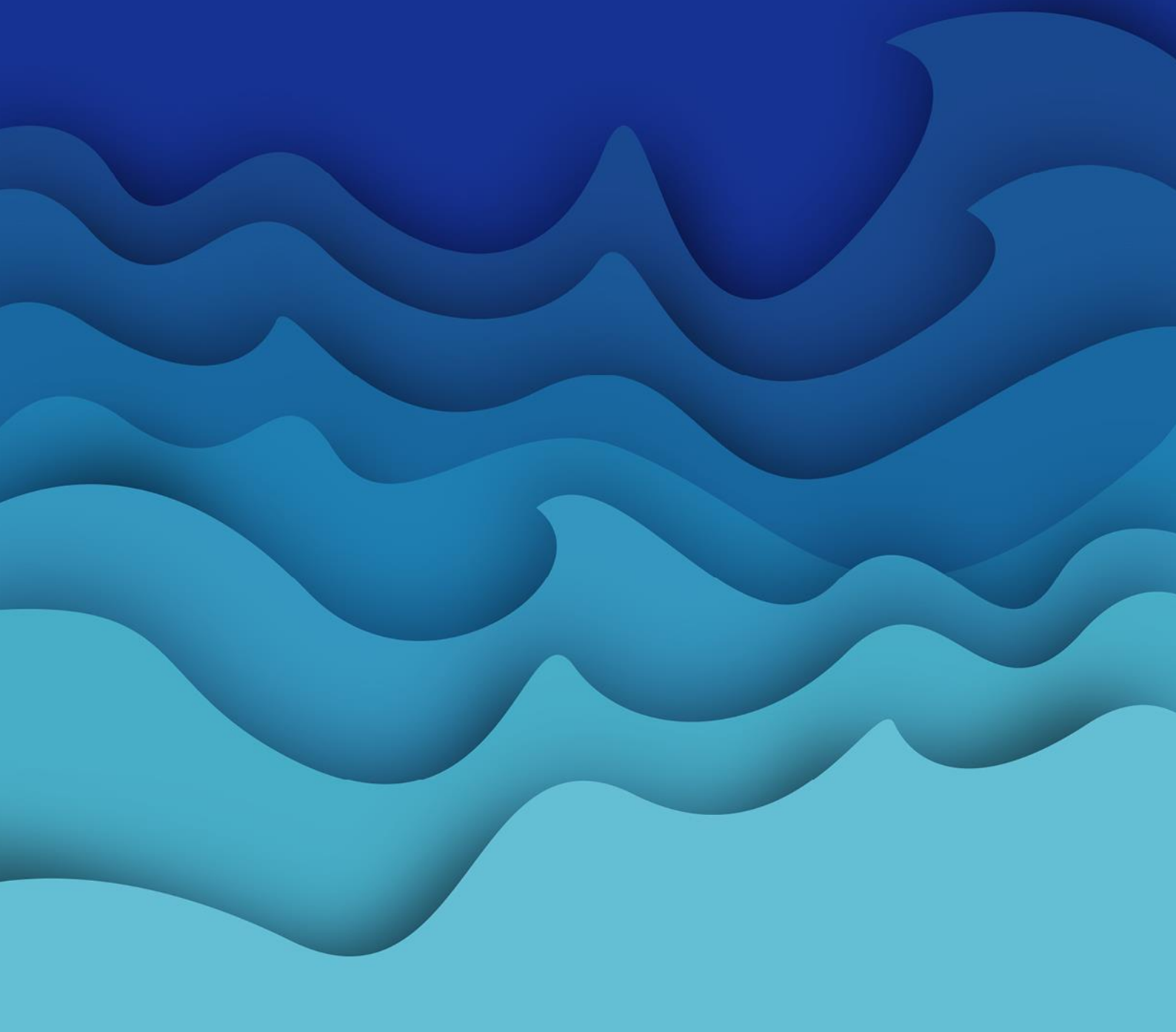
In recent years, issues of trust, identity and legitimacy have torn apart prevailing paradigms about how politics works in modern post-industrial states such as the USA and the EU. It is no longer sufficient to simply give citizens a say in the democratic process by exercising their vote. We need new avenues of citizen engagement that enable and empower citizens to contribute to policy discussions between elections as well. The Conference on the Future of Europe is a powerful signal that the EU understands this challenge and wants to experiment with the instruments of direct democracy and citizen participation to complement and strengthen the work of representative bodies such as the European and national parliaments.

In both Europe and the America there is plenty of evidence that citizens have found their voice. The Brexit vote in the UK, the Yellow Vest protests in France, as well as movements such as Fridays for Future and the anti-corruptions protests in Eastern Europe all point to an era in which popular movements for change are making a powerful impact on institutions.

On 6 January 2021, Capitol Hill in Washington was stormed by Donald Trump supporters – scenes that reverberated across the world and which led President Biden to acknowledge that even in America, “democracy is fragile”. The transatlantic relationship can only be as strong as the institutional partners in that relationship. Neither NATO's military capability, nor the size

of the transatlantic economy, can make up for a lack of democratic resilience. It may not yet be time for a Conference on the Future of America. But there is much that European and American NGOs can learn from each other about the role of citizens in safeguarding fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and the fabric of our democracies.

The Future of Sustainable Development and Digital Cohesion



Daniel C. Hallin¹²²

THE FUTURE OF MEDIA FREEDOM

At the end of the twentieth century, at the time of the so-called Washington consensus on neoliberalism, with most of the world was becoming integrated into a globalized market economy and a wave of democratization was occurring in many places, there was widespread optimism about a shift toward a strong global norm of media freedom. Today we are clearly in a very different place, with media freedom seriously threatened even in many places where it had either been historically strong or had emerged in ways that seemed promising.

The extent of the threat to press freedom varies substantially, of course. Hungary is among the more extreme cases, certainly for a country that is now part of the European Union, with the media largely captured by the state under a populist leader, a pattern similar to what you find in Turkey under Erdogan or Venezuela under Hugo Chávez. In the United States, we have of course seen elements of the same pattern, with Trump, like many populist leaders, denouncing the media as an “enemy of the people,” mobilizing hatred and mistrust of journalists, and often threatening to use state power against media organizations. Trump was never as skilled a politician as Orban or Erdogan or Chávez or Modi, however; Trump never had majority support and didn’t seem to appreciate the importance of building it. The most dangerous populists are those who have strong majorities. And of course democracy and press freedom have deep roots in the United States, and the institutional barriers to monopolization of political power, the so-called checks and balances, remain strong. Despite initial predictions that the so-called “mainstream media,” those historically dominated by professional journalism—would become irrelevant with Trump’s victory, pushed aside by social media and populist partisan media, the central players of “mainstream media” remained strong and aggressive through the Trump’s presidency, both in terms of audience and in terms of their centrality to the flow of information. Still, media freedom in the United States does face real threat. That threat is most tangible today at a very decentralized level, in the form of mob violence and harassment of journalists, often carried out by crowds at right-wing rallies and demonstrations journalists are trying to cover, or by local police. And more generally, the decline of social consensus on the credibility of journalism, the growth of hostility to media institutions, and the rise of the post-truth culture

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that sees information purely as a weapon of political struggle—all of these are profound cultural changes that certainly undercut the foundation that sustains press freedom. This pattern of increasing harassment and violence against journalists is familiar in many places traditionally known for strong traditions of press freedom, including much of Western Europe.

