# THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

**Strengthening liberal values, institutions and procedures at global, European, regional and national levels**

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## Strengthening Liberal Values, Institutions and Procedures at Global, European, Regional and National Levels

**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

Central Europe and the Baltic States

# CONTENT

Erik Uszkiewicz[1]

# INTRODUCTION

The world what we live in is permanently changing with an accelerated speed. Technological revolutions, social turbulences, political tensions, transformation of the media systems, great power conflicts, increasing threat of climate emergency are significant phenomena of the current transformation period. Furthermore, 2020 has created unprecedented challenges for the world and the global institutional order in consequence of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. And just at the time of editing this publication, we are witnessing Russia's unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine which also means the end of the world order as we know it so far.

In this precarious situation, during the last couple of years illiberal and populist waves emerged and became even more dominant across Europe with their political and ideological narratives. On the other side of the Atlantic we also witnessed the "post-truth" politics, which was mainly renewed and reinforced after the U.S. Presidential Election in 2016 with the emerging role of social media in promoting and propagating rumour and untruth.

In the meantime, in Hungary, the democratic backsliding also well-documented, the European and other international institutions and democratic governments are well-aware of the seriousness of the situation. Hungary and Poland can be seen as laboratories of so-called illiberal democracies and creators of a new type of illiberal political regime within the European Union and recently worrisome signals have been arriving from other Member States as well.

Consequently, democratic- and rule of law backsliding is thus on the rise in the EU and there is no guarantee that Poland and Hungary would not be joined by other MSs failing to adhere to the values of Article 2 TEU. United States and the international community must do everything

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they can to prevent these negative tendencies. Problems related to the judiciary system, lack of transparency and high level of corruption, attacks against the independent institutions and bodies, other institutional issues related to checks and balances, extreme media concentration are just some examples of the terrifying situation. The state of minorities and human rights, attacks against the academic freedom (including the Central European University), arts and civil society organisations are seen by many as further deterioration of the common democratic values and principles.

In a nutshell, we live in an epoch of permanent crises when transitions occur in political, social, and cultural spheres. Regarding the new characteristics of international, European, and national politics, the economic transformation, the risks of climate change, as well as digitalisation and the metamorphosis of traditional and social media, political actors and the representatives of civil society should continue their ongoing dialogue how to shape the future of our democratic political communities. Initiating local, national, transnational, and supranational public discussions about our common future is an important task for supporters of liberal democracy. This is especially true in the case of NGOs and think tanks believing in social and political dialogue, learning processes and the crucial role that citizens and civil society are playing when shaping political choices.

In parallel, two significant initiatives are on the horizon. First, the Conference on the Future of Europe that was launched in May 2021 works with an open agenda and its settings let participants to discuss all kinds of issues, not only legal and institutional renovations. Second, the Summit for Democracy, invented by the Biden administration, will go beyond transatlantic relations regarding its more ambitious, global scope. Both big exercises give civil groups a chance to interfere and influence conceptual considerations and practical outputs at the end of the negotiations. NGOs can emphasize moral principles, human and minority rights, the rule of law, political liberties, intercultural dialogue, civic education, new methods for proper citizens' participation, media pluralism, transparency and further policy aspects that might be not on the horizon of some professional stakeholders otherwise. These initiatives mean further opportunities to participate in the present political and expert debates in the European and international public sphere and to have a stronger voice based on our fundamental prodemocratic values.

To facilitate these discussions and exchanges, the Hungarian Europe Society continued its series of events and activity providing floor to fruitful dialogue and debate including our old

and new partners. HES aim is to reach a better understanding of the nature of the challenges we face, how they might alter our lives, our place in the EU integration and the transatlantic partnership and seek to generate ideas, sustainable and mutually beneficial solutions to them.

Spreading such discussions and through them a deliberative debate culture is a contribution that aligns with HES's mission, especially in an era and space where this is sorely missing in Hungary.

# The European Union:
# Fast Forward or
# a New Sclerosis?

Jacques Rupnik[2]

# THE EAST-WEST DIVIDE REVISITED IN WARTIME

Do we (still) have an East-West divide inside the EU and how does it affect the current debate about the future of Europe? The unity displayed in the European response to the war in Ukraine, the speed with which sanctions were adopted and assistance offered could well give the impression that, perhaps, differences had been overstated or at any rate relegated in the European agenda to a secondary status. The urgency of the geopolitical challenge and the prominent part the countries of East-Central Europe play in facing it in terms of humanitarian aid to refugees, military assistance and political support, have certainly shifted the perspective on the region. Poland, asserting a major role in this context seemed to reclaim a moral high ground in the EU thus making it (for the time being) unlikely for the EU Commission to return promptly to its unfinished business with Warsaw over the primacy of European law in Poland. In other words, does the vindication of the East European threat perceptions concerning Russia impact the ongoing controversies with the EU Commission concerning "illiberal democracy" and the conditionality of member-states access to European funds?

Examining the substance of the divide within the EU while the war rages in Ukraine may seem to some as a botanic lesson in a cemetery, yet it remains important for the future development of the European project and indeed for understanding what is at stake in the war: not just an attempted Russian imperial conquest of its neighbour, but also a conflict between Moscow's autocracy and Ukraine's admittedly imperfect attempt to build a democracy.

The divide within the EU with some of its new members developed gradually about a decade after their accession. It concerned primarily the Visegrad group and has focused on three main issues with liberalism at its core: "Illiberal democracy", migration, and societal liberalism.

**1.** "Illiberal democracy" became a contentious issue in the European Union in the aftermath of the PiS (Law and Justice) party in Poland in 2015 with a slogan "Budapest in Warsaw". From

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then on Hungary's Fidesz government since 2010 could no longer be treated as an exception, but rather as a role-model. It is usually put under the heading of 'illiberal democracy', a term used in the 1990's by Fareed Zakaria to warn against a trend which then seemed marginal in Europe (Milosevic, Lukasenko, Meciar): regimes which practice ed democratic elections but not the rule of law thus paving the ground for authoritarianism. Orban reclaimed the term in his famous 2014 speech: you do not have to be liberal to be a democracy.

The features are by now familiar and Poland indeed (more recently Serbia and to some extent Slovenia) implemented most them: dismantling of the separation of powers, the independence of the Constitutional court and of the judiciary; assault on public broadcasting and independent media (On the World Press Freedom Index in 2020 Hungary dropped to 89th place and Poland to 62nd (it was 18th in 2015) ; politicize public administration and most institutions hitherto not subjected to government control.

As a result, the rule of law became the main bone of contention between the Commission and the governments in Warsaw and Budapest. In 2021 the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled against the Polish disciplinary chamber for judges (right of each EU citizen to a fair trial). The swift reply from Warsaw was the Constitutional Court's rejection of that decision while asserting the primacy of Polish over European law, a direct challenge to a basic EU legal principle. Without it, and more broadly without the rule of law, the complex regime on which not just the single market but the whole EU project rests would be undermined.

The conditionality applied to the European post-Covid recovery fund and more generally to the budget is therefore a central issue for the future of the EU and will therefore remain, independently of the developments of the war in Ukraine, a central and highly divisive element in the relationship of Warsaw and Budapest with Brussels the rest of the Union.

**2.** The European response to mass migration was the second main divisive issue between the EU and its Central European members. That was brought into the open in 2015 in relations to the massive influx of refugees related to the war in Syria. The Visegrad group jointly and firmly rejected accepting any as the East/West divide in the EU became explicit politically but also in the media and more broadly in the public perceptions. Viktor Orban built a fence at the border, congratulated by the Czech president and imitated by the then prime minister Andrej Babis who justified refusal to accept some sixty orphans from Syria arguing "it would create a precedent". Kaczynski for his part warned gainst security and sanitary risks. Both sides invoked

European values: Angela Merkel identified them with human rights and the obligation to help asylum seekers, while the V4 leaders with the need to protect their national and European identity from an invasion coming to them from "another civilization" via the Ottoman route from Turkey through the Balkans.

The war in Ukraine since February 2022 marks a complete reversal in the attitudes and discourse of Central Europeans to an unprecedented influx of refugees. They've demonstrated a formidable capacity to welcome and use civil society resources in that endeavor. After 2015 they had refused any EU commission interference in the handling of refugees, let alone quotas for their distribution among EU members. This time they welcome a special EU fund to help cope with the problem. The shift has certainly altered the West European perceptions though perhaps not dissipated the impression that refugees from the East get a different treatment from those form the South.

**3.** "Societal liberalism", issues related to individual and collective liberties in society, constitutes the third divisive issue within the EU. It is, here again, a contestation over values (liberty, equality, diversity vs family, the nation, religion) but above all about the place they have in society. "People want democratic not open societies" as Orban put it. The debate between liberals and conservatives is not new, it simply acquires new meanings for each generation and has become a political and legal bone of contention with some governments in Central Europe. When Kaczynski and Orban jointly declared at Krynica in October 2016 that "Europe needs a counter-revolution" they implied that the Central European leaders were ready to make the 'culture wars' an important feature not just in domestic politics but also in the East/West divides within the Union. Ryszard Legutko, a Polish political thinker and PiS member of the European Parliament outlined their main features in his book The totalitarian temptation. It argues that just like the Communists the Liberals prevalent in the EU want, albeit through different means, achieve the same goals: the dismantling of the family, the Church and the Nation.

Addressing as chairman the meeting of the Visegrad group on June 30, 2021 Viktor Orban said that "it's not normal that other EU member states tell Hungary how to raise its children" (reference to the criticism a Hungarian LGBT related law). "The /EU/diktat must be stopped".

How do these divides fare in the new context of the Russian war in Ukraine? Several elements will be of relevance for the future.

Among the first casualties of the war was the Visegrad group. It was split at its core over Russia when Poland took a leading part in seeking to provide not just humanitarian, but military assistance (a "NATO peace mission") to Ukraine, while the Hungarian prime minister opposed the latter and tried to preserve a middle ground between the worrying parties. In the train taking three Central European prime ministers (Polish, Czech and Slovene) to Kiev in mid-March Viktor Orban was conspicuously missing. In early February he had advocated a 'Hungarian model': you can be on good terms with Putin and a member of the EU. After his election victory he said "Hungary never had so many foes: the Brussels bureaucrats, the international media and the Ukrainian president".

The second war casualty, at least provisionally, is Orban's and Kaczynski's ambition to reconfigure the political landscape inside the EU in alliance with like-minded nationalist-populists in the EU featuring, among others, Mateo Salvini and Marine Le Pen, received (in the midst of the French election campaign) at an official diner in Warsaw by the Polish prime minister. In Viktor Orban's words: "In 1989 we thought Europe was our future. Today we believe we are the future of Europe". Central European "illiberal" nationalists as would-be designers of a new European political landscape?

To be sure, the populist nationalists across Europe are united in their sovereignist posture ("bring back control"), their contempt for weak, permissive, decadent, liberal Europe and tend to like strongmen at the helm: Trump, Bolsonaro… Putin. It so happens that the latter's neo-imperial war on Ukraine, his overt threats against the West, have united Europeans around liberal democracy and (for the time at least) isolated those with a soft spot for the dictator in the Kremlin. The political re-alignment in Europe will have to wait.

In their slanging match last Fall with the EU Commission over the rule of law and conditionality for accessing EU funds, the ministers of justice in Poland (Ziobro) and Hungary (Judit Varga) waving the flag of sovereignty, used and abused the parallel between the European Union and the Soviet Union, Brussels as the new Moscow. Really? Try to tell that in Kiev, where president Zielenski made on March 1st in his speech to the European Parliament made a passionate plea for his country's "fast track" accession to the EU as an anchor for the future of Ukraine's democracy. The war and the geopolitics of democratization on EU's Eastern periphery should help redefine the terms of the democracy agenda within the Union itself.

Wojciech Przybylski[3]

# INSTEAD OF DIVIDED EUROPE, A BROKEN V4

There is no future without a past, especially in Central Europe.

It might sound banale but it is worth to underline that next to the Mediterranean or Nordic perspectives, the European future depends in equal parts on the shape of Central Europe. Therefore a unity or disunity of the Visegrad Group (V4), even as a symbolic representation of a much larger group of countries in this region of the union, matters for the common European direction.

As things stand today, it seems that the V4 has split up along the most unexpected angle – breaking up a nearly decade long Budapest-Warsaw axis and quite possibly opening up a new trend built around a global struggle between democracies and autocracies of the world. While, the V4 must be considered an important pillar of one of many European concentric circles it is also important that as of 2022 its illiberal backbone has been apparently broken beyond repair.

The obvious trigger for this recent shift has become the Russian war in Ukraine which resulted in millions of refugees and internally displaced. It is furthermore displayed by the patterns of responses in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

## Central European turning point in Ukraine

In the best interest of Kremlin was to see a could shoulder response from Central European societies, who would reject any sort of migration that violates the border and prevent solidarity with the Eastern Partnership countries – Belarus and Ukraine in particular. Both countries, signatories of the 1991 act of dissolution of the USSR, have been also displaying a popular support for democratic reforms and rocking the boat of post-soviet (and truly post-modern)

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conservatism promoted by Vladimir Putin. Democratic upheaval in both countries - due to geographic and cultural proximity - has been for long an Achilles feet to the ambition of Russian imperialist revival. At the same time the V4 has been the main proponent of the EU's Eastern Partnership format that harboured six former USSR republics in a cooperative loosely resembling pre-accession cooperation of the V4 on its way through democratic reforms to a full membership.

In early 2021, shortly after thwarting a democratic turnover in Belarus, Moscow-backed Alyaksandar Lukashenka has started an operation to destabilise first the Baltic states and later Poland sewing a polarising division in those societies in respect to a fundamental debate on morals vs security. Freshly imported Middle East migrants were to be smuggled through the EU borders by Belarus servicemen in order to recreate the sort of domestic tensions experienced in 2015 around the Balkan route migration crisis (Valdonė Šniukaitė, Migration Crisis in Lithuania: An Opening for Domestic Upheaval, Royal United Services Institute, 23 August 2021).

Back in 2015 Viktor Orbán has used that opportunity to turn around public opinion in Europe and in particular in V4 societies by fierce opposition to any forms of illegal violation of external borders as well as humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees. His messages were clear, built up on nationalist and racist vibe, and resonated well with a political turning tide in Poland and Czech Republic elevating him from a pariah of the EU to the leader of the V4 Group in control of a popular anti-migrant sentiment.

It was a transformative moment changing pro-migrant Polish society sentiments noted yet in 2014 to a fierce anti-migrant position (Jerzy Leszkowicz-Baczyński, Evolution of Poles' Beliefs About "Strangers" as an Effect Migration Crisis In Europe, Colloquium Wydziału Nauk Humanistycznych i Społecznych AMW, Issue 2 / 2018). Since then Poland was closely following messages and methods of Orbán repeating the illiberal pattern of democratic backsliding. To a large extend it also followed Kremlin's efforts to drive a wedge between V4 countries and its eastern neighbour (Vanessa Gera, Poland-Ukraine ties seen as target of Russian disinformation, AP, 10 April 2022.

Therefore, in response to the crisis on the Belarus borders Poland unsurprising followed the securitisation path and the governments' push-back and denial of access policies have been backed by the majority of the public opinion. At the same time Russia's preparations for the invasion of Ukraine were slowly carried out must have assumed that the active measures aimed

at dividing Poland and Ukraine over their difficult shared past were well planed seeds of disruption (Shaun Walker, [Polish far-right trial raises spectre of 'false flag' tactics](#), The Guardian, 27 January 2019).

However, Russian hopes were misplaced. What worked in Hungary, where in spring 2022 elections the society has chosen a hope of securitisation over an ambition to resist autocratic injustice, did not work in Poland at all. Polish welcoming response to the refugee situation has surpassed even the self-perception of most self-indulged Poles. Solidarity with Ukrainians has overshadowed the ongoing injustice on the border with Belarus and given a fresh impulse in the Polish politics. Jarosław Kaczyński, the kingmaker chairperson of PiS ruling party along with his prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki joined Czech prime minister Petr Fiala Slovenian Janez Janša on the first ever trip by EU leaders to a war torn Kyiv. On the same day Viktor Orbán held a national day electoral rally messaging exactly the opposite geopolitical direction to his closest regional allies. By that time a political rift in Central Europe could have been only measured by the geographical distance between Budapest and Kyiv.

Yet, Polish response was not coming as a surprise. One of scenarios derived from a strategic foresight with focus on the region entitled "Shotgun wedding" ("[Central European Futures](#)", Visegrad Insight 1 (12) 2018) already stipulated a development that would see Central Europe more integrated and seeking shelter in a renewed spirit of EU integration despite being still headed by eurosceptic governments. Even in comparison of Polish and Hungary negotiation strategy regarding the rule of law upon which rests the promise of releasing the EU funds there is today a stark difference of approach. Poland makes some progress, despite internal divisions in the government and Hungary holds its position without any concessions.

Political reaction to the war is of course not dictated solely by the immediate economic calculations. One of the ways to understand Central European projections and expectations about the common European future is a look back into the memory or rather memories represented in writing or visual arts that capture broader social imagination of what Europe is and what it should be about.

A stark difference in approach to understating one's security provides readings by Paris-based Kultura journal ([https://kulturaparyska.com/en/article/history](https://kulturaparyska.com/en/article/history)) from mid-twentieth century that coined a fundamentally different approach of Polish elites across the board to the country immediate neighbourhood. This extremely influential magazine, led by Editor-in-chief Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski (leading strategic thinker of that age) have coined the post-

war ambitions of Polish statehood that are carried until today in country's foreign policy. They claimed - in a nutshell - that in order to secure Polish statehood free of Russian imperialist control the nations of Czechoslovakia (at the time), Hungary but even more importantly Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania must be free and independent.

That sort of thinking paved a way for a consolidated long-term effort that remains unchanged until today and are only confronted by a strategically opposing view of Viktor Orbán who claimed in an interview in March 2022 that "the area between Russia and Hungary should be of adequate width and depth. Today this area is called Ukraine" (Zoltán Szalai and Gergő Kereki, Hungary is pro-peace – interview with Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, Mandiner, 3 March 2022) in a display of indifference to its immediate eastern neighbour or its economic ties (Hungary-Ukraine pre-war trade was higher than with Russia).

Hence, as I explained in Politico just ahead of the election day on 3 April 2022 when in the opinion polls it was clear that Fidesz is going to win and would receive a mandate to rule again based on such a strong pro-Russian position that that marks the end of the illiberal alliance in V4 (Wojciech Przybylski, The end of the Budapest–Warsaw axis, Politico, 2 April 2022). There is no turning back to the pro-Russian illiberal stride even for PiS and there is no Western pivot in sight in Budapest - at least until the next elections. But that might be actually, good news for the future of Europe.

## Conference on multiple futures

In February 2022 a study explaining individual contributions in the ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe has been released. Due to obvious contains such as non-representative samples and methods of collection the findings are providing an insight into what are the possible national imaginations of the European public sphere. In particular they allow some comparisons of the Central European voices in the debate on the common future clearly indicating that national debates on Europe are in sync with the European mainstream on key non-political issues and divergent in terms of political culture or even modes of participation. Yet, it was a striking confirmation that Poland and Hungarian messages about the future of the EU differ also when it comes to the main focal points of the civil society (Contributions per

Member State on the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe, Kantar Public, February 2022).

Despite popular bias across Europe, the Polish society has not expressed conservative catholic messages or fought the culture war as represented in the famous 2009 art-installation 'Entropa' by a Czech artist David Černý in which Poland was represented by a few priest sculptures raising a gay-parade flag on a potato field and imitating the Iwo Jima famous sculpture. Polish participants in the Future of Europe Conference produced their input pretty much in the mainstream spectre of the whole EU. Also, it should be noted that it noted the lowest (21) number of contributions per million of inhabitants from among all EU.

At the same time Hungarian contributions (243 per 1 million of inhabitants and second highest in the EU) focused largely on the culture war, memory and conservative set of values, producing an overall message of civil society input as if all Hungarians very not only in agreement with the government ideological line but they felt as one of the most compelled in Europe to preach their message to the others. It is worth noticing here that according to informants from around the Hungarian administration a lot of these messages were simply orchestrated and coordinated effort of the national and local administration under party orders. This suspicion is still pending further investigation.

Nonetheless, although in the general perception the illiberal alliance between Hungary and Poland was set in stone and threatening the future of a united and democratic Europe there is now mounting evidence of this misperception.

In this context the split over Russia's war in Ukraine has been just a cherry on top.