In the pages that follow I would like to make three points about the current crisis of media freedom: first, that the causes of this crisis, and the kinds of forces that threaten media freedom, are diverse, and we have to understand the issue in its different contexts; second, that it is in most places rooted in a broader crisis of democracy and liberalism, and cannot be understood apart from that broader crisis; finally, coming back to the idea of post-truth culture, that it is connected with a more general set of issues about dialogue, consensus and truth, and the role the media play in facilitating or undermining the social processes that produce a healthy public sphere. Issues of media freedom, in other words, are often inseparable from issues of media openness, accountability and sustainability.

Threats to Media Freedom and their Diverse Contexts

The most traditional way of understanding threats to press freedom centers on the role of the state, and the imposition of state control over media which are usually assumed to have been previously “independent”—though the latter assumption is in some cases simplistic. Many cases of course look a lot like this. Hungary presumably would be one, a case where a particular political actor was able to consolidate political power to the extent that it gave him a platform to capture or intimidate media and journalism. China fits this model in a way, though of course in China the media were not separate from the state to begin with. What has happened in China is that new leadership has shifted policies toward the media to consolidate party control over them and reign in the growing autonomy they had within the party-state during an earlier period in which they were given a more active role. It is possible that this can be seen as part of a kind of cyclical pattern or change in a single-party regime between centralization liberalization, politicization and professionalization or rationalization. In the Chinese case, another factor—one China shares with much of the world—has to do with the way in which the Internet undercut the business model of mass media, thus making them more dependent on outside actors—in this case the Communist Party.

In Mexico, by contrast, and in some other parts of Latin America, a substantial deterioration in media freedom took place after a promising opening, not because of the consolidation of centralized state power, but because of the growth of violent threats by organized crime, and the ability of the latter to penetrate the state and capture it for its own ends. It reflects in an important sense not the strength of the state but its weakness, its inability to exercise a monopoly over the use of force.

In other parts of Latin America, a region I am currently researching, press freedom is certainly often threatened by the exercise of state power. But more typically, the relation of media to the state is one of collusion. Both are controlled essentially by the same relatively narrow set of elites. Politicians use state power and resources to support the media, and media owners and elite journalists support—and also sometimes bargain with—those politicians. Much of the focus of this conference is of course on populism, so I would like to give a bit of perspective on populism and media freedom from the Latin American perspective, where of course, unlike Europe and cases like Turkey or India, populism is most often on the left politically, not the right. Populist governments in Latin America typically denounce media as part of the corrupt elite. In many cases they ally with media reform movements—often called media accountability movements in the region-- which have proliferated with the spread of democracy. These movements have advocated for media freedom—for access to official information, for example, and an end to impunity for violence against journalists, but have at the same time advocated for regulatory interventions to democratize oligarchic media systems. Populist leaders have taken up these demands and acted to challenge the existing distribution of media power, passing laws to regulate existing media powers in various ways, and also establishing state-funded media and encouraging the growth of community media.

Media elites have typically denounced these policies as traditional threats to press freedom, and global press freedom advocacy organizations have often echoed this. But the reality is often somewhat more complex. Threats to press freedom in these cases are definitely real. Populist leaders in Latin America see media as a crucial to the consolidation of power. They also see themselves as the embodiment of popular sovereignty, and reject political checks and balances as anti-democratic. The reforms they carry out, appropriated in a sense from grass-roots media accountability movements, are often radical at a certain level, challenging the structure of the media system as media accountability movements (Porto 2012; Soledad Segura & Waisbord 2016), have advocated; but in other ways populist leaders implement reforms in media policy in ways that simply reproduce traditional patterns of clientelism and patrimonialism, and fail to

promote the growth of independent media. Most of them do not consolidate control over the media—Chávez was the exception in the latest wave of left-wing populist rule. Instead, media become polarized between pro-and anti-populist media, both highly politicized. Damage to press freedom is often inflicted during these conflicts; at the same time pluralism in the media system increases. And research by Manel Palos-Pons on the case of Ecuador (Palos-Pons & Hallin 2021) shows that in a surprising way journalistic professionalism may actually increase as well, as media find themselves subject to increased scrutiny, and have to worry about sources or ethnic stereotyping in ways they did not before. Eventually the populist leader loses power, media state-relations shift from conflict back to collusion, complaints of threats to press freedom decline, but so too does pluralism in the media system. Historian James Cane (2012), who writes about the classic case of populist leadership under Juan Perón, in Argentina, criticizes the narrative of “a sudden authoritarian intromission into the otherwise progressive development of an internally coherent, autonomous press (p. 4),” and I think he is right about that he is right about Latin America, where the barriers to media autonomy and the openness of the public sphere are deep and longstanding and persist as populist regimes come and go.

Crisis of Democracy

The growth of threats to media freedom is not an isolated phenomenon, but must be understood in the context of a broader crisis of democracy and liberalism which undermines the cultural and institutional basis within which media freedom has traditionally been able to thrive. This too, of course, takes different forms in different parts of the world, and is far too big an issue for me to analyze in any detail here. In Latin America, for example, and I think probably in many other parts of the world, the persistence of corruption is an important factor which undermines public support for democracy, and also creates incentives for elites to undermine media freedom. I would add that the visibility of corruption has probably increased faster than the actual incidence, as the changes connected with democratization in the 1980s and 90s really did increase transparency in important ways. One thing that I think is common to much of the democratic world, experienced in different ways but very fundamental to understanding what is going on today, is the persistence or even intensification of inequality, which leaves much of the population feeling that the liberal democratic order does not deliver results that improve their lives. These and other factors, including probably the shift from politics based in economic interest to politics based in identity, have produced increases in political polarization which

have profound consequences, undermining both the ability of democratic governments to take action to solve social problems and support for the norms of political debate and contestation. In the case of my own country this change is truly profound, though we will have to see to what extent it proves a lasting change and to what extent it is tied to the figure of Trump and will pass away as he leaves the scene. The fact that Trump was willing to break the norm of accepting the result of a democratic election and that his party was willing, rhetorically at least, to back him on it is a symbol of a profound rupture in political culture, and the context of polarization in which this occurs is obviously at the root of the kinds of attacks on media freedom that have taken place increasingly during the Trump era. One effect of polarization is that it makes the practices of so-called objective journalism, which were the mechanism by which journalists in the United States were able to present themselves as an institution above political divisions, serving society as a whole, increasingly difficult to sustain. Polarization increases the stakes of politics, and by doing so increases the incentive to attack and to seek to control media.

At a global level, if liberal democracies appear politically unstable—as the United States certainly did in the wake of the 2020 election, if they are unable to reach consensus on resolving social problems, from inequality to the pandemic, if their communication systems are unable to manage the circulation of misinformation and hate speech, they do not appear as very attractive models, and competing models of political organization, the Chinese being the most coherent, become more attractive, with obvious consequences for the value of media freedom.