## Does Central Europe offer alternative ideas on the EU's future?

A short answer is no. A strategic foresight into the Europe's future spelled out by Central and Eastern European civil society leaders does not show much different worries about the democratic performance in Europe from most of other places on the continent. EU citizens from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea are clearly concerned about challenges to democracy both at home and at the level of EU institutions.

However, in their outlook about the future there is a clear distinction in prioritising security concerns for Europe that stem from CEE geographical positioning on the edge of European Union, rather than worry about exacerbating global pressure points such as the climate change.

But CEE also represent a different political and security sensitivity that will be better explained in the upcoming scenario-based publication by the Visegrad Insight on the topic in September 2022.

There are however clear divisions in Central and Easter Europe as to the security trends perception that will also reflect on the global democracy vs. autocracy constraint. We see especially that in CEE countries like Lithuania or Czechia have already been clearly demonstrating their commitment to the West despite being lured or intimidated by Russia and China and responsibly bearing also some economic costs of such a clear cut. In Poland, there is a growing discourse among libertarian circles, previously very vocal in their opposition towards eurozone, that presents a reverse arguments - following on the upcoming adoption of euro by Croatia in 2023 and Bulgaria in 2024. Both countries are also clear about a security-driven motivation.

So now perhaps we have this opportune moment that many Central Europeans may build on the perilous experience and a hope for a better future and even be more decisive about the future of European strategic autonomy. According to Visegrad Insight strategic foresight most of Central European civil society leaders definitely hope for Europe to prevail and to be stronger voice.

## Central Europe north-south fracture

Instead of conclusions let me draw a on the biggest fraud in the public debate of the last ten years has been the reemergence of the east-west divide in Europe. That imaginary division rested upon a premise of a dividing line between Central Europe the Visegrad Group (V4) and the older members of the EU. It was clearly a re-enactment of the Cold War division it has been forgotten that Central Europe is by now just as much part of a common European polity as any other part of Europe, be it the Alpine region, the Nordics or the South. And it was not true.

By now there is no major diving line between east and west in Europe when it comes to democratic performance. Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 indicates that 72% of the European Union population – 322 of 445 millions of European Union citizens –

live in flawed democracies. 204 millions of which are citizens of countries qualified by the Economist as Western Europe and only 118 as Eastern Europe. Moreover, the scores year to year seem to have improved among the lower end of the scale and slightly downgraded at the top - including the overall score for Western Europe 8.22 in 2021 from 8.29 in 2020. In other words France 7.99 or Spain 7.94 is not far more democratic than Estonia 7.84. At the same time Poland 6.80, Bulgaria 6.64, Croatia 6.50, Hungary 6.50 and Romania 6.43, are well behind the lowest score in Western Europe (Cyprus 7.43), but their performance is still marked just a bit more flawed - no reason to be proud or happy about those numbers. EUI 'flawed democracies' concept indicates significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy then elections. It is also worth remembering that since 2016 the United States (7.85 in 2021) also belongs to that category.

This is a reminder that Central Europe is no longer a cultural concept of Milan Kundera explaining a colonialist expansionism of Moscow that captured this part of Europe but these member states act now as co-shapers of the common European future and their democratic underperformance is in line with a worrying global trend. Yet, there are other outlying drivers that shape CEE perspective about the future of Europe differently than then the rest of the EU. For instance trust in EU across CEE (except Slovakia) is as high as in Germany or the nordic countries (Standard Eurobarometer 96 - Winter 2021-2022).

If we can speak of any division lines on the basis of Central Europe that those would be only the very same division lines which go across the whole of the EU: global North-South divides or based on how the threat perception and response vis a vis Russia is shaped.
Against this backdrop, since 2018 Visegrad Insight, Res Publica Foundation has been conducting a recurring strategic foresight exercise on the future of Europe to engage CEE civil society leaders in scenario-building workshops and generate a public debate around actionable recommendations.

The most recent and ongoing part of this process has started in September 2021 with a European Commission grant (Europe for Citizens) and brought a number of in-person and online discussions that address several priorities of the Conference on the Future of Europe related to the democratic security (from the topic of democratic values, cyber security to the global positioning of EU). And before the final scenario-based report is released let me highlight just a few points that are for sure emerging from the CEE voices, ie.:

- there is a clear priority to find pathways for more countries in the east and south of CEE to join the EU;

- there is a pressing need to rebuild broken democratic institutions because the dangers of not having democracy are more clear in CEE and should be the leading voices for the whole of the EU; and finally

- Central European countries and societies do not trust in the political experiments across the EU, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe – which could explain the low participation in the official process (except of Hungary) but do want to speak up.

This is all bad news for the type of political ideology of national bigotry represented by the far right in Central Europe, but it is a good message from this region for the future of Europe.

Corina Stratulat[4]

# THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: LESSONS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR THE FUTURE

A year ago, the European Union (EU) opened "a new space for debate with citizens to address Europe's challenges and priorities" so that people from "all walks of life and corners of the Union", especially younger generations, can "have their say on the future of Europe".[5] The shorthand for capturing this "citizens-focused, bottom-up exercise" is the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE).

The Conference process follows the footsteps of many past attempts to foster greater citizens' engagement in European political affairs with the intention of rejuvenating EU democracy and boosting the Union's democratic legitimacy.[6] But it also marks a departure from previous similar initiatives in that it substantially raises the scope and stakes of the conversation: everyone can engage at different governance levels and through various, innovative formats to discuss a broad range of key policy issues. Moreover, EU institutions have committed to follow up on citizens' input.[7]

Such a flagship initiative with such a bold title suggests that European democracies are starting to take the need to innovate seriously, daring to experiment to that end. Regardless of whether or not the CoFoE process will ultimately generate structural reforms that renew the political shape of our democracies, its undeniable merit is in promoting experimentation. Given that we lack ready-made solutions for how to tackle today's complex external and internal challenges

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[5] Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on the Conference on the Future of Europe: Engaging with Citizens for Democracy – Building a more resilient Europe.

[6] For example, 200 randomly selected citizens were brought to Brussels in 2006 under the framework of the European Commission's Plan D initiative to discuss in their own language what they identify as priorities for Europe's future. In 2009, an EU-wide online consultation was held as part of the Commission's Debate Europe programme. In 2018, a Citizens' Panel in Brussels saw 96 Europeans select their 12 most important issues for the EU's future. See Stratulat C and Greubel J (2019) Preparing for the Conference on the Future of Europe: the 'known knowns' of citizens' participation. *EPC Discussion Paper*, European Policy Centre: Brussels.

[7] Article 1 of the Rules of Procedures of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

to democracy in Europe (and beyond), experimentation is probably the only sure path to improve the functioning of our political systems and shore up democratic resilience.

# A major pan-European exercise

In the next few weeks before 9 May – the official end-date – the Conference will reach its conclusions in a final report for the presidents of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission to take forward and implement in practice. This final report will be the outcome of a complex process that unfolded since May 2021 along a participatory dimension and a representative dimension, each with its own unique elements.

The participatory dimension foresaw the collection of input from citizens either participating in a diversity of events and deliberations with various actors at the European, national, regional or local level or else contributing their ideas via the Multilingual Digital Platform (MDP). The MDP also kept track of all events organised in the member states, where national and sub-national actors were given free rein to implement citizens' panels or thematic meetings in line with their "own national or institutional specificities".[8]

But the key feature of the participatory dimension has been the so-called European Citizens' Panels (ECPs). Between September 2021 and February 2022, the Conference held four ECPs with 800 randomly selected citizens[9] from all 27 member states (200 citizens per Panel) to deliberate and formulate recommendations on four different thematic clusters.[10] Each ECP met three times: once online and twice in person at different locations across the member states.[11]

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[8] Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on the Conference on the Future of Europe: Engaging with Citizens for Democracy – Building a more resilient Europe, p. 2.

[9] Participants were randomly selected by the market research company Kantar Public from across all member states to represent the EU's sociological diversity according to five criteria: geographic origin (i.e. nationality, urban/rural), socioeconomic background, level of education, gender and age. Special attention was devoted to ensuring that a third of each Panel was composed of people younger than 25, and at least one female and one male citizen per member state were represented in every ECP.

[10] Stronger economy, social justice, jobs, education, culture, sport, digital transformation" (Panel 1); EU democracy, values and rights, rule of law and security (Panel 2); climate change, environment and health (Panel 3); EU in the world and migration (Panel 4).

[11] Panel 1: Strasbourg – online – Dublin; Panel 2: Strasbourg – online – Florence; Panel 3: Strasbourg – online – Natolin; Panel 4: Strasbourg – online – Maastricht.

The Panels were designed with due consideration of fundamental deliberative principles.[12] The succession of plenary and subgroup discussions, expert input, professional facilitation and simultaneous interpretation in all official EU languages were crucial in gearing ECP participants towards delivering concrete results. The first session of every Panel started from the participants' general views about the EU and its future before identifying streams of key priorities for the Union within each thematic cluster. The second sessions delved into the different streams and guided the citizens to define possible orientations – that is, approaches to the priorities under discussion. The third sessions then focused on breaking down these orientations into recommendations for EU action.

A total of 178 recommendations were agreed by the four ECPs. Together with the ideas collected from the citizens' events in the member states and the contributions to the MDF, these recommendations fed into the ongoing debates of the Conference Plenary. During the current 'hot' phase of the Conference, the Plenary will now work to translate citizens' input into proposals.

The Plenary is the main decision-making body of the Conference and thus the key element of the representative dimension of the CoFoE. It is made up of 449 members, including representatives of European institutions, national parliaments, social partners, civil society and citizens. 80 'ambassadors' from the ECPs, 27 representatives of the national debates, and the President of the European Youth Forum are also part of the Plenary.

Nine thematic Plenary Working Groups prepare the debates and proposals of the Conference Plenary, which is responsible for adopting conclusions on a consensual basis and forwarding them to the Executive Board. The latter will draw up the final report going to the Joint Presidency.


## A steep learning curve


The experience of the CoFoE so far contributes a great deal of knowledge about the dos and don'ts of participatory processes, as well as lessons about the resistance points and bottlenecks

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[12] See, for example, Chwalisz C (2020) Good practice principles for deliberative processes for public decision making in *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. OECD Publishing: Paris.

in the existing system. These insights should guide future efforts to establish better initiatives and continue to advance EU governance reform.

The Union did succeed in launching its first large-scale experiment in citizens' deliberation. This is all the more an achievement since it unfolded within a single year and during the COVID-19 pandemic. A lot of thinking, coordination and hard work has gone into designing and implementing the Conference process and its many, different elements. Providing simultaneous interpretation in all 24 official EU languages for the ECPs, the Plenary and on the MDP is unprecedented and proved indispensable for communication among citizens and stakeholders across all member states. Existing know-how in deliberative processes helped organisers to set up a method of participation that produced concrete recommendations and kept citizens motivated throughout the exercise. The Multilingual Digital Platform is an innovative tool with EU-wide reach and the Plenary is a promising idea of how to marry the participatory and representative dimensions of politics. Such novelties contribute towards the creation of a genuine culture of openness in and around EU institutions about citizens' participation.

But the CoFoE also offers key lessons for the future[13], referring *inter alia* to:

- **The subject of deliberation**, which should be as precise as possible. If the aim is to gather suggestions for decision-making, a narrower topic or specific question – ideally one already on the EU agenda or in the policy process – will allow for more useful input and result in tangible proposals. The wide scope of the themes of this Conference made it difficult this time for the citizens to go into any depth in their discussions, affecting the quality of the conclusions.

- **The time for the participatory process**, which should be sufficiently ample as to allow citizens to become aware of the issues discussed and properly exchange with others about their positions. During the CoFoE, experts struggled to cover all relevant aspects in the mere 10 minutes allocated to their presentations. Likewise, the citizens had difficulties processing and internalising the new and complex information received as

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[13] See High Level Advisory Group Report on The Conference on the Future of Europe: What worked, what now, what next?, February 2022, Brussels: European Policy Centre and Stratulat C and Greubel J (2021), Una casa para todos: Observations from the first European Citizens' Panel of the Conference on the Future of Europe. *EPC Report*, Brussels: European Policy Centre.

the process was quickly unfolding. Little time for reflection meant that citizens could not really use this material to inform and develop their deliberation.

- **Citizens' knowledge about the topic(s) discussed**, which should be raised before deliberations start. If their contribution is to be meaningful, participants should come to grasp the policy issue they are asked to debate, including the broader context, and the EU's role and room of manoeuvre according to its legal competences. Organisers should use creative ways to inform the citizens, including briefing materials, expert input, meetings with officials or practitioners, or visits to EU institutions. The expertise provided during the Conference was not always sufficient or objective enough and was generally limited to the plenary sessions. In the subgroups, where most of the deliberation took place, the citizens were largely on their own.

- **The link between transnational and (sub)national debates**, which should be cultivated. To foster wider European debate, discussions about EU issues in the member states should intensify and connect with deliberations in other countries and at the transnational level. The absence of a systematic relation between the different tiers of debate is a structural deficit of the CoFoE. The ECPs, national panels and MDP essentially functioned as 'separate bubbles'. The Panels did not discuss ideas or proposals emerging from the national events. Vice-versa, without a common methodological framework, national debates did not reflect on the ECP deliberations either.

- **The objective**, which should be clarified from the outset and communicated to participants. The goal may be to provide policy input, consult on the political agenda, or simply raise awareness about ongoing processes or the functioning of the EU. Whatever the overall objective of the deliberations, it should be spelt out as concretely as possible. This clarification is needed to manage unrealistic expectations on the side of citizens but also to ensure the buy-in and shared commitment of EU institutions and member states. Uncertainty about the specific goal(s) of the citizens' deliberations in the CoFoE has meant that some participants ignored the potential impact of their work on the final result, some hoped that it would make a difference, while others doubted and continue to doubt that it will be taken up by politicians. It has also resulted in lukewarm political support for the initiative.

- **The visibility** of the exercise, which should be as wide as possible. If deliberations are to engage a significant number of citizens, including segments of the population that would not otherwise be reached, the process has to be underpinned by effective communication and endorsed by political leaders at all levels through discussions about the results and their implications. The CoFoE lacked overall momentum and the political capital injected by member states and EU institutions into the process has been inadequate to make the initiative known and prominent. Beyond the 800 citizens in the ECPs and the 50 000 contributions on the MDP, the reach and interest in the Conference among Europeans remained scant. The CoFoE process did not attract much political or media attention and it is still unclear whether EU institutions, especially the EP, member states politicians and journalists will now raise the stakes of the exercise by taking up its results and discussing how they should be put into practice.

- **The decision-making process**, which should be transparent. If it is unclear how citizens' input is translated into actionable proposals, the legitimacy of the exercise can be called into question by participants or observers. The procedure on the basis of which the Conference Plenary and its Working Groups are not known and the extent to which citizens' ambassadors have a real voice in the proceedings is also uncertain. The impression of a 'black box' in the Plenary casts doubt upon the outcome and whether citizens' contributions will influence the final report and its subsequent implementation by EU institutions and national governments.

Overall, the problems identified in the Conference are linked to structural impediments which pre-determined the organisation of the CoFoE before experts were even called in to design a process, its elements and their methods. The broadness of the themes, the lack of time, the weak links between levels, the ambiguity of purpose were givens from the start and organisers had to work with and around them. These underlying obstacles tend to be the outcome of diverging interests between and within institutions, tiers of governance and other stakeholders. They are often also an expression of little or no experience with participatory exercises, especially on a grand scale, which tends to breed hesitation. The challenge for the future is to avoid the same mistakes, try again but do better.

# A stepping stone to EU governance reform

An inclusive, participatory European Union will not come about 'overnight' or thanks to the CoFoE alone. It will require continued reflection on how institutions can support bottom-up efforts with the appropriate tools, funding, and constructive engagement. It will also demand persevering in the courage to try again and again, until we get it right. ECP 2 has in fact called for more frequent online and offline interactions between the EU and its citizens (recommendation 29) and for regular citizens' assemblies (recommendation 39). Ideas posted on the MDP echo the same desire for citizens to engage and contribute in new ways in the future on EU issues. The more European political elites and people recognise that democracy is high-maintenance and engage in experimentation and innovation to keep it effective, the more likely it is that they will manage to make it fit for the 21st century.

This does not mean implementing a 'CoFoE 2.0' further down the line. It entails taking on board the lessons offered by the Conference experience and building on its best practices to create other, more effective mechanisms of citizens' engagement in politics. It also suggests looking beyond the CoFoE, at the multitude of deliberative initiatives taking place at the national, regional and local levels throughout the EU.[14] These exercises systematically involve hundreds of thousands of citizens in decisions about real issues (like how to spend a city's budget, how to tackle online hate and harassment, how to improve the quality of air, whether to legalise same sex marriages) and offer abundant expertise and inspiration to refine our methods.

But perfecting deliberative processes will not be enough for EU governance reform: these processes also have to count in policymaking. A more citizens-friendly European system might require revising existing procedures and structures and/or institutionalising channels for citizens to be able to influence the decision-making at explicit moments.[15] Whatever the path(s), a fundamental change in how we think about politics and how we practice democracy will be necessary.[16] That step, between a great deliberative process and a political decision, which can transform a merely deliberative process into a proper participatory instrument, can

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[14] OECD (2020), Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions: catching the deliberative wave. OECD Publishing: Paris.

[15] See, for example, the proposals put forward in the Report of the High Level Advisory Group on The Conference on the Future of Europe: What worked, what now, what next?, February 2022, European Policy Centre: Brussels.

[16] See Stratulat C (2021) Forging a new democratic frontier in Europe. Input paper prepared for the EPC Annual Conference *Is Europe still in the global race*, European Policy Centre: Brussels.

only happen through a gradual change of democratic culture and a wide recognition that citizens' input can add value to policymaking. The Conference on the Future of Europe is a stepping stone in that specific direction but the road ahead remains long.

Richard Youngs[17]

# EU DEMOCRACY AFTER THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) concluded on May 9 with mixed results for democratic reform. EU officials worked hard to design an innovative process that gave citizens a voice in key debates over the EU's future. However, ambitious and wide-ranging follow-up will be required if the conference is to generate tangible progress toward democratic renovation. While the CoFoE was undoubtedly the most open and participative exercise of this kind that the EU has ever held, it did little to address the broader state of European democracy. The conference may lead to one or more regular EU-level citizen forums; the even more important advance would be if it serves as a catalyst for wider democratic improvements across Europe.

## Citizens' Chance

Despite its rocky start, the CoFoE offered a refreshing contrast with previous elite-dominated intergovernmental conferences. Initially, the conference preparations were tense, prolonged, and fractious. The start date was pushed back due to considerable interinstitutional wrangling. There were moments when many member states seemed intent on retaining so much control that the citizens' input would have been largely symbolic. It is remarkable that the CoFoE ultimately gave European citizens a far more meaningful role than might have been expected, even if it is governments that will now decide how the conference's proposals are taken forward.

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The conference's four thematic citizen panels gave 800 randomly selected citizens the ability to explore an extremely wide range of topics and policies. Citizens were able to deliberate on new agenda items and ideas, and then presented 178 policy recommendations. Over a hundred of the citizens involved in the panels also participated in the conference plenary. In parallel, a digital platform enabled thousands of citizens to offer further input, with Decidim software (pioneered in Barcelona) enabling interactions across different languages. Also, after initially being frozen out of the conference, civil society organizations were included in its plenary, albeit in limited form.

Some deliberative experts expressed concerns that the randomly selected citizens were considering overly broad sets of issues in a short time frame and that the panels felt more like open conferences rather than carefully targeted deliberation. Critics also pointed out that there was no role for minority rights groups, pushing aside rights-oriented agenda items. Another concern was that some (although not all) of the EU institutions and experts guiding the panels tilted debates toward their own desired outcomes. Input on the digital platform came mainly from well-organized pressure groups with technical expertise rather than the so-called unengaged citizenry.

Citizen panel recommendations fed into the plenary that included citizens alongside government and EU representatives—this hybrid form standing in contrast to standard citizen assembly processes. It was not clear at first how these recommendations would be dealt with in the plenary, as there was no predetermined process that guaranteed they would be taken on board. Several filters existed between citizen deliberation and the outcome: so-called working groups chose their favored recommendations from the panels; the plenary could then pick and choose from these working groups; an executive board could in turn pick and choose from the plenary; and finally, governments are likely to pick and choose from the final set of recommendations.

Despite all the shortcomings, however, the CoFoE undoubtedly put the need for citizen engagement more prominently on the EU agenda—adding to the momentum created by other initiatives like the union's new Competence Centre on Participative and Deliberative Democracy. Some teething difficulties in creating the first transnational panels were to be expected, as tried and tested national- or city-level citizen assembly processes cannot simply be cut-and-pasted to the EU level. The conference's final report calls for citizen assemblies to be held "periodically" in the future. The exercise has raised expectations around citizen

participation that will be hard to rebottle. Surveys suggest that citizens are certainly [interested](#) in directly participating in EU-level decisionmaking beyond the conference. The European Commission plans to reassemble the citizen-panel participants later in 2022 to review what progress has been made on their recommendations.

## Step-Change Still Needed

The citizen panels and the digital platform countered some of the initial skepticism over the CoFoE. The commitment to more regular, post-conference forms of citizen participation is a significant development. However, notwithstanding the positive changes, the way in which the CoFoE approached the issue of democracy had its downsides. The overwhelming focus on mini-public deliberation might be seen as both boon and bane. It prompted dynamic innovation in citizen participation but may also have smothered some elements of debate about wider elements of democratic reform.

Much of the [focus](#) in the latter stages of the conference was on the precise details of a possible permanent assembly—whether this should sit as a de facto second chamber of the European Parliament or be linked to very specific thematic issues, whether it should propose new ideas or only monitor existing legislation, and so forth. Ultimately, these questions were left unresolved and the [final report's](#) calls for ongoing participative forums are couched in very general and imprecise language.

While these are important issues, they are largely organizational and relatively narrow in nature when set alongside the magnitude of challenges facing democracy. More regular citizen participation is key but still needs to be flanked by other democratic advances. And yet, these other types of reform did not gain the same degree of prominence on the CoFoE agenda.

The conference's final report calls in familiar, often-repeated terms for transnational lists and an elected European Commission president. (Outside the CoFoE, on May 4 the European Parliament voted for electoral reforms that would include twenty-eight seats to be elected through an EU-wide list.) Yet, in broader terms, a highly favorable narrative about the CoFoE's democratic inclusiveness has risked diverting attention from deeper political reforms. The routinely repeated line was that the conference was moving citizen involvement in

a significantly positive direction. But the conference did nothing to stop the ongoing deterioration in many aspects of democratic quality across Europe that was evident even as the conference was taking place. The need for a step change in democracy is far greater than member states and EU institutions still seem willing to acknowledge.

It is also doubtful that the CoFoE's democratic advances keep pace with new EU policy developments. As the EU moves toward common debt, hugely increased financial transfers, new taxes, loosened fiscal rules, an incipient health union, and many other policy changes, the absence of deeper political reforms will overall leave the EU *more* democratically challenged than it was before the CoFoE. Moves forward in policy integration are now significant enough to require a major jump forward in democratic accountability. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted moves toward common energy procurement, more defense cooperation, and a more security-oriented union, raising even more profound questions for democratic accountability.

The conference did not acknowledge or address this fundamental policy-versus-politics disjuncture. Far from addressing the imbalance between deeper policy cooperation and stalled democratic processes, the conference ended with this gap between policies and politics even wider than when it began. In this sense, it risks bequeathing a false sense of adequacy and exaggerated sense that its level of citizen involvement will have game-changing significance.

The conference's citizen panels and digital platform could hardly be expected to alter the EU's quasi-constitutional settlement or to come up with completely new, out-of-the-blue solutions after so many years of different policy proposals being discussed at multiple institutional levels. Rather, the measure of citizen engagement should be whether it gives citizens the formal and regularized ability to hold decisions to account. A skeptic might fear that the CoFoE was framed as an exercise in a looser ethos of "listening," "consulting," and "debating" to avoid giving citizens those tangible and incisive formal tools of democratic accountability.

## Bolder Innovation

The necessary step change should involve wider approaches to democratic innovation. The EU would benefit from multiple forms of democratic experimentation. EU policymakers and European experts have largely been focused on one specific type of mini-public deliberation

that has found traction mainly (although not exclusively) in Western countries. They have generally not been open to different kinds of innovations tried in other countries.

More effective avenues that directly involve a mass citizenship are still needed. Even if permanent EU participative forums do materialize, these will still involve a very small number of citizens. These citizens will function as representatives, simply selected rather than elected like politicians. This form of representativeness may be well-grounded, but a wider, active citizenship is equally important. Those involved in burgeoning citizen participation commonly agree that citizen panels and the like are not meant to replace but rather complement other reforms. However, in practice, these other kinds of reforms gathered little momentum in the CoFoE.

Two points repeated often during the conference were first, that the citizen panels must not be a one off and second, that future citizen forums must be connected to formal institutional policymaking processes. These points are clear-cut, but the argument here is a different one. Even these much-repeated calls do not take the debate over democratic reform as far as it needs to extend. The EU needs to be guided by a full spectrum vision for what a future democratic system should look like. New citizen initiatives should then be designed to fit around this, rather than taking shape as piecemeal, stand-alone initiatives. (It has been argued that already-existing participative channels need a fuller, more democratic infrastructure to function properly and that without this there will be little value in simply adding one or two more citizen initiatives.)

Several types of initiative might help create a wider base of legitimacy for advances in European integration. For example, a broader and more ambitious EU crowdsourcing vehicle could allow citizens to provide input into very concrete legislative and other policy proposals. While direct democracy voting initiatives have fallen out of favor, it might still be helpful to link assembly proposals to EU-wide referendums. Indeed, the citizen panels called for this link, but governments generally balk today at more direct democracy. Parliamentary and party reforms are needed just as much as citizen forums, and far beyond the narrow question of transnational lists. More boldly, EU citizen forums that include political party representatives could be especially interesting and innovative.

More effective CSO involvement in EU-level policy developments could also be of the utmost importance. A civil society convention that ran in parallel to the conference did not manage to wield much influence. For many years, the EU has been criticized for consulting selectively with large CSOs that have a well-organized presence in Brussels and largely share a desire for

deeper integration—and these were the kind of organizations that took the eight seats granted to CSOs in the conference plenary. Even though the final report calls for civil society involvement in democratic innovation, the CoFoE missed the opportunity to rectify this imbalance through a more broadly cast initiative for CSO engagement.

Most fundamentally, the step change in democratic renovation requires a less instrumental approach to EU citizen participation. Among policymakers and analysts, there is still a tendency to judge democratic participation in terms of whether or not it triggers deeper EU integration and overcomes obstacles in the European Council—with an assumption that citizens will see participation as credible only if certain policy reforms toward deeper integration are forthcoming. The final report fuses democratic reform ideas with the need to develop "a stronger common European identity."

In the final stages of the conference, debate about democratic reforms was displaced somewhat by a focus on the CoFoE possibly leading to a new convention or some kind of constitution-building process. Some civil society groups insisted that a constitution-drafting process could itself be a channel of citizen participation, and French President Emmanuel Macron supported this notion in his speech at CoFoE's closure on May 9. However desirable such options might be, this approach appears to make democratic renewal more conditional on or subordinate to wider policy and institutional changes.

If the goal is a higher-quality democracy, this should be prioritized regardless of what it means for the institutional restructuring of the EU or what kind of integration model might emerge in the future. EU cooperation, if it transpires, needs to be the outcome of stronger democratic engagement, not vice versa. The primary objective should be to legitimize the policy cooperation that is already afoot. Now that the CoFoE has finished, a more comprehensive "enhancing European democracy" agenda is needed, as opposed to the current "deliberative participation on select EU policies" approach. This would be helpful in more constructively engaging citizens who might feel that participation in the CoFoE was somewhat loaded in favor of certain pro-EU outcomes.

Notably, it is unlikely that any reform exercise—CoFoE, convention, or constitutional assembly—could result in a new model of integration that all parts of Europe would accept. But EU initiatives could usefully serve as umbrellas for local-level participation by a broad, diverse group of citizens. For example, the EU could set up something like a network of democracy facilitator hubs across Europe to help and encourage local initiatives feed into the

European level of decisions. This effort would show that the union is concerned with shared citizen empowerment more than simply the mediation of member-state interests. It should also foster horizontal connections between democratic forums across borders, not only vertical connections through Brussels.

# Conclusion

The CoFoE unfolded well enough to represent a genuine opening for democratic change. The risk now is that the expectations generated will remain unfulfilled and trigger another cycle of popular frustration with both the EU and democracy. Policymakers say they are fully aware that the conference itself was only a first step forward. Rather than assuming the job of listening to citizens is now done, policymakers will need to use the period *after* the conference for further democratic renovation. The question of what kinds of reforms could deliver meaningful democratic accountability still needs to be answered.

The conference demonstrated that EU-level citizen participation can be made to work, and it should remain a core strand of future democratic renewal. Permanent deliberative structures could combine two levels of change, one giving citizens a more active role in decisionmaking on theme-specific issues, the other for them to monitor the overarching direction of EU integration (not in an abstract sense of 'what kind of EU citizens want' but keeping track of whether leaders are following through on their concrete promises). Still, it would do a disservice to democracy if a few such institutional initiatives were to deflect attention away from the need for more far-reaching and bolder adjustments to democratic practices.

Political reform processes cannot simply use citizen initiatives as pressure valves to periodically vent frustrations with the EU. They also cannot involve merely adding supposedly benign popular legitimacy to plans for deeper EU policy centralization. Rather, political reform efforts must employ more radical extensions in citizen empowerment and rigorous contestation of both EU and national government policy models. The CoFoE may have slightly nudged open this door, but governments have not yet chosen to cross its threshold.

# A New Era for the Global Co-operation of Democracies?

Jamie Shea[18]

# ALLIANCE SECURITY AFTER FEBRUARY 24: WHERE DO WE NEED TO GO NOW?

The entire world has responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine with a mixture of shock and horror. Russia has been condemned in the UN Security Council and by an overwhelming vote in the UN General Assembly. As the Russian invasion enters its second month and Moscow ramps up the military pressure by shelling urban populations in Kyiv, Mariupol and Kharkiv while trying to get its forces into the Ukrainian capital, it is time for an initial assessment. Here we see a mix of good and bad which is typical of the opening phases of long and protracted conflicts.

On the positive side of the ledger, we have admired the fighting spirit of the Ukrainians, making a stand for the values of freedom, democracy and the right to belong to the European family of nations. At a time of rising authoritarianism and democratic backsliding, it has been inspiring to see that political elites, social celebrities and ordinary citizens are still willing to fight and die for the right to determine their own future. The transatlantic community, despite being strained recently by the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and arguments over AUKUS, has pulled together in a remarkable display of unity and resolve. President Macron has retracted his comment about NATO being "brain dead" and now says that the alliance is indispensable. Not only the alliance but the broader international community has proved ready, willing and able to adopt draconian sanctions against Moscow, including Indo-Pacific partners seemingly remote from the conflict or neutrals like Switzerland that normally stand aside. The manner in which so many major western companies have spontaneously joined this effort, boycotting Russia or divesting their investments and assets there, has been as surprising as it has been commendable.

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Yet on the more negative side we are still witnessing appalling human suffering and a mounting humanitarian crisis affecting the 5.5 million Ukrainians displaced both within Ukraine and beyond its borders. From the perspective of military strategy and operational competence, Russia's performance has been lamentable; but Russia still has the advantage of geographic proximity and the capacity to outmatch the Ukrainian army in reserves and heavy weaponry, despite the considerable Russian losses in manpower and equipment thus far. It is compensating for its military failings by resorting to terror tactics, as in the shelling of cities and deliberate targeting of civilians. Russia's disregard for legal or moral restraints gives it an advantage in controlling the escalation ladder. Moreover, in the G77 beyond the West, there are still too many fence sitters among the world's big, populous countries such as India or South Africa, which have refused to impose sanctions or even condemn Russia's aggression. Finally, we do not seem close to a ceasefire, let alone a Russian disengagement or a political settlement for Ukraine. Moscow has made exorbitant and nebulous demands such as demilitarisation, de-Nazification and the protection of Russian speakers which it would be impossible for Kyiv to concede without giving Russia a permanent controlling role in its domestic affairs. Ukraine will be reluctant also to concede at the conference table what it hasn't lost militarily on the battlefield. Desperate for a military success as the setbacks mount, Putin will also use the peace talks for show while he tries to seize the additional Ukrainian territory he needs to be able to impose his own terms.

As the war in Ukraine becomes prolonged and unpredictable, the risks for the transatlantic alliance will increase, as will the shockwaves of the conflict as they spread across the world. Thus the allies will need both a European and a global containment strategy as they deal with a crisis that has major economic and humanitarian as well as military dimensions. Four tasks in the security field stand out:

- to bolster NATO's defences so as to have the military capability to repel any form of Russian attack on land, at sea, in the air, or through space and cyberspace.

- to preserve Ukraine as an independent and sovereign state with international guarantees of its future security.

- to isolate and weaken Russia and China (to the extent that Beijing allies with Moscow) so as to deter them from future military aggression and contain their capacity to harm Western interests on the global stage.

- to reduce Western strategic dependencies on authoritarian states and economies so as to increase the West's scope for autonomous action.

# Bolstering NATO

The first element of this strategy is to ensure that NATO's capacity for deterrence is boosted by more combat forces able to defend territory. In recent weeks this has taken the form of additional troops, ships and aircraft being despatched to reinforce the Baltic States and Poland or Romania along the Black Sea coast. Ten allies have so far contributed to this effort placing now 40,000 troops under direct NATO command. Those sceptical about the future of the transatlantic security relationship have been confounded by the major role that the United States has played in this effort, sending elements of the 82nd Airborne Division and 3rd Armoured Division to Poland and redeploying US Stryker brigades from Germany and Italy to the Baltic states and Romania. Although many other allies have sent useful assets, such as French and UK aircraft to Romania or German and Netherlands Patriot batteries to Slovakia, the United States' contribution still surpasses all the European efforts put together. The US now has 100,000 troops in Europe, the highest level since the mid-1990s. NATO has also mobilised its high readiness Reaction Force for the first time and will establish four new multinational battalions in the Black Sea region, with France offering to lead the one in Romania.

Most of the deployments are on a temporary basis but the receiving allies would understandably like them to stay longer and for NATO to commit to permanent stationed forces. This would oblige the alliance to break formally from the pledge it made to Moscow in 1997 not to station substantial combat forces or nuclear weapons or build military infrastructure on the territory of its new member states in eastern Europe. Yet this was a political undertaking linked to circumstances prevailing at the time. Given Russia's behaviour, there is no reason why NATO should not now abandon it.

Yet beyond showing the flag along its eastern flank NATO faces some longer term issues that will need to be clarified in its new Strategic Concept due to be adopted at its summit in Madrid in June. First is whether to abandon its current strategy of reinforcement and military mobility

across Europe (Enhanced Forward Presence in the NATO jargon) in favour of the deployment of heavy armoured brigades or even divisions in fixed positions close to borders. This will be expensive over the long run and will deprive allies of the flexibility they have enjoyed since the end of the Cold War to use their forces as and where they wish - from deployments in the Sahel or Afghanistan to fighting forest fires or building emergency hospitals for Covid patients at home. The only exception is when they have put forces on rotation into the NATO high readiness forces or the EU Battle Groups.

The decision of Germany to increase its defence spending to 2% of GDP and to devote EUR 100 billion to modernising the Bundeswehr makes it technically possible for NATO to move to a Cold War style forward, armoured defence. Yet how quickly will Berlin raise its new divisions given its traditional problems with procurement and government/industry relations in the defence sector? Given these problems it may make more sense for Germany not to launch new acquisition programmes but to buy existing off the shelf capabilities (as it has recently done with its decision to buy 35 US F35 aircraft) which other European countries are also acquiring and which therefore offer economies of scale and cheaper operating and maintenance costs. Yet if Germany abandons ambitious defence projects with France (which prefers a Buy European approach), such as the Future European Air Combat System, it will put its relationship with France under strain and put at risk French plans for EU self-reliance in the military field. How much of the conventional defence burden in NATO will Germany, traditionally a country averse to war fighting and narrow military approaches to security, be willing to take on? Will this be the opportunity to create more integrated European units with neighbours like France, the Benelux, Poland and Italy, and even with the post-Brexit UK? London recently re-established a permanent army base at Sennelager in Germany and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has certainly forced "Global Britain" to re-engage with continental Europe and its security and refugees much sooner than it expected.

The other issue for NATO is to work according to a single theatre wide strategic plan managed by the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) and the NATO command structure. In reinforcing the alliance's eastern flank. Allies have sent forces to where they have liked and largely under national command. This would not be optimal in a real war situation. NATO will need to revise its exercises to prepare and train for the new threat level. It will need to ensure that its forward deployed forces are fully integrated with the local forces and the police and border guards to anticipate and respond to any Russian hybrid war tactics. It will also need to step up its joint planning and interoperability with Sweden and Finland whether these two

Nordic neighbours decide to join NATO or not. Yet one thing that NATO has done well in this crisis (in addition to the intense and full range of transatlantic consultations at multiple levels and in different formats) is its political messaging vis a vis Moscow. At a time when Russia has become more threatening and reckless, it is essential for NATO to be consistent and predictable. Re-affirming NATO's core defensive purpose, calm rejection of Putin's nuclear posturing or the alliance's refusal to put NATO forces in Ukraine may be frustrating for some who think that NATO can better deter Russia through a posture of "strategic ambiguity". Yet this would only play into Putin's playbook regarding an "aggressive NATO" and give Putin the sense that he is being pushed into a corner. This said, NATO strategic ambiguity can still be useful when it comes to how NATO would respond to a Russian escalation in Ukraine itself, for instance Russian use of chemical weapons.

So here are the key questions for NATO.

- what should be the balance of permanently deployed and rotational forces in NATO's new posture?

- what should be the balance of US/Canadian and European forces in this posture?

- how can the capability development programmes under EU Strategic Autonomy (such as PESCO and the European Defence Fund) be geared to support the European role and responsibility in the alliance? Air and missile defence would seem to be particular priorities given Russia's reliance on long range strikes.

- how can the EU's Strategic Compass, NATO's next Strategic Concept and the third NATO-EU Joint Declaration be harmonised to bring the two institutions more closely together in responding to Russian hybrid operations and influence campaigns and in assisting not only Ukraine but other exposed neighbours such as Georgia and Moldova?

- what should be the balance between forces for collective defence with heavy armour and directed artillery fire and those for expeditionary missions beyond Europe such as counter-terrorism, stabilisation and peacekeeping?

# Supporting Ukraine

The next leg of a Western strategy is to support Ukraine as long as the Ukrainians are able to continue their resistance. The survival of Ukraine as an independent state means that Ukraine has to hold on to as much territory and its major cities as possible (given the difficulty of getting Russian troops out of occupied territories) and to raise the costs for Russia and its army. There has been much discussion of a no-fly zone over Ukraine; but this would require enforcement by NATO aircraft and quickly result in confrontation with Russia. To impose a no-fly zone, NATO would also need to suppress the Russian air defence system and take out long range USD 400 and USD 500 batteries deep inside Russia itself (and perhaps Belarus too). As the Russians would still have superiority in heavy weaponry on land, it is not clear how a no-fly zone would change the war in the Ukrainians' favour. They clearly still want to fly their own aircraft and drones. So better to focus on those things that can help the resistance such as easy to use anti-tank and shoulder-fired anti-aircraft systems, observation and armed drones, electronic warfare, jamming and cyber effects, intelligence on Russian troop movements and intercepted communications and the use of Western special operations forces to train the groups of civilian volunteers from inside and outside Ukraine who have gone to join the fight. It is encouraging that many countries, including now Germany and the Netherlands, are sending lethal arms and other equipment (such as uniforms and medical supplies) to Ukraine and that deliveries are continuing even though Western militaries can no longer fly the supplies directly to Kyiv. Establishing secure supply routes will be essential which means transportation at night and in small consignments to reduce the impact of strikes or interceptions by the Russian forces. Equally important is adapting the assistance quickly and flexibly to the changing needs on the ground (for instance urban fighting and dispersed commando operations) and to provide equipment that serves as true force multipliers for what the Ukrainians can do by and for themselves.

NATO urgently needs a backfill system so that those allies willing to transfer some of their military capabilities to Ukraine can be compensated with equipment from other allies. Poland has requested F16s from the United States in exchange for transferring its MIG 29s to NATO (for forwarding to Ukraine) and Slovakia has asked for air defence batteries in return for supplying its stock of S300s to Kyiv.

So far, the allies have shown a strong financial commitment to helping Ukraine. The US Congress has voted a package of USD 13.6 billion to fund additional support to US deployments in eastern Europe, for the Baltic states and other exposed allies and for Ukraine itself. Since the Russian invasion, Washington has allocated USD 1 billion to fund weapons transfers. The EU is setting up a Ukraine Solidarity Fund and the IMF has extended a credit line. This financing, perhaps extending to Lend-Lease arrangements as well as grants will probably be needed on a long-term basis.