The Crisis of Truth

If there is a crisis in our system of public communication, in our ability as societies to separate truth from falsehood, to have open, inclusive exchange of views on public issues and to reach the consensus necessary to take action on common problems, it is not a crisis that can be attributed solely to issues of media freedom. Media freedom may be central in some countries; I think this would be true of Hungary, or in an even more extreme form, of Russia. In other places its role is less central: threats to media freedom are more likely to be part of the long-term damage caused by the crisis than a central cause. In many cases, moreover, media are themselves part of the problem. One of the most important reflections on media freedom in US history is the so-called Hutchins Report, the report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press sponsored by Time/Life publisher Henry R. Luce. Published at another period of crisis, in the

wake of the great depression and Second World War, it explored broad issues related to inequality in access to the means of communication and the spread of propaganda and misinformation, and made a fairly strong statement that the “failure of the press is the greatest danger to its freedom” (Leigh, 1947: 68). The report discusses the possibility of various forms of public policy intervention to resolve issues of the quality of public communication, but, reflecting the dominance of liberal ideology in the U.S., falls back on professionalization of the media as the solution. It is widely seen as the landmark in the shift from the “libertarian” to the “social responsibility” theory of the press in the United States.

Similar issues can certainly be raised today. The media accountability movements of Latin America I mentioned earlier articulate a version of this view. In the US context, it is certainly clear that the spread of misinformation, the polarization of the political discourse and the breakdown of social solidarity and of norms of political competition all to a significant effect are influenced by the actions of media organizations. The discourse of journalists as an “enemy of the people,” for one thing, is not something that originated with the state, it was something that arose inside the media, in talk radio initially and then at Fox News and in right-wing online media, as they worked to differentiate themselves from “mainstream” media and build audience niches on the basis of political and cultural identity. Indeed, a strong case can be made that the principal actor in the rise of Trump and the shift of the Republican party to right-wing populism was Fox news (Peck 2019), and that with Trump in power Fox news had at least as much influence on his policy as the other way around (Hallin 2021). Fox and other right-wing media played a central role in the circulation of misinformation about voter fraud in the 2020 election, and also in the politicization of the public response to the coronavirus and the circulation of misinformation about it. Over a longer period, Fox, and Rupert Murdoch’s media properties more generally, have played an important role in holding back the development of consensus on the reality of climate change (Feldman et al., 2012; Painter 2013), an issue recently in the news following the agreement of Murdoch media in Australia to move away from climate change denial. The role of Fox probably represents a more extreme case of centralized spread of misinformation, promotion of political division or the undermining of democratic norms than anything that took place in the United States in the era when the Hutchins Commission report was written. It is a piece, and a prime example, of a wider phenomenon that involved changed institutional structures—the decline, for example, of the centralized media “gatekeepers” in which professional journalists played the central role—and of a deep cultural shift toward what is often called “post-truth” culture, a culture in which people are increasingly cynical about the

possibility of any generally-agreed criteria of truth, and information is evaluated for its relation to people's identities and political interests. Natalia Roudakova (2017) makes a particularly eloquent case for the role of this post-truth culture in the system of power in Russia, where it is strongly advanced.

What is most dramatically new in the current media system is of course the role of social media, and social media strain our existing frameworks for thinking about media freedom and its relation to these questions of truth and dialogue in particularly deep ways. When the Internet first emerged as a network of public communication, it was the focus of considerable utopian imagining. One central argument held that by lowering the cost of public communication, the Internet would eliminate the kinds of concentrations of media power that had concerned the Hutchins Commission and other critics of existing media markets over the years, make it possible for all voices to be heard, and allow the libertarian vision of an unregulated free market in ideas finally to work as its proponents had always believed it could (Volkh, 1996). It hasn't turned out that way, of course. The effects of the Internet on public communication are complex and many-layered. It has certainly opened important new possibilities for public communication, and become central to what media freedom can be today. But in many ways the Internet has dramatically centralized communication, concentrating most advertising revenue in the hands of the few big tech companies, with the effect of decimating the ranks of local news media and enhancing the dominance of the biggest national media which are the ones able to survive in the new more centralized markets (Usher 2021). In the modern "attention economy," big players able to afford sophisticated social media influence techniques are able to magnify their voices (Wu 2016). And clearly, at same time, social media have opened the way for vast flows of misinformation and hate speech and for manipulation by hidden actors, including state intelligence agencies acting across borders.

The social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, Twitter-- are obviously key players here, and central to many of the thorniest debates about media freedom in the contemporary world. There is no question that they have played central roles in both the growth of political polarization and the circulation of hate speech and misinformation, and considerable public discussion has focused on the role of their algorithms in encouraging the most disturbing tendencies in contemporary public communication. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported on the basis of leaked internal memos that "Company researchers [at Facebook] discovered that publishers and political parties were reorienting their posts toward outrage and sensationalism. That tactic produced high levels of comments and reactions that translated into success... "

(Hagey & Horwitz 2021; see also Waller & Lecher 2021). Facebook executives resisted making changes that might reduce “engagement.” There are debates about how much to attribute to their algorithms, and how much the circulation of this kind of content is driven more by demand-side factors (Munger & Phillips 2020). Clearly, as I have argued above, there is a wider context in which this circulation of information on social media takes place, a context that involves political actors and other elites, including media elites like Fox commentators, as well as ordinary social media users. Misinformation does not circulate on social media in Norway or New Zealand the way it does in the U.S. or Brazil, and this has to do with the wider political culture, and media system, as well as with the behavior of elites. Still, much of the kind of spread of conspiracy theories and growth of anti-democratic subcultures is clearly facilitated by social media, and their policies have profound impact on the ability of other actors, including many news media, to reach audiences. So the social media have be central to any contemporary discussion of media freedom.

At the same time, social media platforms are a very new form of communication infrastructure, and we are just beginning to think through what kinds of policies, institutions and norms might apply to them. Often there are reversals of normal political patterns that reflect this confusion. Populist leaders with ambitions to control discourse on the Internet take widely divergent approaches, sometimes (as with Modi in India) trying to force social media platforms to remove content they consider misinformation, and sometimes trying to block them from moderating content, as with Bolsonaro in Brazil. In the United States, politicians on the right complain of censorship exercised by private owners—definitely a reversal of their historical position in media policy debates (and perhaps mainly a pressure tactic), while those on the left tend to insist on the right and responsibility of those owners to exercise editorial judgement, also an uncomfortable departure from historic stances. Social media platforms are in one sense a telecommunication network facilitating horizontal communication—a form to which we would usually apply common carrier norms of content neutrality—and in another sense mass media platforms, to which we would normally apply norms of editorial judgement and accountability to public interest norms.

I don’t have a solution to propose to the question of how we should think of social media platforms, their responsibilities and the norms and policies that should regulate them. The wider point that I want to make here, though, is that the broad kinds of issues raised by the Commission on Freedom of the Press, issues about how we can create a media institutions that serve society, that facilitate the search for truth, dialogue about social issues, and effective

action to meet community needs, these are all back on the table in a fundamental way. Our challenge is not simply to protect media freedom, important as this is. It is much deeper and more fundamental, and involves thinking through the nature of both our media institutions and the political relations that shape our system of public communication.

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Kálmán Dezséri¹²³

THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITALISATION AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

In late spring of 2020, within just a few weeks after the Covid-lockdown was introduced, teleworking, e-commerce, and online education, etc. advanced as much as over five years under normal conditions in the world. Digitalisation showed then its crucial role and proved its importance not only in the economies of all countries of the world but also in all kinds of everyday situations of the mankind. This short paper focuses on certain aspects of digitalisation of national economies in the world and its various social impacts which can be arbitrarily considered the most decisive and important elements of the on-going global trends. A more comprehensive report would probably list also other elements of digitalisation and its impacts on economic competitiveness as well as lay out a partly different agenda for tackling challenges to the individual countries and to the global community.