Support for Ukraine will also necessitate skilful risk management by NATO. Putin will undoubtedly interpret the alliance's role as direct involvement in the conflict and he may escalate recklessly in seeking to strike back. He may feel himself at war with NATO well before NATO sees itself in open conflict with Russia. So perseverance, keeping a cool head, effective strategic communications, and anticipating and managing potential escalation points will be crucial for alliance strategy moving forward. Putin is the master of fear mongering and intimidation, as he has demonstrated with his gesticulating of the nuclear threat. NATO unity will be essential in facing him down.

So here are the key questions for the West's Ukraine strategy:

- What should be Western aims for a negotiated settlement between Ukraine and Russia that is not merely a relapse into a lower intensity Donbass style conflict? What kind of security guarantees can the United States and the European major powers give to Ukraine that are not tantamount to a NATO Article 5 guarantee without NATO membership?

- How can the Ukrainian army be sustained over time as an effective fighting force (and not merely as localised pockets of resistance) until it can fight Russia to a stand still and negotiate better peace terms?

- How can the UN agencies and international forces be inserted into Ukraine to secure humanitarian corridors and the provision of relief supplies to besieged civilians with our repeating the mistakes with "safe areas" made during the Bosnian conflict in the 1990s?

# Isolating and weakening the Putin regime

Given that open conflict can be potentially catastrophic and only a last resort, sanctions against Russia clearly must be the third leg of the strategy. At the outset, invoking sanctions seemed to many observers to be the face saving default option for countries not wishing to give Kyiv military assistance or become involved in the fighting. Yet the unified and simultaneous way in which they have been applied, and the inclusion of measures such as limits on Russia's access to the SWIFT interbank clearing system, or on Russia's Central Bank operations or the decision of the London Stock Exchange to stop trading in Russian assets, has confounded many sanctions sceptics. Countries well beyond Europe, such as Australia and Japan, have imposed sanctions too; and even neutral Switzerland, which usually stays strictly on the side-lines, has decided to align itself with the EU. Most remarkably of all, the private sector, which usually tries to stay out of politics and protect both market share and bottom line, has acted against Russia without being compelled to do so by governments. Shell, BP and Total Energie are divesting their Russian assets and pulling out of joint ventures with the likes of Rosneft. Apple will stop selling its iPhones, Puma its sports shoes and Airbus and Boeing will freeze the sale of spare parts or maintenance services to Russian civil aviation. Citibank will pull out of Russia while Google and Facebook take RT and Sputnik off their platforms. Others have dumped sponsorship deals with Gazprom or other Russian companies. The rouble has lost 30% of its value, the Russian stock market has seized up, and even valuable commodities like Russian oil have become toxic with shipping and insurance restrictions (despite a barrel of oil now approaching USD 120). The spectre of Russia defaulting on its foreign currency denominated debt, for the first time since 1918, has been raised by the IMF.

Yet the link between sanctions and changes in political behaviour is a tenuous one, and sanctions take a number of years to produce their full impact. Countries learn to adjust over time and find work arounds and evasion techniques as Iran, Cuba and North Korea have long demonstrated. Russia itself has followed with some success its import substitution strategy, especially in the food sector, since the EU and the US imposed sanctions on Russia after its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia's low level of foreign debt and its wealth funds and financial reserves give it some cushion, although those reserves can be sequestered as

around 50% are held in foreign banks. Moscow is clearly looking to Beijing for a bail out and is trying to stem the haemorrhage by preventing foreign companies from divesting their Russian assets and Russian citizens from taking large amounts of foreign currency outside the country. The fact that oil and gas exports have not been sanctioned so far, and the spiralling prices for these commodities, may give Russia a lifeline if it can keep its major markets. India has just bought USD 3 million barrels of Russian oil and Gazprom is now pumping at maximum volume towards Europe. Putin and his inner circle will no doubt seek to exploit the grey zone of crypto currency exchange dealing on the Russian SU-EX market and use smaller shell companies not on the sanctions list to keep the money flowing. Usefully the US Treasury has set up a Klepto Tracker Task Force to clamp down on the Kremlin's trade in crypto currency and other illicit financial flows. Yet the paradox of sanctions is that the very time they need to produce their full impact is also their worst enemy. The news cycle moves on, emotions and outrage fade, and the wall of unity of the international community starts to fragment. China has already refused to go along with the sanctions, as has India, Turkey, Israel and countries in the Gulf and Africa.

Consequently there are two things that the Western democracies have to get right. First to front load the full sanctions package to maximise the pain on Russia and give it less time and scope to adjust. Second, to keep domestic public opinion, worried by rising inflation and energy bills, on side for as long as possible. Governments must avoid a situation where, standing up to the Kremlin becomes the scapegoat for falling living standards and USD 5 a gallon at the fuel pump. That is why maintaining pressure on OPEC to increase oil output, releasing 60 million barrels of oil from strategic reserves and perhaps even burning more coal on a short-term basis now make strategic sense to give us time to adjust supply to demand, and even if they will not prove popular with environmentalists. Belgium has also announced that it will delay the decommissioning of its nuclear power stations. Speeding up the green transition can help to offset this temporary reversal in the phasing out of fossil fuels; but some difficult Realpolitik choices will need to be made in choosing the lesser evil over the greater, as in engaging Saudi Arabia on oil output despite its execution of 81 individuals in mid-March.

Previous hopes for a Russia strategy mixing competition with partnerships and cooperation need to be abandoned. As do hopes that cooperation outside Europe in areas such as Afghanistan, piracy or the Iran nuclear file would dampen the Kremlin's determination to overturn the post-1990 European security order. Russia's animus towards NATO has not diminished just because the alliance allowed Russia to enter the NATO building and take its

seat in the NATO-Russia Council. Whatever the mistakes of the past, such as not sanctioning the Kremlin more vigorously after the annexation of Crimea or allowing "Londongrad" to thrive as a hub of shady Russian financial transactions notwithstanding pledges made at G7 summits to shut it down, NATO countries now are united by a common fear of what Putin is willing and able to do to them. Taking away that capacity and weakening Putin's grip on Russia must now be the focus of Western policy. The instruments - economic, diplomatic, military and also legal in terms of tying up Putin and his regime in a host of criminal proceedings-are there.

Lawfare already is progressing well. Two former UK prime ministers, John Major and Gordon Brown, are spearheading a campaign to establish a special criminal court to investigate Putin and his regime for crimes against humanity and war crimes as well as the easier to establish crime of aggressive war. The US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, has announced that the US is gathering evidence from Ukrainians recording Russian exactions on social media. At the request of 39 countries, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim Khan, has also opened an investigation into Russian war crimes and the International Court of Justice has acceded to a case brought by Ukraine to order Russia to stop its invasion. Most surprising of all, even the UN Human Rights Council, not normally known for standing up to the bigger authoritarian powers, has agreed on an investigation. Of course Russia is ignoring these moves and has withdrawn from the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights, stripping its citizens of important legal protections. Yet as and when indictments are issued against Russian political and military leaders and officials, they will become persona non grata in the international community. Their ability to travel or raise money will be restricted and or their governments or companies will want to avoid the reputational risk of dealing with them. The spectre of war crimes trials in The Hague could help to split the Putin regime and encourage defections.

In the long run, export controls could be more instrumental in undermining the Putin regime than sanctions. Denying Russia access to key technologies and scientific know how will make it more difficult for Russia to rebuild its army and modernise it after the grinding it has taken in Ukraine. NATO and its partners need to establish a mechanism similar to the Coordinating Committee or COCOM that operated in Paris during the Cold War and which maintained a black list of critical military and civilian technologies subject to tight export controls. A successor mechanism, called the Wassenaar Agreement, exists in The Hague and brings together 42 countries. It could be expanded and strengthened to more comprehensively deny

critical technologies to Russia and other authoritarian states that manifestly challenge the rules-based order.

Finally, China. Future historians of Russia's war against Ukraine may well view how the West handles China as the determining factor in whether we end up with a second global Cold War or a more competitive but still largely multilateral international order. China has given rhetorical support to Russia but its actions so far have been more ambivalent. It abstained in the UN votes, has called for a ceasefire and offered to mediate. Beijing seems surprised by the extent of Putin's invasion and by the speed and far reaching nature of the sanctions. Like Russia, it was expecting the West to be more divided. It fears the possibility of US secondary sanctions if Beijing gives military assistance to Russia or helps Putin to circumvent the sanctions. This said, it knows the opposition of the EU to US secondary sanctions in the past (Iran) and that major sanctions against China may be a step too far for EU governments and businesses experiencing the blowback from sanctions against Russia. On the other hand, Beijing knows that Russia will emerge weaker from this conflict and be even more the junior partner in the relationship. This is in China's interest so its assistance to Moscow will undoubtedly be a double-edged sword for the Kremlin.

The US is now actively seeking to limit China's support to Russia. President Biden has already warned President Xi of the consequences. Washington knows that there are multiple stakeholders in China, particularly in the banks and large companies, that do not want more confrontation with the West. Yet accurately gauging Beijing's intentions and identifying the political levers, interest groups and pressure points to deter Beijing from forming an axis with Moscow will be the overriding diplomatic challenge of this crisis.

So here are the key questions for the West's Russia and China strategies:

- what are the benchmarks for lifting the sanctions against Russia? Should the sanctions apply only to Russia's actions in and vis a vis Ukraine or to Russia's international behaviour more generally?

- can the US and the EU agree on the scope of potential secondary sanctions against China and/or other countries giving direct assistance to Russia? What should these sanctions be and what will trigger them?

- how can countries sitting on the fence be incentivised to support Western policy towards Russia?

- how can Lawfare be effectively used to isolate, divide and undermine Putin and his regime?

- what kind of international export control mechanism can best restrict Russia's (and China's) access to sensitive technologies?

- how can Western intelligence and police, organised crime and financial tracking services cooperate most effectively to block Russia's efforts to circumvent sanctions?

# Enhancing Western strategic autonomy

The final piece of the jigsaw is to reduce our dependency on the finances and economies of the authoritarian powers.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a valuable lesson in the extent of this dependency. Much of this debate has focused on the energy security situation in the light of the 40% of the EU's gas and 29% of its oil that come from Russia. The US and the UK are now stopping their purchases of Russian oil and the European Commission has a proposed a plan to cut the EU's imports of Russian gas by two thirds over the next 12 months. Germany is constructing two LNG terminals, the UK is thinking again about fracking and Norway has increased gas production by 5% to help the EU to diversify its supply. The EU has approached other suppliers in Qatar, Algeria and Nigeria and there is an incentive to improve the EU's relations with Turkey to enable the considerable gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean to be optimally exploited. Higher gas and oil prices should also ramp up the production and exploration of unconventional fossil fuel sources in the US. A major transatlantic challenge is to build an LNG gas infrastructure between the US and Europe so that the US (and Canada) can overtime replace the current volume of Russian gas. Ukraine has just been connected to the EU grid but the Baltic states are still connected to the Russian grid and Finland is totally reliant on Russia gas. So in terms of inter-connectors there is still work for the EU to do; and as the EU decouples from Russian fossil fuel companies, it must take care not to create new dependencies by doing deals with Russia to develop new fuels such as hydrogen.

Yet Russian involvement in the global economy extends well beyond energy to other minerals such as nickel, uranium and palladium, and to grain and fertiliser supplies where Russia is the dominant producer of urea. Belarus also produces much of the global supply of potash. So we need a transatlantic strategy on rare earths and precious minerals and metals, especially as it takes time to open new mines on both sides of the Atlantic.

Indeed every week has brought its share of examples of dependency on Russia- from the European Space Agency not being able to launch its probe to Mars because of its partnership with Roscosmos and use of the Soyuz rocket to Russian sponsorship of medical research and sports events. So a comprehensive transatlantic mapping of critical vulnerabilities and dependencies is required.

Fortunately in this last priority area the transatlantic community is in better shape than in the other areas. The Covid 19 pandemic and the growing competition with China have pushed the allies into repatriating production and supply chains, for instance in semi-conductors and pharmaceuticals. They have also reviewed foreign direct investment screening and devised anti-coercion instruments to push back against economic bullying and unfair trade practices. In the wake of rising food prices, they have examined their food security and how to increase domestic agricultural production. Consumer behaviour is also adjusting to rising energy and food prices and to the ways of conserving energy and using resources more efficiently. The new EU-US Trade and Technology Council is helping to make supply chains more resilient and to harmonise technical and product standards in a way to boost transatlantic trade. This is important as the more North America and Europe decouple from the Russian and Chinese economies, the more they will need to compensate by growing trade among themselves.

As part of their new Joint Declaration the EU and NATO could usefully agree to establishing a common mechanism for mapping and assessing the critical vulnerabilities, potential choke points and dependencies of the transatlantic community and issue an annual report with recommendations for remedial action.

So here are the key questions for enhanced transatlantic strategic autonomy:

- which are the West's critical dependencies on Russia (and China) beyond energy?

- which dependencies can be remedied through supply diversification and which require supply chain repatriation, domestic production or sourcing and stockpiling of reserves?

- how can Europe and North America better integrate their supply chains and support each other's economic resilience? How to optimise the role of the TTC in this regard?

- how can NATO and the EU work better together to enhance whole of society resilience?

# Conclusion

Although the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a catastrophe for Ukraine and Europe more generally, there is a silver lining. The multilateral system has discovered a new energy and sense of purpose. NATO has been revived and refocused on its core mission. The EU and the US have pulled together with daily coordination of their policies and actions. The EU is facing up to its geo-political role and has agreed as a bloc to supply Kyiv with nearly EUR 500 million worth of weapons from its European Peace Facility. The G7 has taken on a more day to day operational role and the democracies of the Atlantic and the Pacific have been united with a few exceptions such as Israel which is attempting to play a mediating role. The UN has also been reasonably robust with the General Assembly finding a new lease of life, the World Health Organisation highlighting Russia's destruction of hospitals, the Food and Agriculture Organisation stepping up to handle the fallout from reduced Ukrainian and Russian grain exports, the International Maritime Organisation intervening in the shipping crisis and the International Criminal Court swinging into action. The narrative of a 21st century contest between the democracies and the authoritarians, which some may have been sceptical about before 24 February, has now been validated. There is an opportunity here for the transatlantic community not only to better defend itself but also to build a more effective and values based multilateral order able to react more systematically to rule breaking and aggression. Whether it will have the wisdom and skill to do so in the testing years ahead is another question.

Imants Lieģis[19]

# DEALING WITH ASSAULTS ON DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE DYNAMICS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EU, USA, RUSSIA AND CHINA

Russia's leadership has assaulted democracy and the post-Cold War order in a brutal and callous way. The culmination of this assault was on 24th February 2022, when Putin unleashed his second war against Ukraine by announcing a "special operation". The earlier indications first appeared when Putin was Prime Minister in 1999 and Grozny was raised to the ground with scant concern for human life as part of Moscow's war in Chechenia. They continued with cyber attacks against Estonia in 2007, a war with Georgia in 2008 and the first military action against Ukraine, including occupation of Crimea, in 2014.

But there have been numerous other assaults on democracy over the preceding years. So I would like to widen the debate by examining some of these assaults which have come from various tyrants using a system of terror management to sow fear and doubt in societies. I want to place my overview within the context of relations between firstly, the EU and USA, then the EU – USA and China, and finally between Russia and China.

## Transatlantic dynamics (EU + USA)

The EU and US are natural strategic allies whose partnership strengthens the rules-based international order and promotes shared values, including democracy, human rights, and the rule of law .

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But the partnerships need to be constantly nurtured. Not too long ago, we saw that when America sneezes, Europe catches a cold. The "big sneeze" in America in fact gave Europe and other liberal democracies a 4 year long cold shower from 2017 until 2021. During this period, the elected US President imperiled democracy in the country regarded by many as the bastion of freedom. The culmination was a blatant physical assault on the symbol of democracy – the US Congress – on 6th January 2021.The repercussions are still felt today within the United States and beyond.

Like most of the countries in our region, the Trump years threatened to destabilise the security and peace dividend that our renewed democracies had fought so hard to achieve with membership in NATO and the EU. NATO was announced as obsolete by Trump, but a few years later as brain dead by President Macron. But, paradoxically, US financial support for our defence actually increased during the Trump era.

Trump's disdain for multilateralism in the global scene caused chaos and concern. The EU was scorned, Germany scolded. Trump placed more faith in Putin than his own US intelligence services, more faith in Putin than many democratically elected leaders.

But for now, America has bounced back. Not only have we had the recent Summit for Democracy, which, as noted, has ambitions beyond the transatlantic realm. By December of last year, the State Department claimed that "On practically every issue we work on at the State Department and in practically every region of the world, we are working closely with the EU.[20]"

This consolidation of relations has of course now been greatly helped by President Putin. There has been an incredible show of unity both within NATO and between the US and Europe. The extent of US consultation and cooperation with European partners has been astounding. Together with our other Eastern flank partners, we have experienced this directly, whether with an increase of troop presence or official visits.

But it is political polarisation within the United States itself that will once again challenge US relations with Europe and elsewhere in the next presidential election cycle. Polarisation has affected US foreign policy and its global standing.[21] Mid-term elections later this year will no doubt be a reminder of what lies ahead.

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[20] Oi. 12. 2021 Previewing the U.S.-EU Dialogue on China (globalsecurity.org)
[21] Francis Fukuyama; the Economist; 18. 08. 2021 https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2021/08/18/francis-fukuyama-on-the-end-of-american-hegemony

The other side of the coin relates to assaults on democracy within the EU itself, thereby making some of its members less reliable partners. It is no secret that the OSCE already back in 2014 assessed Hungary's parliamentary elections as "free but not fair"[22] and that both Hungary and Poland failed in their attempts at the European Court of Justice to stop the EU from tying the payment of funds to democratic standards[23.]

I want to refer back to the dynamics just 5 years ago when I was Latvia's Ambassador in Paris. The shock of the Brexit referendum and the election of Trump was leading to dire predictions. There was talk of a "Frexit" and the victory of Marine Le-Pen in the French presidential elections, along with the demise of the European Union. In spite of Russian interference in his campaign, Macron halted the populist wave by defeating Le-Pen in the second round of the elections. Many of the populist groupings, both left and right, that have received direct financial support from Russia during the last 5 years have now been given an enormous blow to their anti- democratic credentials by Putin's all-out war against Ukraine.

## EU-US dynamics with China

Secretary Blinken has indicated that the US relationship with China will be "the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st Century" and he called for engagement with China from a position of strength[24].

Although China scorns liberal values, human rights and democracy, the EU has referred to China as a "partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systematic rival". A new EU-US dialogue on China was envisaged to advance joint interests and manage differences. After a number of dialogues and working group meetings, a *modus vivendi* has evolved which means cooperating with China where possible, and otherwise managing in a responsible way the competition and systematic rivalry with China. So even though EU-US assessments on China may be similar, policy responses to China's growing international assertiveness may differ.

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[22] Shaun Walker and Daniel Boffey, The Guardian 09. 04. 2018 Hungary election: OSCE monitors deliver damning verdict | Hungary | The Guardian
[23] Jennifer Rankin, The Guardian 16. 02. 2022 ECJ dismisses Hungary and Poland's complaints over rule-of-law measure | Court of justice of the European Union | The Guardian
[24] 01. 12. 2021 State Department briefing Previewing the U.S.-EU Dialogue on China (globalsecurity.org)

The EU itself is due to hold a virtual summit with China on 1st April. Latvia's neighbour Lithuania has recently put a spoke in the wheel of relations with China, which has drawn in the EU as a whole. China's efforts to divide and rule European countries with its 17+1 arrangements to promote the Belt and Road policy, came unstuck last year when various Europeans downgraded their level of participation as a direct affront to the presence of President Xi on the Chinese side. Lithuania subsequently withdrew from the 17+1 format. In addition, Lithuania allowed Taiwan to open a diplomatic office in Vilnius using the word "Taiwan" instead of the acceptable "Taipei". China's reaction was harsh - imports from Lithuania to China were banned, diplomats thrown out. Then companies from across Europe whose exports to China merely contained Lithuanian components were also targeted for bureaucratic harassment. The EU Commission in turn launched a claim against China at the WTO in January this year for "discriminatory trade practices"[25]

It's also interesting to note that even before the EU put its support behind Lithuania, America already in September last year praised the approach taken by Vilnius to stand up against tyranny. In his telephone call with Lithuania's Prime Minister Simonyte, the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan expressed US appreciation for Lithuania's principled foreign policy in support of democracy and human rights[26]. Lithuania has indeed been exemplary in facing up to the assaults on democracy emanating from China.

President Macron has said that it would be counterproductive to join together against China, but again, recent events may well push America and the EU closer on their China policy, given that China was beginning to bond more closely with Russia against the common enemy.

# Russia – China dynamic

Chinese -Russian cooperation has meant joint military exercises, including a large-scale naval drill "Joint Sea 2021" in October.

[25] Stuart Lau 27. 01. 2022 Politico EU sues China in WTO over Lithuania blockade – POLITICO
[26] 13. 09. 2021 https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/13/statement-by-nsc-spokesperson-emily-horne-on-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivans-call-with-prime-minister-ingrida-simonyte-of-lithuania/

After the Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministers met in March last year, there was both the 1<sup>st</sup> massive increase of Russian troops by the Ukrainian border, and highly publicized Chinese amphibious assault exercises and the highest frequency air incursions into Taiwan's so-called air defence identification zone in nearly 25 years.

China is clearly watching very closely the US led reaction to Russia's current actions on Ukraine. Despite China's president strong personal relationship with Putin, Xi Jinping probably needed Putin's war with Ukraine as much as he needed a hole in the head. China will no doubt note the US intelligence penetration and its disclosures. China will be noting the mistakes being made by the despot in the Kremlin. Finally, China will see a very united US-European reaction which involved speedy and drastic sanctions being imposed.

At the same time, China has not given Russia unequivocal support in responding to the war. There have been abstentions in the voting at the UN and a move to stop loans to Russia by the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank. But there are now indications of China being asked for military and economic help in Russia's war against Ukraine [27] followed by US warnings to China against this.

President Putin's and Xi Jinping's meeting at the Winter Olympic opening session in Peking just weeks before Putin's full-scale assault on Ukraine, was one of almost nearly 40 previous bilateral meetings. It resulted in a joint statement which rejected NATO expansion in Europe and American alliance building in Asia. It referred to the promotion of democracy as a Western plot [28]. So here we see that the common interests by these 2 authoritarian powers uniting against our accepted values.

## Dealing with these assaults on Democracy

If we extend our view beyond the immediate measures that need to be taken to stop Putin's war against Ukraine, there are a number of lessons that can already be drawn

- Maintain strong Transatlantic unity. As previously mentioned, Europe is America's natural strategic ally. Shared values about freedom, democracy, human rights and the

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[27] CNN, 14. 03. 2022 Russia has requested military and economic assistance from China, US officials say - CNNPolitics
[28] The Economist, p.47. 12. 03. 2022

rule of law should continue to be upheld by strategic partners so as to promote these values on a global scale.

- Avoid a return to the sphere of influence approach. The Helsinki approach – embedded in the establishment of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe – should prevail. Individual states should have the right to determine their own fates. They should not be used as pawns in a chessboard amongst larger powers, some led by tyrants, as happened at Yalta in 1945.

- EU needs to deal with China on the level of 27+1 thereby abandoning the 17+1 format which encourages splits in a united approach. Larger member states such as France and Germany should not cajole their smaller partners, as happened in December 2020 when the German EU Presidency pushed ahead with the Investment Agreement with China. The Commission, as in the case of Lithuania, should continue to be vigilant in defending member states being coerced by China.

- maintain calm and resilience in the face of assaults by outside tyrants. The Ukrainians are an example to the whole world in facing up at great cost to Putin's war. Despots acting within a country also need to be challenged at an early stage by avoiding the end of checks and balances, the dissolution of political parties, the suspension of freedom of expression or of rights to a fair trial. In such circumstances it is crucial to avoid being a bystander [29].

- learn from peers in other countries. As Timothy Synder pointed out already in 2017, Russia employed the same techniques against Ukraine in 2014 as it did against the United States and elsewhere[30] making it crucial to deal quickly with fake news and cyberwarfare. Just as the assaults against democracy are often transnational or coordinated amongst peers, so resistance against such assaults should be developed in close consultation with other victims.

- speak truth to power. This is a duty that all democrats must employ even if it means taking personal risks. Fact based truths should never be swept under the carpet. Sycophants should be given short shrift and challenged if their assumptions are ill-founded or dubious.

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[29] Timothy Synder "On Tyranny" The Bodley Head, London 2017 p.103 and 110
[30] Ibid p. 26/27

Maria Domańska[31]

# HANDLING THE UNTHINKABLE. LESSONS TO LEARN FROM UKRAINE INVASION

After a gradual escalation of political tensions in Europe since Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008, another Putin's war has directly threatened the West. The rapid and unprecedented mobilisation of the Euro-Atlantic community against the aggressor luckily ruined Russia's hopes for another territorial conquest being tacitly approved. However, given the past mistakes of the Euro-Atlantic community that failed to prevent the invasion, it is highly relevant to discuss lessons to learn and current and future challenges to the unity and resilience of the West. The critical question is whether we can restore sustainable peace in the European continent and what we need to achieve it. The Kremlin has always treated aggression against Ukraine as a proxy war with NATO. Hence, our conflict with Russia is far from over no matter when and how the war in Ukraine ends. We should view the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the assaulted country as one of our vital interests.

## The fallacy of 'divisible security'

Russia's invasion of Ukraine laid bare all the West's mistakes and miscalculations since the Russian–Georgian war in 2008. The long-pursued policy of appeasement vis-à-vis the increasingly aggressive Kremlin hinged on repeated offers of dialogue, toothless sanctions, and continued economic-financial cooperation with the authoritarian regime. The European Union attempted not to 'provoke' Russia with harsh sanctions for destabilising the international legal order. In 2014 the 'collective West' implicitly recognized the Kremlin's 'privileged interests' in the so-called post-Soviet area: violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity was met with little more than ritualistic "deep concern." Few EU countries were genuinely interested in countering

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Putin's revanchist foreign policy. Effective measures of containment and deterrence were never seriously discussed, although we had all the necessary tools at our disposal. We conspicuously lacked the joint political will to use them back then, when the price we would have paid remained moderate.

Instead, a large part of the Western establishment would attempt to 'understand' Moscow's great-power ambitions, disguised as 'security concerns.' Representatives of political and business circles usually did it in the name of their vested interests, both political and financial, or out of a fascination with Putin's strong leadership and charismatic personality. As late as early February 2022, Emmanuel Macron still repeated that the European security architecture should be shaped together with and not "against" Russia – a country that openly labeled NATO as the enemy, attacked its neighbours in 2008 and 2014, built up troops near Ukraine's border, and was notorious for political killings committed on NATO's territory (including with chemical weapons). This approach dangerously fitted the manipulative Kremlin's concept of "indivisible security." Russia claimed the right to decide unilaterally on security issues in its own 'zone of influence', while demanding the right of veto in all decisions on Euro-Atlantic security. Statements like Macron's shaped Moscow's perception of the West as being deeply disunited, weak, corrupt, and unable to defend itself.

Faulty strategic communication by the West was one of the main factors that have led to the current war. Until the beginning of the invasion, the West kept sending wrong messages that significantly lowered the cost of aggression in the Kremlin's eyes.

After many years of watching Russia destabilise its 'near abroad,' Western leaders still felt relatively comfortable making those mistakes. Despite warnings regularly coming from the NATO eastern flank countries, most EU members assumed that it was not them who would pay the price for the policy of appeasement. Russia successfully convinced Europe's leaders that peace and stability of the EU could be bought at the expense of the third parties' sovereignty – in other words, that security is 'divisible', very much in the spirit of the Yalta agreement. In this way, the West undermined its own strategic goal of building a stable and prosperous Eastern neighbourhood, based on liberal democratic principles. It also substantially contributed to security threats at the Union's external borders. All of that stemmed from the illusion that we can remain safe without investing in our and our closest neighbours' security in a highly turbulent world.

Now Ukraine is paying the highest price for the West's negligence in 2014. Harsh economic and personal sanctions and the mass withdrawal of Western companies from the Russian market should have taken place back then. Today's stakes are much higher, as is the price the West will have to pay in the coming years.

## Russia's strategic goals

As top Russian officials often put it, the war against Ukraine that started in 2014 is just one aspect of Russia's systemic – geopolitical and civilisational – conflict with the West. In fact, Moscow is waging a proxy war against the entire liberal democratic order, which is considered an existential threat to Putin's regime. At least since the mass anti-government protests in Russia in 2011, the Russian president has genuinely believed in the alleged, West-orchestrated attempts to topple him through a 'colour revolution'. In a system where political clout is the principal source of ill-gotten gains and personal security, the fight for power can literally be a life or death struggle.

The authoritarian leadership has always perceived the successful political and economic transformation of Ukraine and its integration with the Euro-Atlantic community as a potentially infectious example for Russians. The state propaganda constantly warns that the West strives to "destroy Russia": this way, potential threats to the regime's grip on power have been raised to the rank of existential threats to the state itself. The narrative that Russia "feels threatened" by NATO in military terms, taken seriously by many Western politicians and experts, has always been a sheer humbug.

A highly subjective perception of security is a decisive factor that shapes the selection of Russia's foreign policy tools. By sowing instability abroad, the Kremlin tries to prevent instability at home. Foreign policy is supposed to insulate the authoritarian regime from real or imagined threats and challenges. In 2014 and 2022 (however, on a different scale), Moscow reactivated the Brezhnev Doctrine. The war against Ukraine implements the idea of 'forward defence,' based on preventive military strikes against the hostile ideology.

Moscow treats the rivalry with the West as a zero-sum game, which is not about any negotiable issues, be it in security or any other domain. What Russia wanted to 'negotiate' before the war was the very existence of democratic Europe. The Kremlin was clear about its goals in the

ultimatum made to the US and NATO in December 2021 (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021a; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021b). The unceremonious demand for a fundamental overhaul of the post-Cold War European security architecture (including the withdrawal of NATO forces from all member states that joined the organisation after 1997) was merely another proof of long-announced Russia's ambition to restore the Yalta order in Europe, based on the concept of 'non-equal sovereignty' and violence as a standard tool of foreign policy (Domańska, 2019).

Russia's ultimate strategic goal vis-à-vis NATO and EU is to destroy these organisations (including through sowing internal dissent) and build new cooperation mechanisms with individual states – the latter automatically becoming less resilient to Russian political and economic leverage. Although the war, waged right at NATO's borders, ruined Russia's international reputation in a heartbeat, Moscow will not abandon this strategy any time soon. Putin is ready to turn Ukraine into a failed state to delegitimize the very idea of Euro-Atlantic integration. The policy of turning cities into rubble has been accompanied by direct threats targeted at NATO members, including the possible use of nuclear weapons. Western strategic culture, based on the win-win paradigm, democratic control of decision-making processes, dialogue, and compromise, is thus not applicable in relations with a terrorist state.

In light of Moscow's objectives, the conviction prevailing in some states that they would never fall victim to Russia's aggressive actions is a severe misconception. We cannot feel safe unless the aggressor is defeated.


## Russia's strategic culture: why the West got it so wrong

The historically-motivated chasm between the Western and Russian strategic cultures, which translates into discrepant foreign policy notions, is one reason why the West misunderstands the Kremlin's logic. Another one is the highly idiosyncratic motivations of Russian decision-makers: they refer to phantom pains stemming from the collapse of the Soviet empire and Putin's deep ressentiment towards the West and the Ukrainian nation.

In Russia's view, the great power status boils down to the vast territory (that needs constant 'forward defence' against real and imagined threats), raw materials, and nuclear potential. It refers first and foremost to the state's ability to resist the rest of the world, which accentuates

its potential for destruction and destabilisation rather than cooperation. It is paradoxical, as Putin's kleptocratic system has always been based on close business ties with the West. At the same time, the Kremlin is fully aware that Russia is losing the 21st-century global economic competition. Moscow is trying to level the playing field, employing 19th-century geopolitics.

Due to the historically-shaped peculiarities of the Russian political system, the strategic culture embraced by the leadership is a mix of the Chekist and mafia-style worldviews (Domańska, 2017). Core beneficiaries of Putinism and key decision makers are former officers of the Soviet security services formed by the Cold War-era confrontation with the West. Their strong position in the system affects Russian foreign policy in two ways, at both the ideological and operational levels. First, to maximise their political influence and control over financial flows, they must demonstrate that Russia is constantly under threat. Secondly, due to their professional viewpoint, they think about the state policies in terms of a permanent special operation. They believe that international politics is primarily a field of competition between secret services. They see the very idea of cooperation with the West as a way for the West to infiltrate Russia. Their foreign policy toolkit, inherited from the Soviet secret services, is composed mainly of active measures (Darczewska, Żochowski, 2017), among which disinformation, reflexive control, blackmail, and brinkmanship take pride of place. A key tool is the language of 'post-truth' and outright lies, employed on a mass scale since 2014, which usually serve to signal intentions contrary to real ones.

The peculiar 'ethos' of the ruling elite also includes criminal standards of behaviour. There are many striking similarities between the Chekist and mafia-style worldview - the latter embraced by today's Kremlin's cronies during the turbulent nineties, which constituted a formative moment for their future careers. The intermingling of politics with the criminal world at the time, with physical violence as a method of the fight for financial assets and political clout, resulted in the transfer of mafia-style thinking and modus operandi onto state policies.

By this logic, power is absolutised and must be constantly confirmed. The rules of conduct are determined by the ideal of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Stephenson, 2015), which includes intimidation of an opponent as a necessary part of any negotiation process. Willingness to compromise or to hold dialogue are seen as signs of weakness, which only encourage further demands, extortion and blackmail.

The Kremlin's worldview is also based on quasi-tribal thinking. Rules are considered valid only with 'people like us' (Stephenson, 2015), while lying to opponents or breaching binding

commitments vis-à-vis 'others' are part and parcel of a standard diplomatic toolkit. As when criminals settle their scores, the arsenal of measures to be used is not defined a priori. There are also no 'red lines' that should not be crossed. Amid permanent fights without formal rules, all kinds of tricks are allowed, provided they are effective. The risk tolerance threshold is much higher than in the case of Western elites; in the face of a democratic rotation of governments, they rarely see a loss of power as the end of the world. The logic of 'winner takes all' means that by definition, the interests of a competitor or opponent are not taken into account (Липман, Рябов, 2007).

This systemic approach has resulted in the constant brutalisation of Moscow's foreign policy, leading ultimately to war crimes we are witnessing in 2022. Given the beliefs that shape the Kremlin's perception of security objectives, Putin cannot show weakness and retreat from a misconceived military operation. Russia will not abandon efforts to destabilise Ukraine, and will continue to treat this country as a base for further destabilisation of the region.

## If you want peace, prepare for war

As Russia has engaged in a systemic conflict with the West, the current crisis will continue independently of how and when the war in Ukraine ends. Peaceful coexistence is over for a long time. We will remain within the wartime paradigm, no matter whether we want it or not – as long as Russia's potential for harm remains in place.

The unprecedented unity of the EU and NATO vis-à-vis the Russian invasion caught Moscow off guard. Now the question is how resilient this unity will be in the future. The war in Ukraine stands every chance of becoming a formative moment for a new Europe and a new Euro-Atlantic community – provided we do not lose the current momentum.

The West needs to work out a cohesive strategy both vis-a-vis Moscow and Ukraine without waiting for the end of the invasion. This strategy needs to be based on lessons learnt from the recent past and adapted to Russia's strategic culture. As the Kremlin disdains diplomacy, no political and diplomatic solution to this crisis can be found unless Ukraine (backed by NATO) defeats Russia on the battlefield.

The western strategy should encompass several elements. First, we need effective strategic communication tailored to the Kremlin's worldview. Second, if violence is to be eliminated

from international relations in Europe, Russia must pay for its crimes, and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be saved. Third, Europe cannot be safe, prosperous, and democratic without investing in military security. Fourth – we need to address the nexus between Russia's domestic and foreign policies: as long as the country remains authoritarian, it will pose an existential threat to the West. Last but not least, given the democratic mandate necessary for making strategic decisions, effective communication of Western politicians with their societies will be of crucial importance.

In other words, the new strategy should fundamentally reformulate the political thinking characteristic of the last three decades. It was based on the faulty assumption that multiplying economic and political ties with an authoritarian regime can prevent aggressive actions. Although Russia has become toxic both in economic and political terms in the time of war, we risk returning to the beaten track of old mistakes. Illusions die hard.


**Strategic communication**


Russian military offensive in Ukraine has been accompanied by unprecedented psychological warfare against the West, including overt threats of conventional or nuclear strikes against those NATO members who deliver weapons to Ukraine. The longer the "special operation" lasts, the more Russia will double down on its crude blackmail to provoke a split among Euro-Atlantic allies, testing who will blink first. Its goal is to force the West to exert pressure on Kyiv to sign peace agreements on Russian terms. In this war of nerves, even minor concessions or gestures of goodwill (like Western leaders' phone conversations with Putin) are imprudent as long as Russian troops are still on Ukrainian ground. The Kremlin will view them as a green light for further escalation, including the extension of war beyond Ukraine's borders.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the only way to avoid a full-scale military conflict with Russia is to demonstrate our readiness to engage in it if needed. What would be decisive in this war of nerves is not as much NATO's net military potential as its preparedness to use it. Moscow has always doubted the latter. The worst we can do is continue informing Moscow what measures we will not employ to respond to its aggressive steps. Instead, we need to raise stakes for Russia through compounding uncertainty regarding our real intentions.

The outcome of this confrontation will impact both regional and global security. Every single word or action in Russian – Western relations will continue to be carefully analysed in Beijing and other authoritarian states.

**Peace enforcement**

The new strategy should aim at complete economic decoupling from Russia to reduce present and future Europe's vulnerabilities, first and foremost in the energy sector. Also, the sanctions regime must be expanded (up to a full-fledged economic blockade) until Russia entirely withdraws its troops from the Ukrainian territory, pays war reparations, and until war criminals, including Vladimir Putin, are brought before The Hague Court. There is no other way to restore peace, but it would mean that sanctions will stay with us for long. They are going to generate additional costs for European companies and customers temporarily – and still, this is the lowest possible price for their safety. A dangerous temptation may occur to partially lift or soften sanctions to 'encourage' Russia into signing a truce or a peace agreement. This would mean condoning war crimes in the name of an illusory compromise that Russia could easily revoke.

However, even tougher economic sanctions will not be sufficient to deter further aggression – be it against Ukraine or its NATO neighbours. Moreover, Ukraine cannot wait for months until the sanctions ruin Russia's economy and force the Kremlin to roll back.

Although Russian pressure has not brought desired results so far, and the aid for Ukraine continues, the very fact that Western leaders remain apprehensive about offering Kyiv full-scale military support (including deliveries of anti-aircraft systems) sends a wrong signal to the Kremlin that the blackmail works. In the case of the most violent act of unprovoked aggression in Europe since 1945, discussions about allowable support of the victim with defensive weapons and 'non-allowable' deliveries of the 'potentially offensive' ones are highly inappropriate.

Weapon deliveries for Ukraine should aim not just to make Russia spin its wheels there, letting the civilian death toll grow, but to free the entire country from Russian occupation. Ukraine's non-NATO status should not play a primary role in NATO's engagement scale. The seriousness

of threats and the scale of atrocities need to outweigh formalities – just as they probably would if Russia attacked Sweden or Finland.

In this context, another question arises: supposed a truce or even a peace agreement is finally concluded between Kyiv and Moscow, how NATO or the US (as one of the possible guarantors of the treaty) is going to force Russia to respect its provisions in the short and long run? How will we force Russia to roll back its troops from the entire Ukrainian territory? Without well-prepared answers regarding peace enforcement, the negotiations will not bring results.

**'Forward defence' of values**

Sanctions and weapon deliveries pertain to the arsenal of tactical, reactive measures. What is badly needed now is Western 'forward defence' based on sovereign choices of our neighbours and a successful projection of liberal democratic values beyond the EU. From the political, economic, and strategic point of view, we cannot allow the Ukrainian resistance to collapse – as the nation is struggling for its sovereign right to choose Euro-Atlantic values. It means the very credibility of the Western integration project is at stake.

Failing to withstand the aggression invites more of it. If this big Central European country becomes a failed state or gets truncated by the aggressor, it will send another wrong signal to Beijing, proving the West is as weak as it was expected to be. It will only boost the current trend of democratic space shrinking globally (Freedom House, 2022).

We must be ready to defend our values and style of living with all possible means, including military ones. Ordinary European citizens and companies need to understand that the security of Ukraine is the security of their own homes – as Russia is waging war against liberal democracy as such. Growing food or energy prices is the lowest price we can pay. This war has started because we did not want to pay it in 2014.

**Is Russia doomed to Putinism?**

Russia will be waging war against NATO as long as the current leadership (not only Putin as president) remains in power. An authoritarian Russia will always pose an existential threat to the West: the Kremlin views aggressive anti-Western actions and imperial ideology as the principal tool to boost the waning legitimacy of the dysfunctional political-economic system. Due to war crimes perpetrated by all leading officials, any economic or political relations are possible in the future only with new Russian leadership, the one committed to political reforms.