The overall impact of the ongoing fast-pace digitalisation is likely to be very significant and the implications of digital transformation extend gradually far beyond the economy for it penetrates almost all spheres of everyday life of most people. The digital transformation in the economy and the society is changing many economic and social factors, e.g., business models, methods of production and distribution as well as the employment, quality of labour force and the way of living, learning, data processing, access to information including media, etc. It is already evident that digitalisation is a global phenomenon that certainly opens up a new epoch, namely the 4th industrial revolution in the economic and social history of mankind. This revolution consists of developments in information technology combined with robotisation, automatisisation, the internet of things (IoT), 3D printing, Big Data, smart (driverless) cars, drones, etc. All these herald a new economy and hence a new world of both production and work as well as new ways of living, education, and media consumption, etc. It will make necessary the acquisition of new knowledge, practices, and not last new ethical norms.

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1. Economy

Digitalisation may be considered as a technology/supply shock affecting the main economic aggregates, notably via competition, productivity, and employment effects, as well as through its interaction with institutions and governance. Digital technologies are also changing the ways how firms do production and business as well as how they interact with their customers and suppliers. Understanding digital transformation and the channels through which it influences the economy is therefore increasingly relevant not only for the economic actors but also for various areas of public policies to determine their directions, means and goals.

As digitalization disrupts society ever more profoundly, the concern is growing about how it is affecting, beyond production and distribution, such issues as structure of employment, job disruption and creation, wages, inequality, health, resource efficiency, and security. It can already be foreseen that the 4th industrial revolution will create new types of jobs, new sectors, new products and services, and distribution channels and patterns. Digitalisation changes the concept of locations where costs are incurred and value-added is created so they are no longer closely associated with each other as well as with production and consumption. It is already clear that this phenomenon has importance in and implication to public policies, e.g., national, and international trade and tax policies, etc..

Production

There are two principal new features of the development of digitalisation: one is the evolution of the platform-based economy, founded on new economic models, and the other is the emergence and fast development of peer-to-peer exchanges¹²⁴.

Digitalisation has a strong impact on enterprises, both in manufacturing and services industries, where converging trends are detectable in the way micro, small and medium-sized enterprises interact with customers and employees. The main factors for successful adaptation are the ability to collect, process and exploit data, the interconnection of value chains, the creation of

¹²⁴A peer-to-peer (P2P) service is a decentralized platform whereby two individuals interact directly with each other, without intermediation by a third party. Instead, the buyer and the seller transact directly with each other via the P2P service.

digital customer interfaces. A positive business phenomenon is that digitalisation can substantially lower market entry barriers, and open up potential national and foreign markets that firms, even SMEs can serve as well as create new markets. Digitalisation has also reduced the costs of scaling up production, advertising, and products' distribution. The widespread use of algorithms enables online platforms to exchange goods and services including work activities. Algorithms are also transforming traditional companies, by enabling them to better manage their assets and processes, while redefining their strategies according to innovative solutions. The availability of cloud computing services provides smaller and newer firms with flexible access to considerable computing power without investing in physical IT infrastructure.

Digital transformation offers the potential to stimulate competition and yield substantial consumer benefits. Platform-based business models (Airbnb, Uber, Amazon, eBay, etc.) have also raised competition in some traditional markets (e.g., accommodation, transportation, or retail services) where online and offline business models compete. Trends in creating 'platforms' and asset dematerialisation are significantly reducing costs of using IT tools, (e.g., data storage, sharing and processing), and improving collaboration. Overall, digitalisation reduces transaction costs, maximises trading volumes, and improves demand and supply matching. They bring about that there are some important characteristics of the digital economy. First, it creates massive economies of scale and scope that may present challenges to maintain competitive conditions. Second, digital production typically features significant upfront costs to develop products and near-zero marginal costs. Third, intangible assets (intellectual property, algorithms, software, data) have particular importance in an effective competition, which is a relatively new phenomenon.

Digitalisation will result in an increasingly data-driven economy, in which platforms can benefit from economies of scale and scope in collecting data. Data has become a very valuable asset (or one of the most valuable assets) in the digital economy. Access to large amounts of data can result in improvements in analytics and machine learning, which can further help firms to improve the quality of their production process and services. However, a thriving market for data between firms also exists, which may contribute to alleviating the asymmetries in data collection between smaller and larger market players.

Platform businesses also exhibit strong network effects, which further reinforce the benefits of scale, potentially creating difficulties for new entrants to break into a range of markets where they need to compete with large established firms.

In traditional businesses and industries, digitalisation affects existing organisational and management structures of firms. This is a new phenomenon, which is very visible due to the higher flexibility and fragmentation of work, changing work monitoring methods, as well as skill and training needs. More generally, the real challenge for industrial established firms is whether they can engage their digital transformation even before disruptive competition forces them out of business.

Employment, wages

The question of whether digital technology creates and/or destroys jobs is gaining momentum. Digitalisation creates new types of jobs and professions (e.g., data analysts, data miners, data architects, as well as software and application developers, etc.) on the one hand and certain jobs will be at risk over the next decades due to computerisation, automatisisation, and robotisation on the other. Digitalization could create up to several million jobs worldwide in this decade in the logistics and electricity industries. There is no consensus on exactly how many jobs will be lost but automation will displace many human beings and their number is expected to be very high. Some current estimates of global job losses due to digitalization range from several million to 2 billion by 2030. This means that more than half of the now existing jobs may be at risk. There is great uncertainty, with concerns also about its impact on wages and working conditions. With both winners and losers resulting from digital transformation, a huge premium rests on the near-term ability of businesses to upskill employees and shape the next generation of talent for the IT machine age.

The digital revolution has created new roles (such as search engine optimization managers and social media account managers), new types of organizations (cloud computing providers and social media agencies), and even new sectors of the economy (digital security and data science). The impact of digitalization has also acted as a catalyst for employment growth in the wider economy. Quite little is surely known about what is going to happen even in the near future. What will the economic impact of innovations be in the future? How will humans

interact with machines and algorithms? What kind of skills do we need and how should we learn them? How will all of this impact labour market?

Based on current knowledge, there will be three types of jobs categorized by the likely effects of digitalisation:

Jobs that will disappear (lost the race against the machine) e.g., clerks and administrative staff, or truck drivers.

Jobs that are in collaboration with machines/algorithms (run with the machine). For example, those professions that rely on cognitive and social capabilities, such as doctors/surgeons. Jobs that are completely new or remain largely untouched (running faster than the machine or running a different race). For example, roles in the creative arts are unlikely to be automated, as are new roles that involve managing data and machines.

In sum, there will be both winners and losers while the net impact on jobs in certain industries or sectors could be positive whereas many sectors will experience job losses.

Digital services

Digitalisation has significantly increased the importance of services in the economy which is reflected in their growing share in economic activities, GDP, employment, etc. This new situation requires the revision of the relevant national and international rules.