An essential aspect of dealing with the growingly oppressive regime would be to provide broad assistance to Russian political émigrés trying to save the suppressed civil society structures abroad. Many of them are ready to return to Russia provided a narrow window of opportunity opens for political change. The authoritarian foundations traditionally rely on repression, social apathy, a prevailing sense of disempowerment, and the lack of political alternatives. However, the 2021 independent public opinion surveys revealed growing regime fatigue, mounting protest moods, and demand for change (Domańska, 2021). The current 'rally around the flag' may seem powerful, but the pre-war trends will probably re-emerge sooner or later and undermine the regime's grip on power. They will be stoked by increasing poverty and lawlessness – the consequences of Ukraine invasion and the regime's totalitarian spirit.

**Dialogue with Western electorates**

Despite Western societies' unexpected and unprecedented solidarity with the Ukrainian nation, there is a high risk of 'Ukraine fatigue' among the same public if the war continues for weeks or months. It may be buttressed by growing energy prices (with all their negative consequences for consumers' living standards) and migration fears. The UN Food and Agriculture agency has warned that the invasion may lead to a worldwide food crisis (Harvey, 2022). We are already facing the biggest migration crisis since World War II, another element of Russia's strategy to destabilise the EU. The current number of four million Ukrainian refugees who have fled to Europe is just a foretaste of a more significant humanitarian catastrophe if Russia maintains its troops on Ukrainian soil. This situation

may form a fertile ground for appeals to end the war at any price (while Kyiv will pay the price) and relaunch 'dialogue' with the aggressor to stabilise the situation.

That would be a grave strategic mistake as it would show that war can be an effective tool of achieving anti-Western goals. Given that Russia's foreign policy strategy most often boils down to creating problems out of thin air and then offering 'solutions' to them, which serve solely Russian interests, selected EU or NATO members would be next on Russia's hit lists. The aggression would not necessarily take the form of airstrikes. It may as well target critical infrastructure with massive cyber-attacks, wreaking havoc on some countries, while nuclear blackmail would continue to be used against others to discourage them from a united reaction.

Any premature normalisation of relations with Russia would be risky as Kremlin-sponsored corrupt practices and violence may freely spread in Europe again. In the past, we saw a few European politicians effectively corrupted by the Kremlin; they embraced authoritarian values in the name of their vested interests. We also saw Kremlin's opponents killed on European soil by agents of the Russian state; at least some of those crimes, perpetrated with chemical weapons, posed a lethal risk to hundreds of local citizens. Those Europeans and Americans who advocate dialogue with Russia seem to know little about everyday realities in a country where citizens' rights are blatantly violated, and political freedoms remain only on paper. A country where some independent journalists and opposition politicians have been murdered (there is also much information on attempted killings, like in Alexei Navalny's case) and people can go to jail for up to 15 years for peaceful anti-war protests. Worst of all, there are virtually no defense mechanisms against state-sponsored lawlessness as the judiciary forms an integral part of the machine of repression. One cannot even exclude that the death penalty will be restored in Russia soon (Анисимова, Алехина 2022).

Corruption, political killings, violence, poverty: this is what Russia brings wherever it comes. We have witnessed it in the occupied Donbas for the last seven years and in other parts of Ukraine since late February – this time in the form of mass war crimes. If NATO's credibility is undermined or the alliance splits, no one will be able to save not only Ukrainians' lives but also defend living standards and human rights in Western Europe.

# Conclusion

The post-war EU-NATO security architecture will require serious enforcement and broader engagement of the non-member states committed to democratic principles. The West must not only become capable of responding to emerging threats but also effectively preventing them. We need to start thinking outside the box and openly admit that Ukraine is an inseparable part of our security space. 'European' must stop meaning just 'European Union' or 'European part of NATO'.

Ukraine should be immediately offered the NATO and EU candidate status and a fast-tracking accession process. Its army has proved it would be an asset for the alliance. While the EU accession would be more difficult, requiring prior institutional reforms, the best moment to launch them would be immediately after the war. It would be much more reasonable for the EU to invest in the future member state than just 'neighbour'. Reconstruction of the country under a new Marshall Plan would allow the displaced people to return home, while NATO's military umbrella would secure the long-term effects of this reconstruction. It would enhance the West's global soft power and signal belligerent states that war is suicidal as a tool of foreign policy.

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# GEOPOLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR FOR THE LIBERAL WORLD ORDER

Although the Russian war against Ukraine runs for 8 years now, only since the all-out attack on February 24, 2022, all the (im)plausible Russian deniability with its imminent half-tones, constant attempts to frame the conflict as the internal one, talking over the problem of the territorial annexation or broken non-proliferation regime, delaying the discussion over the dysfunctional UN SC as well as impotence of many other international organizations have been laid bare. While the uncertainty on the Russia-Ukraine battlefield weights crucially on how this discussion will end, it is certain that now it would be impossible to circumvent the question of the future of the (liberal) world order.

Since the start of the Russian onslaught, it has been widely discussed in numerous papers and op-eds that the Russian-Ukrainian war augurs massive shifts on the global scale. These include, *inter alia,* imminent threats for the world food safety (especially in Africa), deep shifts in energy trade and supply chains, new challenges for China's alliances and regional policies, fresh breath into the transatlantic cooperation between the US and the EU, etc. These are all the very important pieces of the conflict jigsaw puzzle, but the question of the liberal order is larger than that, targeting the very basis of the international relations system.

What is described as "liberal order" means the set of the rules that govern the international relations since the Second World War, with the special emphasis on the sovereignty of nations, freedom of alliances, inviolability of borders, effective international institutions, ever increasing international connectivity through open markets and free trade, spreading democracy and human rights worldwide to secure peace and prosperity. This order has been hit by several critiques and sapped by numerous setbacks, crises and retrenchments in the last years. It took blows both from green and leftist movements over the excesses of free trade on

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climate and inequality from rightist/antimigration movements against identity issues, together with endless questioning by politicians and pundits alike whether the Western countries themselves did not contribute to the weakening of that order or whether the hegemonic leadership of the US was not a form of hidden imperialism. Still, the most important question is how we save the key features of the liberal order in dealing with illiberal contenders and rising autocratic powers vowing for new multilateralism in the name of "realism".

Without ignoring other numerous problems and deficiencies of the liberal order, the openly territorial and genocidal design of the Russian attack has put the question bare: will that order survive this onslaught and how it should develop to become more just and more resilient to further challenges. The direct military attack from an authoritarian revisionist state has proven to be unpreventable in the framework of available instruments and theoretical foundations of the liberal order. All the attempts to deter Russia or to lure it into cooperation and appeasement during the semi-covert phase of the war in 2014-2022 (and even earlier, in the wake of other Russian incursions in the post-soviet space) failed and brought us to the brink of the ongoing disaster.

Thus, the liberal order's fate is contingent upon two factors. The first of those is the final outcome of this war. The second concerns the extent to which the proponents of the current order are eager to make sacrifices to achieve the victory of Ukraine and, eventually, of liberalism. There are three possibilities of the war outcome, one in which Ukraine loses and two in which it wins (with bad and good news for global liberal order respectively). As the combined West is incomparably more powerful than Russian Federation both in military and economic sense, Ukraine's loss or victory is rather the matter of the Western choice, not of the predicament. But again, not even every Ukrainian victory will save the most crucial foundations of the liberal order.

In this sense, the first and most undesirable result of the war would be a Ukrainian defeat, either through a direct conquest of important chunks of its territory on the battlefield or through peace agreement. In this scenario, the amounts of Western support will be modest and eventually insufficient (for the economic or political self-limitations, fear of Russian nuclear deterrent or wariness of further escalation on the NATO territory) and with worsening problems in the battlefields, it will wane first from the most hesitant countries and later on from the staunch supporters. The result would be acknowledging Russian territorial gains (sooner or later) and gradual lifting of sanctions. This, in turn, would strengthen Russia-China cooperation as well

as Russian gains in the Middle East and Africa, and probably even lead to negotiating new "security arrangements", according to a long-held Russian demand. This opens up additional space for the new Russian geopolitical conquests in the former Soviet influence zone, thus prolonging and expanding the military conflict in Europe and beyond, as such a success could be emulated by China with respect to Taiwan and elsewhere. The oppressive Russian regime will strengthen internally, illiberal forces will win crucial elections in liberal countries and further democracy spread in other regions will be halted. This augurs an actual end to the liberal order as the one that failed to protect itself and to help those who were willing to resist and made the authoritarian regimes look more effective if not more attractive.

**Second scenario is that Ukraine manages to thwart the threat largely on its own or with the help of some individual countries,** without full commitment of the West. Some less enthusiastic EU countries could refrain from helping or limit their engagement either militarily (provision or transportation of military materiel) or politically (support for the EU candidate status, enforcing meaningful economic and energy sanctions). They could do so either for the fear of military escalation or eventual repercussions on their economic wellbeing, or even feeling ready to renew the relation with the oppressive Russian regime whenever the possibility arrives. Such designs would clash with approaches favored by some more enthusiastic countries that provide Ukraine a broad support (either in absolute figures, like US or UK, or proportionally to their GDP, like the Baltics).

The cause of a Ukrainian victory in such a constellation may combine military ingenuity and bravery, internal problems of the Russian regime, Putin's sudden death, important help from the mentioned individual countries or all of the above. This is a positive scenario, but in case it is not based on the Western consensus, such a victory while contributing to the deterrence of Russia, will stand just until the next incursion. Protecting liberal order should become a common cause, involving not only some countries afraid to be the next victims or for any other particularistic national interests.

**In the third scenario, Ukraine wins with unwavering and definitive military, political and economic support from the West,** gets admitted into its structures and is hugely assisted in the reconstruction effort. It recovers full territorial integrity, receives viable security guarantees, thus restoring both inviolability of borders and nuclear non-proliferation principles. This is an ideal situation and a clear win for all, and beyond very encouraging developments, it is far from a given and requires some huge steps for the West to be able to prove in practice

that the definitive preservation of the order is its key aim, that we do not let down those who are ours or who aspire to be ours and we are ready to defend our values and our way of life with the necessary means. Once again, if the victory of Ukraine is not perceived as the victory of certain values, of a certain way of life and worldview – than it would become just an intermezzo before the next round of fighting, in the same war theatre or elsewhere.

Having said that, we must acknowledge that the three scenarios are not too clearly cut in real life. They do not tell us which kind of support and in which amounts would be enough or which would be more effective. One can imagine, for instance, that in the case of limited and selective military assistance, Ukraine suffers some heavy losses on the battlefield, but the decisive and concerted economic action of the allies, including heavy sanctions, pressures Russia up to cessation of hostilities, regime change and restoration of Ukrainian territorial integrity. The line between the second and third scenarios is even finer. While the level of aid is already unprecedented and important taboos are being broken on the daily basis, how exactly much of help, support and engagement ensure that the liberal order is indeed being defended as a common value?

Still, standing up in the defense of the liberal order and effectively protecting it is just one part of the story. The no-less important part is that to survive, the liberal order will have to critically review some of its most important presuppositions, mostly related to how to deal with non-liberal regimes, the ones that have proved disastrous in the non-prevention of the current escalation with Russia.

**The first issue to be fixed is the way the unfriendly regimes are being approached: a shift from dialogue to deterrence is necessary.** The current practice is significantly tilted in favour of dialogue as a process. It thus limits the influence on the desired result in the form of the behaviour change, both in bilateral relations between the key countries and inside the international institutions. Engagement and dialogue, however "principled", provide the authoritarian states with additional instruments to exert pressure either while blocking important initiatives or shifting the discourses to impair action in inclusive organizations or bilaterally. The new versions of the liberal world order should acknowledge that not every conflict is a positive sum game. Denying this brings no peace, especially in dealing with authoritarian and rogue regimes.

Enforcing deterrence to unfriendly regimes would also mean reviewing the key principles of the international organizations, both as to their membership and available action choice.

It would be advisable to prevent the participation of members who do not share common values or directly challenge them (or have a mechanism to kick them out/suspend their rights in case they are already in). Numerous examples of debates and votes in the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe have demonstrated that huge efforts to engage Russia into dialogue and cooperation brought disproportionately little results while paralyzing the necessary action before it was too late to avert bloody escalation. Bilateral dialogue formats, e. g. France's bid for rapprochement with Russia in the last years, fared no better and it is crucial to understand this now that appeasement (by any other name) does not work as a credible conflict resolution instrument in the XXI century as it never worked in the XX.

Finally, one-sided disarmament as the way towards general peace and dialogue-based conflict resolution is delusional: defending your order demands sound defence capacities, cooperation networks and psychological readiness. Thus, there is hope that the current discussion on the necessity to increase defence expenditure and review fighting capacities, will bring satisfying results.

**The second problematic idea is "economic reconciliation" or "Wandel durch Handel" or any similar ideas that attempt to bring authoritarian illiberal states into liberal order through economic integration.** The brutal war Russia has waged has demonstrated that compartmentalization of the relations – trading and developing investment links for pragmatic reasons with partners whose behaviour on the internal or external arena we disapprove – does not makes undesirable and hostile behaviours change into benign and mutually profitable cooperation. The so-called partnerships for modernization do not bring democratization and peace. Instead, they create very complex economic interdependencies that limit the will to counter evil, especially the long-term one, against negatively influencing liberal country's own economy and citizens' quality and cost of life. Before the attack in February 2022, economic sanctions against Russia were quite limited and subject to a regular debate of whether it is still advisable to apply them. Politicians were rather looking for ways to circumvent those sanctions or develop economic relations in the areas that were not targeted by sanctions than to strengthen them.

While current five and possibly even six rounds of sanctions constitute a real pressure on the Russian regime, if applied earlier or preventively they could possibly become a game changer in the Russian decision of an all-out attack. In the present situation, they exert important mid- and longterm pressure on Russia, which is not enough for the imminent cessation of hostilities
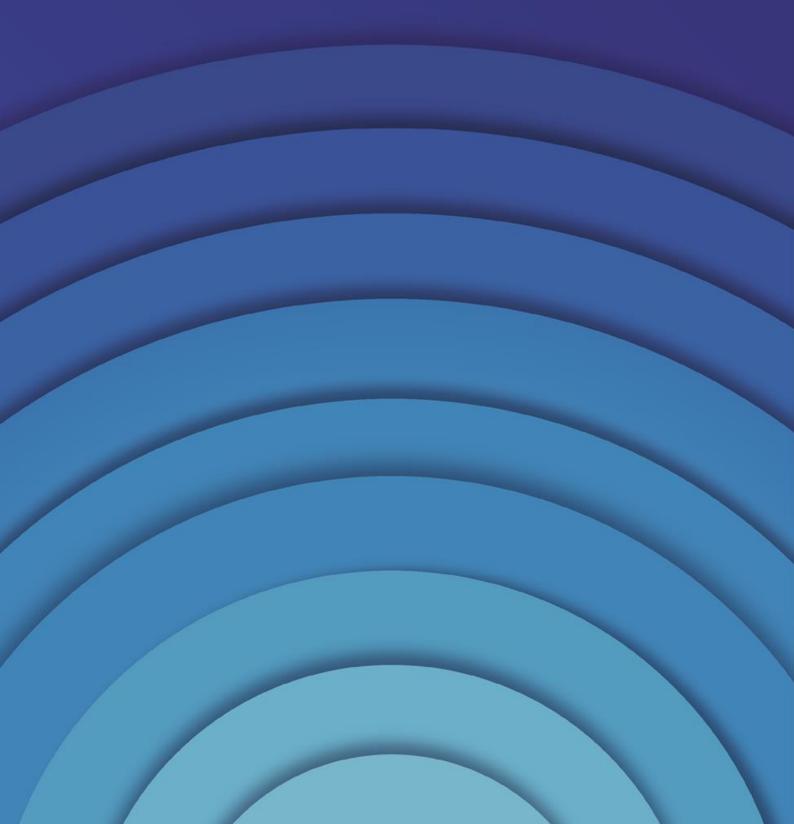
but could weaken the aggressor state in the longer perspective and undermine its capacity of further attacks.

Thus, economic interdependencies are already the problem in the case of deterring Russia, whose participation in the global trade is relatively limited, with the exception of the unbalanced influence in energy trade and transportation. But the challenge looks ever more daunting in the case of a countries that are much more efficiently and importantly embedded in world economy, first and foremost China. Thus, the new liberal order must be much more selective in promoting development of external economic relations from the point of the view of creating dangerous liaisons as well as those of developing sound climate policy or fighting global inequality. The preventive mechanisms of economic pressure would be much more advisable considering similar conflicts in the future.

The third important direction of liberal order evolution would be its joint rethinking in the **dialogue with the Global South to make this order really inclusive.** As the latest votes on the war-related questions in the United Nations have demonstrated, quite a number of countries do not believe in the sincerity of the Western powers and their sponsored order, choosing to abstain or adopt a "neutral" position. Still carrying the deep postcolonial scars and outdated ideas about the antiimperialist nature of the Russian regime, they are open to initiate and deepen relations with the non-liberal regimes. Restoring international credibility, and not only internal soul-searching would be imperative for mending the past wrongs on the part of the promotors of the liberal world order. Strengthening the allies, convincing the unconvinced, deterring the oppressive regimes and bigger powers in the region of Africa, Latin America, East and South Asia is a key to the further development of the renewed liberal order and defining its geographical limits.

To conclude, the war will change many things and to think that we would be able to fully reconstruct the liberal order after this heinous aggression is a self-delusion. The world of yesterday has passed away and to preserve the essence of the liberal order, the noble idea of freedom and democracy, it should be demonstrated that we are ready to defend it as a value and review its shortcomings and blind spots.

# Rethinking the Past, Present and Future of Populist Illiberalism

Helena Rosenblatt[33]

# THE HISTORY OF "ILLIBERALISM"[34] OF THE RIGHT AND LEFT[35]

The media is full of warnings: "Illiberalism" is everywhere on the rise. Books, articles, podcasts and conferences are alerting us to the threat that this phenomenon poses to our long cherished principles of liberal democracy.

The present crisis comes as a rude awakening to those who thought illiberalism defeated when the Cold War came to an end. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama announced the last "beacon of illiberal forces" vanquished.[36] The Berlin Wall fell and liberal democracy was declared the victor. It appeared reasonable to assume that its benefits, so obvious to all, would spread around the world quite unimpeded.

But the world looks very different now. Gone is any liberal triumphalism. Some are wondering if liberal democracy itself might be exhausted and crumbling from within. Might the future belong to illiberal rather than liberal democracy?

But what does "illiberalism" even mean? And how can there be such a thing as "illiberal democracy"? It seems to be a contradiction in terms.[37]

"Illiberalism" is most often used as a synonym for rightwing populism, authoritarianism and/or ultra-nationalism.[38] The term is used to describe governments like those of Viktor Orban in

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[34] This essay draws on my article "The History of Illiberalism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, eds. András Sajo, Renáta Uitz and Stephen Holmes, New York, NY, Routledge, 2022, ch. 2.

[35] Abbreviated version of a talk given at the Hungarian Europe Society's Zoom conference on "The Future of Democracy: Strengthening Liberal Values, Institutions and Procedures at Global, European, Regional and National Levels" (17 March 2022).

[36] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest* (Summer, 1989.)

[37] Jan-Werner Müller, "The Problem with Illiberal Democracy," *Project Syndicate* (January 21, 2016); see also Janos Kornai, "Vulnerable Democracies: An Interview with Janos Kornai," *Hungarian Spectrum* (December 30, 2016" ; but also the reply of Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Is there Illiberal Democracy" A Problem with No Semantic Solution," Public Seminar at https://publicseminar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Isaac-Jeffrey-Is-There-Illiberal-Democracy-Public-Seminar.pdf

[38] These are of course themselves contested terms. Recently there has been an enormous discussion about the meaning of "populism" in particular. Some examples: Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism*? (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Nadia Urbinati, *Me the People: How Populism Transforms Democracy* (Harvard

Hungary, Vladimir Putin in Russia and their various copycats around the world. "Illiberalism" can also be used to describe forces at work today in the United States of Donald Trump and his many followers.

Illiberal leaders are even gloating about this today. Viktor Orban and Vladimir Putin proudly *champion* "illiberal democracy" and declare that American-style liberal democracy is *over*.[39]

But what is "illiberal democracy" anyway? Can such a thing really exist? How can a democracy be illiberal and remain a democracy? Such questions speak to a common confusion about the meaning of our terms and the history of our traditions.