The EU poised to revise its 20-year-old E-Commerce Directive and to draft a wide-ranging Digital Services Act (DSA) which was endorsed by the European Parliament and the Council in 2020. The time is now also ripe for enhanced global or at least for an US–EU cooperation on the digital services or in more general term on the digital economy. The focus of the EU's DSA is twofold: (1) to define the responsibilities of digital services to address the risks faced by their users and to define their rights; and (2) to propose ex ante rules covering large online platforms acting as gatekeepers that now set the rules of the game for their users and their competitors.

For the past four or five years, the EU has acted as the only de facto regulator of the US' online platforms or digital services in general term as the antitrust enforcement in the US has been largely absent. The political trends in the US are shifting because there is a strengthening political view which consider that the online platforms (Amazon, Google, Facebook and Apple,

etc.) are violating certain provisions of the antitrust law. It may indicate that the US and the EU will have the opportunity to define together tougher rules regarding the use of social media to interfere in elections and spread illegal content and/or political and societal propaganda, the proper balance between the interests of content creators and online platforms, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence.

Important obstacles for a rapid progress on the field of the relevant regulatory policy of online platforms still persist, however. Among the most serious and intractable stems from the EU Court of Justice's invalidation of the Privacy Shield agreement¹²⁵ in July 2020 that originally enabled thousands of companies in Europe to transfer personal data to the United States. Although there are other legal methods of transfer, they are either restrictive and/or legally questionable as a result of the court's judgment. While encryption and data localization would address the problem, this approach would be economically destructive, would complicate law enforcement and might not improve data security. The current US administration faces the challenge of how to address the court's core objection that US law does not afford EU citizens sufficient rights of legal redress before US courts, especially with regard to improper government surveillance.

2. Global competition for digital technological leadership

The US, China, and the European Union are trying to impose their technological leadership over the next wave of digitalization. This rivalry or contest among the three main technological powers in the world is expected to be intensifying even further. With US hegemony in relative decline and China's rising importance, the EU is getting caught in the crossfire of this technological war between the other two technological powers (e.g., the issue of the global role of the tech giant Huawei). One can witness a speeding race for global technological dominance

¹²⁵ The EU–US Privacy Shield was a framework for regulating transatlantic exchanges of personal data for commercial purposes between the European Union and the United States. The agreement between the EU and US entered into force by the European Commission's Decision (EU) 2016/1250 of 12 July 2016 on the adequacy of the protection provided by the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield. The agreement allowed for the transfer of personal data from the EU to US. Privacy Shield is designed to create a program whereby participating companies are deemed as having adequate protection, and therefore facilitate the transfer of information. In its judgment of 16 July 2020 (Case C-311/18), the Court of Justice of the EU invalidated the adequacy decision. The EU-US Privacy Shield is therefore no longer a valid mechanism to transfer personal data from the European Union to the United States.

in particular in the field of digitalisation. The EU aims at boosting or maintaining Europa's "digital sovereignty" as digital technology has become a matter of power politics.

The alternative for each of all three digital technology powers is either it leads the way on digital or it will have to follow the ways of the other one or two, that is/are setting the standards for the whole world. Thus, the question is who will obtain the world's digital market supremacy. The two most important areas of this digital supremacy are the technical and regulatory standards. The standards themselves are also subject to global competition.

Countries and/or companies seek to set their standards as norms for the other countries and/or companies in the world. The issues of technical standards have for a long (for a century) been well known. Digitalisation in a globalised world and the digital economy have significantly been increasing the importance of regulatory standards and the dominance or prevalence of certain regulatory standards in the whole world, e.g., in the areas of issues like data protection, digital taxation, platform regulation, digital services, disinformation, eCommerce, eAdministration, eHealth, eTransport, etc. Some of these areas need international regulations, however, in the case of the others, the regulations of the pioneer hegemon country will set the direction for the followers, in practical term for the whole world.

Regarding the future trends of digital technologies and regulations the EU and US, as the transatlantic community will have a particularly important role in determining the main trends of the global digital development. Increased transatlantic leadership in multilateral and international bodies is essential to the preservation of liberal values in the institutional system. This applies equally to standard-setting in the ICT area, where China has made fast inroads. The EU and the US should join their economic, political and technology forces to ensure a free and fair digital future that protects not only their citizens but also the global community as well as their government systems and that of their allied countries in the world from malign influences, state surveillance and monopolistic practices originating in hostile countries. It implies that they should also strengthen network security by building stronger internal controls on investments in strategic industries and technologies and by blocking unsecure investments in critical technologies. While the EU is strengthening its political tools, its member states hold diverging views on issues such as foreign direct investment screening¹²⁶,

¹²⁶ Currently, only 14 out of the 27 EU member states (plus the United Kingdom) have investment screening mechanisms in place to ensure that foreign direct investments do not pose national security risks. Other European countries in greater need of investments (including many in Southern and Central Europe) are more open to allowing Chinese state-owned companies to acquire strategic assets.

limiting the Chinese Huawei's role in developing and constructing 5G networks and guarding against China's increasing political influence.

A successful transatlantic digital cooperation can be an alternative policy option. It should enhance a joint industrial policy to develop viable Western technology competitors because it is simply not enough to make political efforts to insulate the West by cutting off Chinese access to US and EU markets. The West must do more than that. The US and the European governments, in cooperation with major technology companies, must develop joint industrial policies and ethical standards to create viable Western competitors in 5G and other emerging technologies. These may include embracing open architectures that would essentially allow the West to develop a variety of different kinds of IT systems and applications.

Moreover, the EU and the US should craft a common approach to digital tax policy. It requires first of all a reconsideration of the tax plans of all countries of the world and resumed negotiations at the Organization for Co-operation and Development (OECD). Regulatory, competition, content and privacy challenges should be addressed in close coordination; and possibly all (or most of the) countries of the world should jointly set standards to shape global norms and block authoritarian and malign practices. Only together can the US and the EU build the leverage necessary in technology trade, IT technology development and multilateral engagement to hold China to a set of standards that protects democratic societies and contributes to global stability. United the US and the EU can rally other nations around these objectives.

With regard to the rest of the world countries in the peripheries in Europe and the world economy, they will follow the technology paths determined by the leading digital technology powers. Besides the advantages of digital technology, the risks for the periphery countries are most likely higher to be adversely affected by the job destruction caused by the digitalisation of jobs. Likewise, countries with developed broadband infrastructures and workers' e-skills, as well as the widespread use of the internet and digital public services, are likely to be less threatened by digitalisation than countries with less developed digital infrastructures.

3. Digital media and access to content

One of the main areas of everyday life that digitalisation has significantly transformed is the media industry. This transformation process in the media industry has been underway for some five decades having already several waves of digitalisation that cut costs by simplifying production. Improvements in the storage of binary information soon pushed digitization into the distribution and consumption of media, leading to the emergence of video text and Teletext, and the switch from traditional audio and audio-visual recording to CDs and DVDs. It brought about that more content can be produced and distributed by more enterprises and individuals than ever before.

However, while the internet creates opportunities for online content via e.g., file-sharing, streaming, social and mobile-driven by the demand of consumers to access any content from anywhere in the world at any time, it yields only limited monetization for news and general information providers. Social media, video-streaming services, and smartphone apps compete continuously for the consumers' attention. These developments have combined media, computing, and telecommunications industries to create convergence that combines and integrates various means of communication. These in turn increase flexibility and speed, create economies of scale and integration that change the economics of content distribution, and shift greater control to consumers by allowing them to select, filter, search, control, and participate in multiple forms of communication. Moreover, digitalisation is bringing many new entrants into the media markets, creating new types of content, and providing a wider variety of ways to access news, information, and entertainment. It has broken monopolistic and oligopolistic control over distribution mechanisms and empowered consumers to seek and share content in new ways and to become also producers of content.

Although digitization affects all media, its effects on business models and competition are not universal. Print outlets, for example, are now coping with digital distribution and consumption challenges. The pursuit of cost savings and flexibility through digitization is pushing book, magazine, and newspaper publishers toward e-readers as consumption platforms. The internet provides some opportunities for online content, but it has yielded only limited monetization for news and general information providers. The business model of internet advertising is especially problematic because it requires very many regular users before it can begin obtaining

a significant revenue stream and for this reason, it has not provided yet sufficient funding in general to maintain the levels of journalistic activity previously provided by print newspapers. The operational ways that websites, aggregators, and search engines are being used by the bulk of online news and information seekers, and the difficulties websites have to maintain exclusive information due to possible cross-platform dissemination, linking, and forwarding capabilities have created several new regulatory issues to be solved. The most important regulatory issues are e.g. determining copyrights, sharing ad revenues between platforms and content creators, financing quality content, fighting disinformation, providing access to pluralistic information, etc. Because the means of distribution have become by now global rather than they used to be national, such conflicts occur now worldwide as over-taxation of content and how to handle contents deemed subversive, offensive, or otherwise undesirable (e.g., disinformation). Most of the domestic and international laws and rules regarding taxation, the freedom to disseminate and receive information, and mechanisms to censor or punish content were created relative long time ago in the analogue age, when borders, importation processes, and domestic distribution systems were more controlled by national authorities. Although we live already in the digital age, policies and laws are not aligned yet to all aspects of the new realities of digital products such as personalization, global distribution, and fluid networks. Most policies and laws on taxation, trade, libel, privacy, obscenity, and copyright date from an era when there were identifiable producers, publishers, and broadcasters who created and disseminated information - and could be held responsible for it (i.e., editorial responsibility).

These days, content is not disseminated merely through traditional channels for which public policy processes and procedures were established but is transported through constantly changing networks in which identifiable and anonymous users choose whether or not to access certain content, or reconfigure and retransmit content, as well as create content of their own - thus gaining power over the content themselves. Another critical issue is to ensure that mechanisms exist for content creators to benefit financially from their work. While there are economic and moral prerogatives for these protective mechanisms, these must be balanced against the social benefits brought by the flow of content, i.e., information and ideas. Consequently, copyright and related rights protection need to be balanced with fair use and other provisions that protect use by educational institutions, libraries, and protected groups, such as disabled persons. Many provisions to protect the business models of audio and visual producers have been put in place internationally and domestically over the past decade.

The "related rights" have been enshrined in copyright law mechanisms (e.g., Digital Millennium Copyright Act in the US, the Copyright Directive in the EU, the World Intellectual Property Organization Copyright Treaty and Performances and Phonograms Treaty).

Digitalisation in the media sector has brought about not only positive outcomes but also negative ones. Disinformation which has always existed in the communication practices in the history of the mankind, is becoming more frequent and can be spread more rapidly (e.g. deep fakes, cheap fakes and other next-generation disinformation technology). Countering the spread of mass disinformation of economic, political, health, etc. matters must be at the core of joint projects of all countries of the world. Their common interest is to defend the integrity of their democracies and the stability of their economies and societies. Many countries in the world including several European countries and the US were already targets of strategically launched disinformation campaigns during their parliamentary elections and at the height of the COVID outbreak.

Countries should cooperate to develop and keep functioning detection and early-warning systems, which must be closely aligned. There are already agreements to build data competence to identify dual-use tech and tech-powered human rights violations so that participating countries can coordinate sanctions designs. In December 2020, the EU endorsed the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP) which signals that the EU was prepared to make a joint legislative and law enforcement effort with the US to focus on the twin challenges of increasing transparency and accountability of platforms. These efforts may include a joint transatlantic 'code of conduct' on removal of hate speech, illegal and illiberal and blatantly harmful content and other regulatory actions while safeguarding provisions of transparency and free speech. The creation of a transatlantic audit mechanism of 'black box' algorithms could also force changes in business models of the platforms established in the US. Joint EU–US standards around identifying and marking disinformation could give platforms greater credibility and accountability while political and social interests are well respected.

Digitization and technical convergence have created multiple ways to access content on mobile devices. Across the world, mobile devices such as smartphones and internet-equipped mobile devices are replacing personal computers as the primary means of digital content acquisition. In many parts of the world - especially Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where the cost of computers is high and electrification low - individuals who have never had personal computers are skipping that platform altogether and moving to mobile platforms. This can be considered

as the so called “late comer advantage”. This trend will spread all over the world. However, these changes are not likely to lead to the disappearance of the PC shortly, because PCs remain necessary for business, education, health, and media productions. The actual possibilities will be extended even further by 5G and 6G technologies. In this very competitive media market, content is no longer enough and it has no longer exclusive primacy because technology has also got a very important function.

4. Social inclusion and exclusion the treat of an increasing gap

The on-going digital revolution, that is the 4th Industrial Revolution has advanced across very many different countries, cultures, industries and markets, disrupting lives of many and once successful jobs and business models. Digitalisation, the use of the Internet of Things (IoT) and media convergence, etc. are altering the currently known human society and its structure and functions by creating a networked society that operates at many levels (personal, community, national, and global). This process alters not only jobs but traditional social relations and changes also many other things. How it will ultimately change work and social lives of mankind is not yet fully apparent, but it is already clear that emerging new roles and new types of relationship reduce the roles of - and the power previously exercised by – several formal social legacy institutions (e.g. state, church, parties, unions, clubs, and associations) and increase the roles of others.

In the past three decades, billions of people in the world have acquired some level of digital skill even if that level of skill is basic in very many cases. Under such conditions there are people and social strata all over the world that will be able to cope with new challenges created by digitalisation and turn the emerging technical possibilities to their own advantages while other people and social strata will be unable to live up to these possibilities. While roughly one in two people in the world is regular internet user, the other one is not. One cannot assume that the latter one will somehow “catch up” alone with digitalization. In fact, as the sciences make more advances in areas such as analytics, automation and artificial intelligence, it is possible that instead of catching up, these people will only fall further behind.

Automation, in particular, poses some major dilemmas in terms of how economies and societies function in future. Shifts in currently existing jobs towards their digitalised counterparts will occur both in each national economy and in the global economy. The more startling predictions

expect that as much as 47% of jobs may be automated away within few decades. There are various factors which will play important roles in this process, e.g., the levels of economic development (it means that either an industrialised country or developing country can be either in the centre or periphery regarding economic development), the importance of digital platforms and crowd working, high and low levels of social protection, the quality of the education systems to provide skills, etc.