Liberalism and democracy have had two separate histories that only intersected late in the nineteenth century. Democracy stretches back to ancient Greece, when it simply meant "people power", by which was generally meant the direct, unmediated, and unrestrained rule of the people. As such, democracy was disparaged by most authors as the very worst kind of government. Only late in the eighteenth century did "democracy" begin to be used to describe a representative form of government.

Liberalism, on the other hand, emerged in the wake of the French Revolution.[40] The word was coined around 1813 and referred to the core principles of that revolution, including the rule of law, civil equality, constitutional and representative government, and a number of individual rights, such as freedom of religion, speech, and the press, and the right to own and dispose of private property.

Most early liberals did not favor democracy, either of the direct or representative kind. Instead, they tended to think of liberalism as a way of *taming* or even *constraining* democracy, and thereby making it safe from the "mob". Early liberals felt that they had learned, from the Revolution, that unconstrained "people power" could easily ally itself with despotism whether from above or below. The "people" were simply unprepared for political rights. They had unhealthy predilection for authoritarian rulers and were fatally susceptible to propaganda.

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University Press, 2019); Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (University of California Press, 2017.)

[39] Putin says it is "obsolete". https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36

[40] Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism from Ancient Rome until the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton University Press, 2018.)

"Illiberalism" appears to have been a word coined somewhat later in the nineteenth century. It referred to an opposition to, or violation of, one or several core liberal principles, particularly the safeguarding of core individual rights.

After the Second World war, "illiberalism" became a concept used by scholars to explain the Nazi catastrophe. Germany's "illiberal tradition" was contrasted unfavorably with the "West's" or more specifically America's liberal tradition.[41] During the 1970s, sometimes referred to as France's "antitotalitarian moment," some French scholars found that they, too, had an "illiberal" tradition.[42]

In an 1997 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Fareed Zakaria identified what he called a relatively new phenomenon that he called "Illiberal *Democracy*."[43] Illiberal democracies were, by his definition, democratically elected regimes, often confirmed by plebiscite, that ignored the constitutional limits of their power and deprived their citizens of their individual rights. He warned rightly that such democracies were increasing in number around the world.

And that is what we are increasingly witnesses today.[44] What is new today is that some leaders, such as Orbàn and Putin are now openly *championing* illiberalism. Orbàn, for example, has recently boasted that he wants Hungary to be an "illiberal state".[45] And, under the cover of protecting the Hungarian nation from the supposed depredations of western-style liberalism, which he defines in a way that suits him, he has dismantled core liberal principles.

To conclude, there are those who say, somewhat paradoxically, that American liberalism is *itself* illiberal. By this they usually mean that America is not living up to its professed liberal principles. Much of the focus of this critique has been on what is identified as the liberal tradition's sexism, racism, cultural imperialism and policies like the recent "War on Terror".[46]

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[41] One notable example among many is Fritz Stern's *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (1961), *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (1972)

[42] Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment* (Berghahn Books, 2004)

[43] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," in *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1997), pp. 22-43; See also his later book *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (W.W. Norton, 2003).

[44] For the decline of Western liberalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall, see Stephen Holmes and Ivan Krastev, *The Light that Failed. Why the West is Losing the Fight for Democracy* (Pegasus, 2020).

[45] https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp

[46] Among the many examples of this literature, see Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (New York: Verso Books, 2014), Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton University Press, 2016); Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire. A Study in British Nineteenth-Century Liberal Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire. The Rise of Liberal Imperialism in Britain and France* (Princeton University Press, 2006); Michael Desch, "America's

Some have denounced what they view as a "creeping illiberalism" on American college campuses, where, under the guise of *defending* liberal values, students are said to be behaving illiberally when they promote "political correctness" and "cancel culture". [47] The phenomenon called "language policing" is also seen as a violation of liberal principles.[48] And procedures adopted on college campuses to deal with sexual assault cases are being criticized as examples of "creeping illiberalism", on the premise that they also violate due process.[49]

Of course, none of these critics espouse anything that could be called "illiberal democracy"; instead, they accuse American liberalism of being hypocritical.

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Liberal Illiberalism. The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security*, vol 32, no 3 (Winter 2007/8) pp. 7-43; Andrew T. Price-Smith, *Oil, Illiberalism, and War* (The MIT Press, 2015.)

[47] Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (Free Press, 1989.) See also Kim R. Holmes, "Intolerance as Illiberalism" https://www.heritage.org/political-process/commentary/liberalisms-illiberal-intolerance; and Jonathan Chait, "The 'Shut it Down!' Left and the War on the Liberal Mind," https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/04/the-shut-it-down-left-and-the-war-on-the-liberal-mind.html

[48] John McWorther has written and spoken much about this. See https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/07/brandeis-language-police-have-suggestions-you/619347/

[49] Jonathan Chait "Liberals get Illiberal on Campus Rape," *Daily Intelligencer* New York, Oct 14, 2014 and KC Johnson https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/kc-johnson/new-dark-ages-campus/ and https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2014/10/does-liberalism-have-an-answer-to-campus-rape.html and Judith Shulevitz,"Accused College Rapists Have Rights Too" https://newrepublic.com/article/119778/college-sexual-assault-rules-trample-rights-accused-campus-rapists

Auksė Balčytienė[50]

# CULTURE, MORAL BURDENS, AND OTHER BARRIERS TO CONVERSATION IN EUROPE

## Introduction

It has been long discussed that democratic politics, news media, and informed citizenship are the three pillars on which ideals of daily democratic life are being built (McQuail, 2009; Curran, 2000). Democratic decision-making stems from qualities of journalistic professionalism, namely its high respect for facticity and public accountability (Christians and Nordenstreng, 2004), which lie at the heart of the principle of *social contract* (Sjøvaag, 2010). Such an obligation has its foundation in the social responsibility theory that outlines the role of journalism/news media in a liberal democracy and the ethics this role is performed with (Bardoel and d'Haenens, 2004).

Briefly, the classic vision to the democratic way of life obliges both media and citizens to act together in a responsible and engaging manner. Media reacts to public needs, which epitomizes the media's mission to *listen* and to *serve* the political prerequisites of the public. Citizens are anticipated as being on the other side of this contract. By fully engaging and exercising their rights to freedom of expression and information, they commit themselves to make informed choices in politics.

Such conventional logic, however, appears to be fit for the demands of the last century and not today. In the second half of the 20th century, peacebuilding, a quest for social cohesion and integration, and a focus on jointly negotiated (public) interests were foreseen as the core aims for the (Western) European politics and media systems (Nieminen, 2019). Meanwhile, in today's hybrid and rich media and a highly digitalized and accelerated communications arena

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(Chadwick, 2013), where facts are being interchanged with opinionated and malicious content, the naturally arising ability of citizens to make informed choices seems to be doomed.

Digital communication has enormously expanded the ways in which people communicate nowadays, including opening arenas for businesses and self-expressionism, which obviously contributes to the wellbeing of citizens. Nevertheless, digital communication has also brought conflicting feelings of having too much of data and information. Citizens have suddenly found themselves being left on their own, like abandoned youngsters without any toys (tools) and moral guidelines on how to respond to the myriad of threats from the outer world. None of the countless actors with diverse interests (individuals, groups, organizations) are obliged by professional ethical rules and moral obligations to communicate in accountable manner.

To put it another way, in a very short period of time, just a few decades, the state of social cohesion and confidence in all societies across Europe, as well as globally, have been gradually and noticeably, if not radically, transformed. The rise of populist politics and banal nationalism, blows towards radical thinking, increasing suspiciousness, and even xenophobia have been identified as the most obvious signs of evaporating social cohession, declining moral sensitivity and decreasing institutional trust (Bauman and Donskis, 2013).

How to recall the ethos of trust and to restore the belief in the ideal of the potentiality of social contract and conversation/dialogue in Europe? Can these skills be taught to help protect sustainability of daily democratic life in Europe?

## Dire outcomes brought by the long swings of globalization

It seems that nowadays everybody is talking about the crisis and the illiberal turn in European politics, including the rise of populism, proliferation of radical views, and destructive and dysfunctional communication, such as instigations of conflicts and manipulations. However, the shift in societal visions towards heightened distrust and the general mindset of uncertainty have not been that speedy. All information disorders and dysfunctional communication, in fact, might be treated as symptoms of some deeper chasms in societal structures (Bennet and Livingston, 2020).

It is indeed tempting to explore the actual characteristics of illiberalism and its deviations in Europe (also elsewhere globally), especially since it proves to be such a vivid trend across several predominantly younger European democracies, for example, Hungary, Poland, or Slovenia. Nonetheless, it is the *space* between the two settings – the so-called *previous state* and the *current condition* – that should be called to the attention of scholars. What has happened during the period of *in betweenness*, i.e., in the years amid the two clearly distinct regimes?

In such context, a *media focused* hypothesis seemed to work quite well for quite some time, suggesting that various political instrumentalizations and media-focussed technologies were responsible for growing political captures and democratic backsliding in some of the countries. Though much could have been explained by the so-called *media hypothesis*, there have been too few attempts to view public susceptibilities to politically framed manipulations and conspiracies as linked to the greater or lesser degrees of social cohesion in those countries. Briefly, we convey here the statement that the way we frame causes of problems is vitally important to the solutions we seek. To us, it seems that political and social manipulations in contemporary Europe and also elsewhere, as well as the rise of illiberalism in some of the Europe's younger democracies, are contingent on variations in social and cultural factors.

In theoretical terms, news media has always had a mission to set public agenda, to reflect, and to mediate social differences. The role of the media in a democracy is to react in a timely manner and to reveal new political issues. In such a way, the health of democracy is directly related to the health of the media ecosystem. Democracy is a process in action: it requires citizens to interact with the media and information and to immediately react against declining democratic values.

In the Western European media sectors, for example, the transformation towards greater neoliberalist thinking and profit orientation has been registered already in the last decades of the 20th century (Nieminen, 2019). It has started with the turn towards neoliberalist promotions of cost-effective business models and productions of media content that sells. Greater orientation on the so-called effectiveness has brought *clickbaitism* and created niches for populist discourses to develop in some of the mass public-oriented media outlets. With digitalization and global economic re-structuring in digital businesses and media technologies, with greater aims by businesses, including the media, to cover niches with new products, Europe's social, cultural, and political relations have gradually started to transform as well.

Restructuring communications' arenas have brought an increasing fragmentation of societies into groups of interests (Nieminen, 2019), which were soon discovered by populists. Polarization has opened chasms in the social structures of societies between the economic and political elites on the one hand and the de-privileged and dissatisfied people on the other. All of this has resulted in the feelings of frustration, overwhelming thoughts of unfair treatment, and discontent.

Early in the new century, dissatisfaction and unhappiness of people have been overflown into massive protests. Not only have disturbances on a physical level taken place in the cities across Europe, but the global rise of digital media platforms has also opened entirely new spaces for the explication and exploitation of discourses of distrust and disappointment. The opening niches were filled by conspiracy theories endorsing societal and political distrust, which were strategically framed and powered by even more strategically orchestrated disinformation attacks from foreign agents and enemies, such as Russia.

As it turns out, it is not only the news media but rather all knowledge-producing institutions, such as education and culture organizations that have been deeply affected by these multiple strains of the countless trends of liberalization, globalization, commercialization, mediatization, digitalization, platformization, datafication – the list continues. Neoliberalist thinking strengthened with digitally empowered algorithmic logic of global platforms destroyed the dominant models for most of institutions serving the sectors of public epistemic commons (Helberger et al., 2018). The global pandemia was another trend/factor accelerating the influx of conspiracies, disinformation and hate speech simulatenously instigating attacks on professionals (journalists, scientists, health professionals) for being too elitist and far removed from the daily lives and anxieties of ordinary people. In spite of opening spaces for self-expressionism, which is very much needed in certain thematic areas, the digital media platforms as highly accessible communication intermediaries have also amplified fake narratives and false claims (Helberger, 2020), which has resulted in triggering acts of political extremism and even cases of actual physical aggression.

All things considered, digitally amplified destructive communication does much more harm than only spreading social confusion. Research evidence shows decreasing empathy, solidarity, trust, and reciprocity, and increasing polarization, discrimination, and disappointment across older and younger European democracies (Balčytienė, 2021). The unsettling feelings of helplessness, suspicion, disbelief, and distrust damage democracy and destroy principles of

sustainability of a rules-based and rights-focused way of life. Loss of conviction in the potentiality of agreement is a globally registered and the most disturbing tendency of today.

## The enduring misfortunes of East Central Europe

It goes without saying, that a crisis of legitimacy of a rules-based order takes place across Europe, which is also being challenged by the public being dissatisfied with economic globalization and policies based on openness and human rights.

The slow decline of some of the ideals of liberalism, such as the weakening of social trust, and fragile support for the rule of law and human freedoms, are among the most alarming trends. Spontaneously electing populist politicians who might behave autocratically and arogantly is one thing. Another issue is if the succeeding moves in political shifts would affect universality of formerly held principles, human rights would be called into question, civil society would be destroyed, or the principle of the rule of law would be subordinated to political needs.

Younger European democracies appear to be especially vulnerable to such a framework of political and social developments and populist fashions. Democratic constitutional order is an essential precondition to social cohesion and a sense of (national and individual) security. The resilience of democratic institutions is inseparable from public trust, active citizenship, and public commitments to democratic values. In Central and Eastern Europe, generally, trust in democratic institutions still appears quite low, as well as public self-perception of themselves as democratic citizens are mixed (Balčytienė, 2021). The political culture, too, is described as reliant on competitive and conflictual rather than consensual goals.

To begin with, for successful societal rebuff to arising threats – to those internally initiated by populists, or conveyed by foreign enemies in the form of massive information attacks – an important prerequisite is a social solidarity and mutual trust, the readiness and ability of citizens to work together to address emerging challenges and arising political and cultural differences. Socio-economic transformations, demographic change, geopolitical upheavals, social inequalities, and a myriad of other risks pose major challenges to social cohesion in the CEE, making it more important than ever to strengthen citizens' resilience. But public institutional infrastructures appear to be too dysfunctional in Central Europe today – these are

either outer goals oriented in the best case, or even captured by the authoritarian politics, in the worst (as in Hungary).

These developments evidently resonate with ideas of the Czech dissident writer Milan Kundera who long ago expressed concern and almost disbelief about the fate of the idea of European identity and culture. Perhaps this can provide us inpirations on how did the disillusionment has gradually taken taken over in Europe.

In 1984 – long before the fall of the Iron Curtain, in his brief yet very insightful and sensitive essay *The Tragedy of Central Europe*, Milan Kundera wrote that "Europe has not noticed the disappearance of its cultural home because Europe no longer perceives its unity as a cultural unity" (Kundera, 1984). What values does contemporary Europe uphold? How can the ideas of European diversity and multilingualism be sustained, and through what means?

Succedding Kundera, issues generally attributable to the sphere of culture have always been important for political differentiation of those nations "representing highest cultural diversity in the smallest geographic space". But with profit-orientations and economic globalization, instead of inspiring and elevating, culture now seeks to seduce and surprise (Bauman, 2011). As a result, contemporary Central Europe is experiencing a moral downfall – and when there are no more values or ideals, all techniques for improving public images or manipulating public/political opinion become possible, accepted, and even tolerated.

Profit-oriented moves and pressures on European news media and cultural institutions have been recognized. In fact, the change towards the dominance of the above mentioned global trends were in the West were not that rapid: arising in the end of the last century, these developments and outcomes have taken place with gradual social adjustments. In East-Central Europe, the new arising risks of social differentiation have been complemented in a short period of time and by a significant number of regionally and culturally specific threats such as political pressures, reduced citizen support and declining use of conventional news media, and Russian disinformation spreading on social networks. To better understand public response and degree of resilience to arising risks, conceptual refinements of social differentiation of societies as responding to the so-called information disorders, predominantly disinformation and conspiracies, are required. Most importantly, we must acknowledge dependency of communication on cultural and contextual traditions and historic and cultural narratives (Carey, 1989), and also to admit that the spread of disinformation and manipulations is connected to deep social transformations (Bennet and Livingston, 2020).

Similarly to the concept of disinformation, social resilience, too, is a complex notion. Based on a growing body of research, resilience is envisioned as a socio-constructivist process, which includes the acquisition of skills and capabilities of individuals and communities to respond to, cope with, and adjust to various challenges brought by social and political disruptions (Hall and Lamont, 2013). For such an aim, resources, including infrastructural conditions (e.g., professional news media and democratic institutions) and individual capacities (human and moral agency) appear to be of critical significance in the face of manifold manipulations. Conceptually, resilience needs to be approached as a dynamic and socio-constructivist practice, which is changing over time and is context-dependent. As socially maintained development, nurturing resilience is a *discursive*, i.e., conversational, dialogic, and reflexive process – so, responsible and accountable communication and arenas for its exercising are therefore essential.

## Synthesis

Russia's invasion and war in Ukraine have further highlighted the urgent need to return to the sustainability of the rules-based order, the resilience of democratic institutions (including the information and communications sector), and the capacities of the public to deal with the arising crises.

Until recently, the significance of disinformation threats and dangers in Europe has been classified under potential harms (such as government censorship, diminishing free speech, etc.). The current context of international emergencies – such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the succeeding humanitarian crisis – requires immediate defensive moves and concrete acts also against the weaponization of information. The current moment seems to be a decisive momentum to recalibrate the standing and reputations of all stakeholders – news media, global platforms, and governments – in the face of the arising new information *order* in Europe.

Deterrence and resilience seem to be the two most vital strategies in this new informational arrangement. While deterrence is about the concrete regulatory and governance steps against propaganda and related manipulations; fostering resilience is about interventions in public education and culture.

To begin with, available strategies of deterrence are many and varied. News media and journalists mobilize their efforts toward fact-checking and the provision of verified sources of information. European governments make moves towards imposing stricter measures on national security and information defense operations. Global tech companies, such as Google, Meta, and Twitter as well as others, make evident moves in their (political and ideological, and also moral) standing by restricting access and banning propagandist and harmful content and information operations.

However, efforts geared towards the refinement of resilience capacities are not sufficient. For example, the Baltic States have never given up the feeling that Russia hasn't excluded these countries from its informational sphere and obvious moves have been at stake to fight disinformation attacks. Elsewhere in Europe, however, some recent aggressive interventions in political life, such as Brexit, were new discoveries for many Europeans.

The ideal of European modernity and democratization runs on the ideal of openness to difference, consensus, and the public good. In Europe, there always has been a tradition of critical knowledge and activism to defend and safeguard the tradition of conversation and *dialogue*. Culture and knowledge-building institutions (such as classical news media and school sectors, also museums and cultural industries) have always been at a forefront institution safeguarding ideals of inclusion and openness also on behalf of multiple and underprivileged groups. Today, however, all those institutions are still restrained by neoliberalist dogmas drawing them away from their core missions in some countries, whereas in other countries – these institutions are becoming framed to serve dominant political line. No matter what, the evolving crisis of contemporary European democracy and succeeding changed information *order* focussed on greater information management seem to be closely linked with the changed/deteriorating status of those historic and traditional centers of intellectualism, knowledge, and culture.

We do not have an immediate solution and satisfactory answer to the question, which seems to be one of the most difficult questions for tomorrow's Europe: How to elicit populism and radicalism narratives from the digitally mediated European public sphere? What can be done to fight disinformation campaigns and populist manipulations, and diminish their political influence? How to regain the power of dialogue and critical activism without falling into melancholy and nostalgia for what has been lost in Europe?

But we already know that democracy is not fireworks or an action movie. Finding consensus requires skills, critical awareness and moral standing, which are concrete competencies that can be taught, for example, in media/culture education classes or digital media awareness training sessions. But aside from the need for trust, developing consensual communication culture based on dialogue and universalist principles and ethics also requires time.

There are things we can control and cannot influence. Crises are inevitable and will happen, and, unfortunately, disinformation and bad intentions from enemies will persevere. For us, the current momentum appears to be ripe to strategically rethink how to revitalize the epistemic/cultural institutions to inspire the recovery of the vanished critical openness. Succeeding Tony Judd, to withstand the threats to freedom deep moral commitments are required (Judd, 2010). To paraphrase Jan Zielonka, institutional and cultural integration in Europe must go hand in hand with moral integration (Zielonka, 2014); and for that to succeed, confessing and accepting that difference exists within European cultures, and combatting the strangeness (for example, hostile and defective information attacks such as disinformation and strategic manipulations) lying outside of morals and ethics of Europe is needed.