The crucial political, economic and social question is what will happen to unskilled workers in manual or process-driven roles if their existing jobs are displaced by digital technology and they are not equipped with the digital skills and experiences that they need to succeed in the new digital economy? As the digital transformation will shake up most of the industries and sectors potentially millions of people will be deprived of a means to earn a living, and the sense of purpose and social status that go alongside that. Most if not all displaced people won't have the option of moving to find work because the work may not be there for them unless they have the digital skills to do it. All this constitutes a huge political, social and economic problem and no government can alone cope with it. It is a complex package of problems that must be addressed by the whole society (i. e. government, businesses, NGOs, etc.) together and in many cases by the whole global community. The 4th Industrial Revolution that we are going through now is far more transformational than anything the mankind has gone through before in its whole history.

For this reason, digitalisation is very likely to increase the polarisation within societies characterised by enlarging inequalities between various social strata, creating digital winners and losers in the societies. Among others e.g., the future fates of significant parts of middle classes, medium-skilled jobholders, and mass workers seem to be still unclear and unpredictable. One thing is foreseeable there will be a growing need for new social charters to regulate the social aspects of the digital economy. Unless it happens the digital gap among social strata will increase and the competitiveness of the members of these different social groups will also diverge creating unpredictable social tensions and even social and/or political explosions.

The national and global communities must find answers to these complex challenges. Digital exclusion, rising inequality and the need for inclusive growth are burning issues for governments, business and individuals. It is already clear that the potential for technology to make life much better for everyone in the world is vast. Yet there is also a very real risk that

instead of being a force for social good, technology will become a force for social exclusion and exacerbate the pronounced inequalities that already exist today. It is an imperative now and in the future that the countries of the world and the global community should be proactive about driving digital inclusion and building societies where everyone can benefit from the transformative power of technology. If they can solve or at least mitigate this problem, certainly the world can expect to see a more inclusive economic growth.

Besides the on-going radical changes in the world of work it can be observed in increasing number of countries that the members of their societies are now reducing their participation in civic, religious, trade, and political organizations and pursuing their interests through other - often less formalised - interest groups and virtual communities that replace many social interactions that were facilitated by the traditional social institutions.

These changes appear to be altering the influence of those institutions on attitudes, norms, and public opinion formation and increasing the influence of new interactions and less formal networks. For example, media organizations that once enjoyed significant control over the agendas of public discourse are also losing influence, as people themselves increasingly become not only content redistributors but its creators. Under such conditions, digital literacy will have crucial importance.

It must be clear for everyone that countries whose societies suffer from increasing gaps between the digital inclusion and digital exclusion of various social strata cannot have successful economic development and their economic competitiveness are significantly hindered. The adverse consequences become visible already in short and medium terms.

5. Education and digital skills, ethics and trust

Education including teaching digital skills has an increasingly critical role to prevent or at least mitigate social exclusion. An adequate and modern education system can positively affect social cohesion, which is a pre-condition for economic growth, job creation, employment, and improving competitiveness. Educated citizens represent a fundamental pillar of democratic societies because they can orient themselves better in the world, and exploit their abilities and competencies as well as shape the common future of their respective wide and narrow societies.

Digitalisation and digital transformation has rapidly transformed societies and the economies

in the world with an ever deepening impact on everyday life of the mankind. However, until the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of digitalisation on education and training were much more limited. The conditions enforced by the pandemic have demonstrated that having education and training systems which are fit for the digital age is essential in every country of the world. The adequacy of the education systems have direct impacts on the economic development and economic competitiveness of each country.

The still on-going pandemic not only demonstrated the need for higher levels of digital capacity in education and training of every country in the world, but it also revealed a number of existing challenges and highlighted potential problematic issues as well as exhibited existing inequalities. The revealed challenges for education and training systems relate to the digital capacities of education and training institutions, teacher training and overall levels of digital skills and competences. The problematic issues embrace a wide range of areas including the lack of adequate teaching materials, lack of sufficient competence and expertise of educators of all levels and parents to guide the pupils and students in their digital learning process, as well as designing effective and quality online programs requires experience and knowledge in areas such as instructional design and the moderation of online sessions, in addition to the will and ability to train teaching staff to use these digital tools, etc. The inequalities and the gap among social groups or social strata have increased in particular between those who have access to digital technologies (i. e. computer and broadband) and those who do not, including individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

While the pandemic has accelerated an existing trend towards online and hybrid learning the success regarding the knowledge acquired by pupils and students in this way is still questioned. These changes, challenges and shortcomings or failures call for a strong and coordinated effort at national and global level to support education and training systems to address the challenges identified and exasperated by the pandemic.

The rapidly introduced online education practices often included new and innovative ways for students and educators to organise their teaching and learning activities and to interact in a more personal and flexible manner online. These shifts to online education have occurred at different speeds and in different ways. In some country cases, universities and schools have demonstrated remarkable responsiveness and an ability to rapidly implement valid, well-structured approaches to digital training. In other cases, the response has been slower and the approaches used for online education rather rudimentary. The differences in speed and success are largely

due to previous experience with online training. The institutions that were best prepared for this transformation had already demonstrated that they understood that online teaching required pedagogical models and approaches that are significantly or completely different from traditional teaching methods. The successful best practices should be publicised and shared with the other countries struggling relevant problems. The global community should put forward a long-term vision for the way ahead for digital education. Countries alone are and will not be able to solve these problems alone. They need either regional cooperation or wherever it is needed the global community has to find joint solutions. The EU has already made its first steps when it elaborated in 2020 its revised and extended Digital Education Action Plan.

Digital technologies fundamentally transform organizations, with the pace of technological change exacerbating the challenge. Both education systems and economic organizations must have coherent strategies that include plans to educate the young generations and later regularly reskill adult workers. Life-long learning of new skills is becoming a fundamental element of the future social infrastructure and education systems. Whereas previous technological revolutions (most notably the industrial revolution) in the 19th and 20th centuries played out over relatively long time periods, now the speed of digital transformation is such that education systems and businesses need to move rather quickly. For governments, the challenge is equally pressing. The potential inequality and wage deflation or even potential social unrest require urgent actions to prepare the new workforce for a digital future.

Education systems must provide a not only quality education that is accessible to all but must equip the new generations with the ethics of digitalisation including that of the use of artificial intelligence (AI), access to information and use of data, respect of data privacy and its protection, and concerns over security, etc. The key factors here are trust in others and gaining the trust of others. The trust in all technology-based sectors and institutions will further erode unless broader ethical norms regarding the ways how individuals and organizations use digital technology are shared and commonly respected.

THE UNCERTAIN TIMES OF DIGITALIZATION

In order to limit the spread of covid-19, digital tools have become crucial. Digitalisation implies the progressive conversion of documents, services, and goods into digital mediums and the adaptation of economic agents such as companies, consumers, the state, banks and the media to this new situation. A new economy based on new production techniques, adapted employment, and a transformed way of life is gradually emerging.

Digitalisation might be one of the ways to transform the economy because it brings new needs, desires, and also a new way of conceiving economic exchanges. Some authors might be comparing digitalisation to a technological shock that might have consequences not only for the structure of production but also for employment, needs, social relations, and many others.

At the production level, digitalization implies the creation of new interfaces, the exploitation of data, a new relationship with customers, and a reduction in costs due to the platformization and dematerialisation of assets. Digitalisation also allows companies to achieve economies of scale. Traditional companies are faced with newly created platforms that benefit from economies of scale and keep out new entrants. As such, small- and medium-sized businesses struggle against larger ones and legislation which reflects on, and alleviates, this imbalance, is necessary.

In addition, digitalisation is redefining global competition and challenging the poles of power. The European Union wants to become a world leader in the digital economy but is confronted with both China and the United States. It can be said that “the regulations of the pioneer hegemon country will set the direction for the followers”. In that regard, and in addition to the United States’ relative decline recently, there is an increased incentive for them to cooperate with Europe. This would allow for a greater pool of resources and skills available to facilitate rapid technological development and expansion in Europe and the United States. Otherwise, China is likely to become the “hegemon”, and will begin exporting their own technological standards and practices worldwide – and Europe and the United States may be forced to follow.

¹²⁷ Executive Director, Institute for Politics and Society

However, if we look at the effects of digitalisation in a microeconomic way we can see how digitalisation might affect wages, jobs and education. Digitalisation allows the creation of new types of jobs such as data analysts, data miners, data architects. It could create up to a million jobs. However, digitalisation is destroying some of the more traditional jobs as well.

Challenges or Opportunities for Employment?

The covid-19 pandemic fundamentally affected work conditions. While various progressive disciplines previously outperformed work from home, individuals have become so-called digital nomads, traveling the world and working from anywhere, for many employees the absence of a daily "beep of arrival and departure at work" has become a novelty.

The resulting pandemic situation also intensified the long-term debate about which form of work is better for employees and employers. This includes the questions of which is more comfortable, more productive, less time consuming or more environmentally friendly. Obviously disagreements appear. For some, a home office will be the standard no matter what. For others, it's just a "fashion fad" caused by a pandemic, after which everything will return to the previous tracks.

Covid showed many people that the home office could work. People can even be more productive and generally happier. On the contrary however, others consider the home office to be a deviation, and that teleworking cannot be accepted as a "new normal". The biggest problem is mainly with the training of new employees. Thus, working from home you cannot obtain the "direct mentoring" that a new job position would optimally require.

If we take stock of the pros and cons for digitization, the most mentioned benefits include the absence of needing to travel to work and the associated time savings. Greater distance is also a barrier for many people when considering employment. With lower unemployment, subsequent willingness to travel longer to work also decreases. A higher share of work in a home office could at least partially remove this barrier and thus have a positive impact on the labor market.

If we focus not only on the time saved, but also on money, where the saved costs would have a positive impact on the financial situation of households, it is necessary to take into account the impact on services or goods consumed by commuters.

At first glance, a substantial reduction in commuting could also mean a reduction in the purchase of fuel and thus reduction into state budget revenues with regard to excise duty. However, the situation is not entirely clear. It must not be forgotten that people commuting to work take on a number of tasks such as transporting children to school, shopping, etc. The absence of commuting to these activities would mean new journeys to schools, shops and hobbies for children, etc. People would probably also move a greater distance from their place of work without the need for daily commuting. This would increase commuting distances, albeit occasionally. Moving to "more remote" areas would also mean longer journeys to the doctor, to the authorities, etc. After all, life in a village without a car is difficult to imagine. A revenue shortfall would also affect public transport. The coronavirus pandemic has already demonstrated this problem for carriers associated with lower passenger numbers.

However, the reduction in revenue is not just about transport-related issues. If employees commute to work, they often eat in restaurants. This would also be largely eliminated in the absence of travelling to work. This would change the situation not only in the service sector in terms of focus (to the detriment of restaurants and benefit to shops), but also geographical distribution, to the detriment of services located in areas where people commute on a daily basis for work.

In contrast to the saved travel expenses, it is also necessary to bear in mind new expenses for households, which represent an increase in energy consumption, water, higher catering costs in the absence of subsidized company meals, etc.

Another significant externality that speaks against commuting to work is stress. It is typical to run to the bus / train in the morning, experience delays, stand in lines, etc., which also does not benefit mental well-being. Stress has a negative effect on the health of all of us.

Thus, there is no unified attitude towards employees among employers. Various views are brought by the management of companies, but also by the very subject of activity and the workload of employees. In general, it can be argued that working from home will be easier for more "introverted" technical positions than for more "extroverted" jobs requiring a greater volume of interpersonal communication, creativity, brainstorming, etc.

Digitalization in Education

Another question is in relation to the adaptation of education systems, which must become a priority. The new generations must be equipped with the ethics of digitalisation, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI). It is also important to address the polarisation and inequality which has been further exacerbated by the pandemic. Digital infrastructure and literacy are imperative for states to possess worldwide. If this does not change, a substantial portion of the world's population are left behind, and vast troves of useful data go unused.

It might be said that new types of relationships reduce the roles of social institutions such as the state, church, parties, unions, clubs, and associations. During primary socialisation, individuals internalise norms and values through the first instances they come into contact with, such as the family or school. We can experience the loss of influence of social institutions such as the state, church, parties, etc., as we use technology more.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, distance learning disrupted traditional educational norms. While online education became crucial during the Covid-19 crisis and helped maintain educational continuity, the digitalisation of education has certain limits. Since the beginning of the crisis, many students are suffering from symptoms of depression due to isolation, dropping out of school, and a loss of bearings. Although distance learning has enabled children and students to continue their learning, the pandemic has disrupted their social relationships and their constructions as individuals in society.

Digitalization in Freedom of Expression

When a crisis occurs, whether economic, social, environmental, or even health-related, social behaviours appear. The CNRS research director Alain Chouraqui and his scientific team in the Camp des Milles Foundation in France analyse the processes that can lead to the worst in a society, namely mass crimes, while showing the resistibility of this process. The Foundation's scientific work emphasises "the social ground" as that state of society in which racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, or homophobia pre-exist. However, this hatred has an "enormous explosive potential" when society undergoes economic, social, environmental, or even health crises. Indeed, crises can exacerbate and crystallise "the fear of the other". These moments of

destabilisation and crisis generate a loss of reference points in society, frustration, and social jealousy which can lead to violent acts (Chourraqui, 2015).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, fake news, conspiracies, and hate speech exploded on social networks significantly. For example, anti-Asian racism has developed as a result of the pandemic. This racism is based on stereotypical representations, among which Chinese practices on animals, such as the pangolin, contribute to the creation of a health risk for the entire world (Anh, 2020). This racism has been seen all over the world, including in Europe and the United States. Social networks and digital tools have facilitated the spread of racist and extremist ideas (Lee and Yadav, 2020).

The Conspiracy Observatory with the help of Rudy Reichstadt and Valérie Igounet, a historian specialising in the study of the extreme right and the history of negationism, has created the Conspiracy Watch. In this website, a map is available to list conspiracy-related comments, statements, and remarks during the Covid-19 crisis. Social networks have been the scene of this hate.

While hate speech has increased on the internet (social networks, blogs, websites) during the pandemic, the progressive digitalisation of society may also encourage these acts. For this reason, the European Union must adopt clear regulations and policies in terms of digital media, security, and data protection.

The democratisation of digital media is promoted by the digitalisation of society. The increasing use of mobile phones is contributing to the popularity of these new sources of information. These media allow citizens to have access to new sources of information that are not controlled by a single decision-making centre. This is a double-edged sword, however, as disinformation and propaganda can find its way into mainstream media, diluting fact-based reasoning. Consumers have greater opportunities to “select, filter, search, control, and participate”, but so do large tech and social media companies and governments. Ensuring data collected is used for benign purposes is also vital. These issues are a central component of deteriorating trust between citizens and governments in Europe.

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