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Anna Visvizi[51]

# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND ITS DIMENSIONS: POLITICS, ECONOMICS, GLOBAL AFFAIRS

## Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is one of the most frequently discussed topics today, even if the degree of precision in many of the resulting popular debates is at best minimal. In the popular discourse, AI – viewed as a concept and as an artifact, remains insufficiently explained, whereas the technical nature of the explanation that would be due and its apparent obscurity, render AI a subject of either confusion or speculation for quite some time now. Surprisingly, even if the number of AI-based applications (apps) and more complex and technologically sophisticated solutions proliferates, the average understanding of what AI is and to what extent it is present in our daily lives remains negligible. Should the discussion be taken to the broader domain of policymaking, economy, and global affairs, even less is apprehended, not only by laymen. It could be argued that a rift has emerged between the highly technical narrative on AI engaging experts and a highly superficial discussion on AI engaging average voters. It is frequently unclear where the decision-makers and regulators stand in this context. Against this backdrop, the objective of this paper is to shed light on some of the key aspects of AI and its role in today's world in the hope that the reader will thus get a grasp of the concept and consequently will be able to take a critical stance to every next mention of 'AI' as it buzzes in the popular discourse. The reminder of this paper is structured as follows. In the next section, AI and the technology underpinning it are discussed briefly. In the following sections, the AI's impact on politics, the military, and the economy are highlighted. In the concluding section, a few outstanding issues, such as AI and the question of values and principles, are pointed to.

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# AI and the technology underpinning it

While central to the idea of AI is unsupervised machine learning, the latter would not be possible without a specter of technologies, techniques, and applications. In other words, AI is not a single super-technology; rather, its emergence, and so also its evolution, depend on linear and non-linear advances in neighboring, related fields, and technologies. These include internet of things (IoT), blockchain, smart contracts, 5G, cloud computing, big data analytics, smart sensors, augmented reality, 3D printing and robotics and many other. For this reason, one should talk of the AI ecosystem (Visvizi, 2022). In this view, at the heart of AI lies the capacity of ever stronger and more efficient processors – organized in sets of networks mimicking the human brain, hence the term neural networks – to process, and hence connect, a growing number of pieces of information. For these pieces of information to be connected logically, and therefore become a source of meaningful input, information, feedback, an algorithm defining that logic is necessary. A given algorithm defining the functioning of a neural network is responsible for the process of recognizing the features of data available in the system; identifying similarities among sets of data; and grouping these unstructured data into clusters. In brief, contrary to many popular depictions of AI, AI depends on the initial human input, in this case the algorithm. This in itself suggests that limitations are inherent in AI; that AI is not as smart as many people would believe it to be; and, finally, that errors and biases are also a part of it.

From a different perspective, considering that neural networks can overlap, i.e. it is possible to use several layers of neural networks, and an algorithm enables the exchange of data/information among them, it is possible to talk about the lea rning process of a neural network. However, for a neural network to learn, the algorithm and the software that operationalizes it, must demonstrate to the neural network how to do it, i.e. how to respond to data introduced by the user.

AI and the broadening scope of its application are driven by three major trends in computer science. These include the big data paradigm, quantum computing, and green computing. These paradigms, individually or synergistically, influence developments in specific domains of the AI ecosystem, such as hardware-enabled big data processing frameworks, open-source software utilities, hardware- and software-enabled technologies, and related techniques and applications already in use. The landscape of techniques, technologies, and applications, such

as data mining, natural language processing, sentiment analysis, that underpin AI, evolves. Accordingly, also the influence and/or domains of application of AI change. The following sections shed some light on it.

# AI and politics

A lot has been stipulated about the impact of AI on politics, the political system, perhaps even on democracy. Several of the thus voiced concerns are valid and it is imperative to dwell on them. It is equally important to view things in a perspective though. For this reason, in this section, three aspects of AI's impact on politics are briefly discussed. These include AI and fundamental freedoms, AI and the decision-making process, and AI and the public opinion.

With regards to AI and the question of fundamental freedoms and civic liberties, at the heart of the discussion lies the observation that the ability to collect more chunks of data (think of big data) and to transform this data into information (think of machine learning-aided big data analysis) might in certain cases lead to abuses of fundamental freedoms associated with democracy and human rights. Indeed, several instances of abusive use of monitoring and safety control systems, all supported by technologies associated with the AI ecosystem, have been reported around the world. The case of the facial recognition system tested in China on the Uyghurs attests to that (Daly, 2019; van Noorden, 2020). However, the same technology, i.e. facial recognition system has also been employed in a classroom context (to check the attendance), for check-in purposes in hotels (Xu et al., 2021), and in other settings, e.g. to monitor the use of protective face mask (Talahua et al., 2021). Clearly, several questions, including that of express consent, storage of data, processing, use, and many other remain open in this context (Caines, 2021). These are questions of ethics and legal boundaries. Therefore, it is yet to be seen how the underlying advances in technology will be addressed in the regulatory process at national, regional and global levels.

Another issue that is equally important in the discussion on AI and politics is that of AI-supported decision-making, and correspondingly, the prospect of evidence-driven policymaking. Ideally, the use of AI in context of politics should allow AI to be used to *support*, *assist*, *alleviate*, *augment,* or *supplant* decision makers (Sætra, 2022). Arguably, AI-enhanced solutions applied in the context of public administration may lead to more efficient decision-

making. This is because large quantities of data can be examined and used to support the decision-making process. However, AI-supported solutions may be equally useful in automating several office activities, such as scanning of incoming emails, distributing them, and possibly offering automatic responses. These seemingly trivial, yet technologically not-so-simple solutions, can offer great saving in time. That time can be used for other, more demanding managerial and policy-making tasks and activities. Examples abound. To conclude, suffice it to mention that AI-based techniques offer new ways of analysing statistics through advanced data mining tools and techniques (Iqbal et al., 2022)

Finally, considering the connection between AI and politics, it is important to highlight social networking sites. Here the very serious question is how to conceive of AI in context of shaping public opinion, manipulating public opinion, propagating fake news, and where relevant spreading chaos (Mora-Cantallops et al., 2019; Sousa-Silva, 2022). The cases of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, the 2016 Brexit referendum, along with the pre-referenda debates, showcase that a very thin line divides freedom of expression and manipulation. The war in Ukraine offers countless examples of how AI-based techniques are employed to manipulate information, reach specific audience, and spread fake news. Conversely, the same technology that may be used to spread fake news and/or manipulate public opinion, may also be used to counter fake news (Choras et al., 2022; Megias et al., 2021). The intersection of AI and politics is a vast domain and its exploration, including the opportunities and challenges has just begun.

## AI and the military

A lot has been said about AI and its impact on the military. The thrust of the debate revolves around the frequently implicit question of whether the machine, rather than a human-being, will be able to take a decision, for instance whether to strike or not (Ploumis, 2022; Bodziany, 2021). The movie and the gaming industries have been particularly illustrious in this respect, thus feeding the popular imagination. The point is though technically it is feasible to leave the machine to decide on the course of the events, the contemporary military doctrine does not foresee this possibility. What is important is that the over-emphasis, and to some extent the unhealthy excitement, related to the possibility of the machine taking over the critical combat

decision, obscures other very pragmatic facets of the military and its operation in times of AI. In other words, AI may be a source of several critical benefits for the military. Consider, for instance, logistics and supply-chains in the military. Filter this seemingly trivial issue through diverse perspectives defined by either peace, war, emergencies, e.g. pandemic, or closed borders. And now try to arrive at the most efficient -- whereby the key performance indicators could include factors such as cost, manpower, time, fuel consumption, etc. – strategy designed at ensuring steady supplies to an x number of units, distributed over a specific area. What you get is a complex matrix of combination, options and resulting possible decisions. If you have time on your hands, you will certainly be able to find a good solution. If not though, an AI-based support system will be invaluable to present you with the options etc. In brief, AI-based support systems are indispensable in identifying the variety of solutions at hand, and picking the optimal one. Consider this example as well. AI-based solutions enable real-life monitoring of soldiers' health. In times of the Covid-19 pandemic or in cases of the troops being deployed in areas affected by a pandemic, AI-supported systems would be fundamental (Conroy et al., 2022).

## AI and the economy: prospects and caveats

In the discussion on AI and the economy the key points that are raised pertain to innovation capacity and the prospect of acquiring competitive advantages, specialization and increased global output, as defined by the classics, i.e. Adam Smith and David Ricardo. From a slightly different, and yet complementary perspective, the use of AI-enhanced production techniques and technologies, including also design, production line, logistics, supply chains, as well as efficient use of resources, such as water, electricity etc., may lead to substantial efficiency gains. This is clearly an issue related to productivity-led increases in a country's competitiveness, an issue that is central to growth and development in today's highly competitive global economic environment. To put it differently, the use of AI in the manufacturing process creates a variety of opportunities along the value chain, i.e. it starts at the product design process, it includes the prospect of product customization, it enables the application of environmentally-friendlier production modes, finally it enables efficient distribution, targeted marketing strategies, and finally post-production considerations, such as

dealing with waste, unsold and/or returned products. Several facets of the AI-economy nexus exist. The onset of AI and AI-supported tools and solutions will be consequential for certain economies to grow and develop. The challenge certainly remains how to secure innovative potential apt to ensure that AI-based solutions will be developed or successfully adopted in a given country. Several issues need to be considered here, such as the notion of first-mover advantage, technology adoption capacity, and finally global competition (Troisi et al., 2021; Visvizi et al., 2022; Johnson, 2021). These and other topics require very careful analysis as they impact the nature and dynamics of global affairs.

## By means of conclusion: AI and global affairs

Even if AI, understood through the lens of the broader AI ecosystem, is not new, it is only now that its likely impact on our societies is considered more consciously than before (von Braun et al., 2021; Visvizi & Bodziany, 2021). AI is frequently discussed in terms of juxtapositions, i.e. it is presented either as a source of good or a source of evil (cf. Wright, 2018). Similarly, it is not infrequent to hear about 'ethical' or 'unethical' AI. These depictions of AI are not helpful if our objective is to understand the potential AI bears for our societies. In other words, this kind of arguments reify AI positing it as an artifact not only beyond our cognition, but also – and most importantly – beyond our agency, i.e. the capacity of purposeful action. AI, to be blunt, is a set of techniques and technologies. It is up to us harness it in a framework reflecting our values and principles. In brief, "We cannot speak about ethical AI because all AI is based on empirical observations; we cannot get an "ought" from an "is." If we are clear eyed about how we build, design, and deploy AI, we will conclude that all of the normative questions surrounding its development and deployment are those that humans have posed for millennia" (Roff, 2019).

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István Hegedűs[52]

# WHAT IS THE SITUATION IN HUNGARY A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS AND WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED?[53]

## Hungary and the war in Ukraine

Since 24 February 2022, we have been living in a different world. Russian President Vladimir Putin's brutal military aggression against a neighbouring country has fundamentally changed our concepts and feelings about the future of the global political order and liberal democracy. On the one hand, our world has become much more dangerous. The illusion that war would be impossible in Europe in the 21st century has been shattered. On the other hand, the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people helps us not to lose our democratic, liberal convictions and our faith in common universal values. Ukrainians are fighting for their own freedom and sovereignty, but they are also fighting against the division of our world into spheres of interest dominated by great powers and new empires, all of which could result in disastrous consequences, as previous historical eras have proven. The unequivocal response of Western political actors, as well as the unity of the alliances and institutions of the free nations, NATO and the European Union, also gives us reason for long-term optimism.

Up until a few years ago, few European politicians and observers would have paid attention to Hungarian domestic elections, but now - and not only because of the well-known Putin-Orbán friendship - the significance of the forthcoming Hungarian parliamentary elections has been acknowledged and consequently, are being closely watched. As this author read in the

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[53] This is an edited version of the presentation held at the online conference of the Hungarian Europe Society on 17 March 2022 and was first published as a European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN) paper on 31 March 2022. A lecture based on this presentation was held at the working breakfast organised by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in Berlin on 24 March 2022. Available at: https://epin.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/The-Hungarian-elections.pdf.

American magazine 'Foreign Policy' in March 2022, '*From his beginnings as an anti-communist activist to his current incarnation as a global illiberal icon*', the success or failure of Viktor Orbán in these elections is being actively tracked by the international political scene.

During his election rally on Hungarian National Day on 15 March 2022, the Hungarian Prime Minister spoke of his supposedly wise strategy of remaining neutral in a conflict between two foreign states. 'Strategic calm' and neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict: these were the keywords that framed his rhetoric. The argument is based on an interpretation of the history of a relatively small nation that must now, once again, as was often the case in the past, suffers as a victim due to great power confrontations in our region. Therefore, according to Orbán, Hungary should not rely on the interests of a foreign country but must build up her own strength to preserve herself in a hostile world. This desire for peace from the Prime Minister means that Hungary should not interfere in a dispute in our neighbourhood. 'No matter who wins, we will lose,' Orbán said on 15 March.

Yes, this strategy of talking peace and not naming the culprit can seem quite convenient. It appears that many Hungarians hope the war will stay confined to its geographical borders and that Hungary should not provoke the Russians. In short, Hungary is not Poland. The dominant tradition of 'careful caution' originates from the soft communist dictatorship of the János Kádár era (1956-88), not from the heroism of the 1956 revolution. Using this historical background, Orbán can play on people's various fears for political gain once again.

But he also has a problem. After Putin's aggression, he has been forced to do a half-turn – he supported the common positions of the European Union and voted in favour of new sanctions. Currently, half of Fidesz voters support Putin and the other half opposes him. A large part of the Hungarian media loyal to the government addresses the first group, while some Fidesz politicians address the latter. Orbán himself, without naming names, talks about peace. This cacophony is complicated for his supporters, but his camp can still stick together to defend its identity against its opponents, the assumed repressive liberal-left-communist cultural establishment.

Orbán made the statement above from a highly provincial and morally unjustifiable perspective. There are no politicians in neighbouring smaller countries who have uttered such declarations. Orbán's idea of Ukraine as a buffer zone reminds this author of his anger 30 years ago when Hungary was first recommended only a partnership with NATO and not immediate membership. He has thus conveniently forgotten that anger in the current circumstances.

# Orbán and the world

Despite Orbán's half U-turn the day after the beginning of the Russian invasion, suspicion is growing that the Hungarian Prime Minister does not share the worldwide moral outrage over the invasion and wants to maintain his special relationship with Putin in the long run. The numerous Fidesz supporters from Poland did not travel to Budapest during the Hungarian national holiday to demonstrate together - as they have done in recent years. There are many clear signs that the friendship and the alliance between the Hungarian and Polish governments has gone awry. Leading Polish politicians of the populist conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS) have openly criticised their former hero, Orbán. The fact that they have different positions on Russian policy is not really news, but currently the Putin question is the only issue for Central and Eastern Europe that pushes all other political considerations into the background. The scheduled Budapest meeting of defence ministers from the Visegrad Group, which includes Czechia and Slovakia, was cancelled.

Orbán has become completely isolated due to his stance. There is now a new reality. A few years ago, the Hungarian pro-government media portrayed him as the strongman of Europe. At the time, Orbán's special ideological path created a radical alternative to the mainstream positions of the political elites and, at the height of the migration crisis, even seduced members within the centre-right European political family. How did this story end? The strategy to seize power within the EPP failed completely. Today Orbán cuts the figure of a lonely provocateur. The dividing line between his party and the mainstream of European democrats has become crystal clear in recent years, also about the future of the European Union, through his confrontational language referring to national sovereignty and his frequent attacks on 'Brussels'. He also has well-publicised ongoing conflicts with the European institutions over the rule of law, the constitutional separation of powers, media pluralism, academic freedom, corruption, and so on: we know the list all too well at this point.

If Orbán wins the April elections, he would probably do everything in his power to keep alive the prospects of a new 'Populist International' (a so-called Renaissance Group in the European Parliament). It would be a case of 'ostrich politics' to declare him a loser on the international stage. The dividing line between liberal democrats on the one hand and authoritarian populists on the other has not disappeared. One should not rule out an alliance of the populist right-wing parties, despite the ideological and personal differences between some party politicians. Donald

Trump could also feasibly come back to power in 2024 and his friendship with Orbán is much deeper today than during the four years of his presidency. Liberal democrats should also prepare for a scenario in which the charismatic Hungarian politician could play an important role on the world stage once again, regardless of the outcome of the war in Ukraine.

## The chances of the opposition

The former leader of the European People's Party (EPP), now Polish opposition leader Donald Tusk, gave a speech during the Hungarian national celebrations on 15 March at a rally heldby the united Hungarian opposition. Here he found new partner politicians who talk about a future loyal relationship with the European Union and NATO, and with whom the construction of a new co-operative Central and Eastern Europe and Visegrad Group within the EU could become possible relatively quickly. Of course, in the event of an election victory of the six-party alliance led by Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition certainly wants to break with Orbán's legacy. The constitutional amendments and the cardinal laws passed by Fidesz's parliamentary two-thirds majority over the last 12 years will most likely not allow for some immediate fundamental changes (unless the opposition gains their own two-thirds majority) due to needing to respect the rule of law, but a whole new political course with dynamic political communication could gain greater support.

It is still too early to speculate on whether the six party leaders and the six parliamentary political groups can work with a prime minister without a party of his own. We have good examples on how wide and colourful democratic government coalitions have been able to survive after the rule of a populist leader: think about Slovakia in 1998 following Vladimír Mečiar's illiberal democratic system, and Israel right now, where eight parties govern the country after the successful dethroning of Benjamin Netanyahu – well, almost for a year by now.

In the Hungarian case, it would be political suicide for any party participating in a new anti-Orbán government to take both the responsibility and blame for a collapse of unity that allows Fidesz back into power. This alliance is much less about strict policy concepts and how to implement them, but about driving Hungary back to its pro-Western and pro-European path after 12 years of Orbán's rule, including a necessary adjustment to the new realities of the

2020s, following the pandemic and now the war in Ukraine. Ideological differences matter less: Jobbik, for example, has made a long march towards national-conservative values and has left its extreme right past behind. Green environmental innovations and liberal ideas about the restitution of the rule of law might go hand in hand without jeopardising multi-partisan co-operation. What might be more challenging is keeping the internal balance of positions and influence among the political forces, as well as the ambitions of top politicians in check.

First of all, the opposition should win the elections. It won't be an easy task. Although opposition candidates could take all constituencies in Budapest, in the countryside the flag is still flying for the ruling party. Polarisation is extremely high: there are only a few undecided citizens in the tiny centre of the political spectrum who might still be seduced by one side or the other. Most likely, 90 % of voters already know how they will vote: 45 % for the ruling party, 45 % for the opposition.

How can the opposition reach the uncertain, rather apolitical, often former Fidesz voters? Their only chance seemed to rest on finding a candidate from the political centre and not to nominate someone from the traditional left parties. Péter Márki-Zay, a conservative-liberal mayor of a small town brought a sense of panache and style to the opposition campaign for a while and the six parties were 'united in diversity'. But it has quickly become clear that good positioning of the leading candidate is a necessary, but perhaps not a sufficient condition, for victory. One needs not only a common programme, which the opposition has already presented, but also a vision, a mobilising narrative beyond the inevitable Orbán-bashing throughout the election campaign.

Victory would be especially difficult when elections are free but not fair: Márki-Zay received a total of five minutes during the entire election campaign from the public media to present his ideas, whilst Orbán's 15 March speech has been repeatedly broadcast. Orbán refused an invitation to a live TV duel, although two-thirds of citizens wanted to see a debate between the two top candidates. Moreover, the free segment of the media probably isn't able to penetrate rural areas where elderly citizens can only watch TV channels that are dominated by pro-Fidesz messaging.

Independent Hungarian NGOs had asked for a full-scale election observation mission by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), an unprecedented wish in an EU member state that was granted. According to ODIHR, its recommendations following the last Hungarian parliamentary elections had not been considered and implemented by the

Hungarian authorities. On the contrary: the list of measures and problems that have hindered a truly even playing field has become much longer. The electoral system still openly benefits Fidesz. Just to mention one element, previous bouts of gerrymandering have resulted in traditional conservative constituencies with smaller populations, where right-wing populist candidates can safely win with fewer votes. This is compared to the much larger levels of support needed to gain mandates in more urban-liberal districts. As the electoral system is not proportional, as in Germany, where citizens also have two votes, experts emphasise that 50 % plus one vote would be not enough. On a downward slope, the opposition might need 53-55 % of the popular vote on its joint party list to be able to win enough individual mandates.

Overall, the opposition will also need some luck to win. Does Putin's attack on Ukraine paradoxically translate into a solid chance for the opposition? Probably not: the 'rallying around the flag' effect is also working for Fidesz.

But a miracle could still happen at the last minute! In such a case we would at last regain the spirit of 1989, 12 years after Orbán's populist twist. The united opposition would definitely return to the joint decision-making rules and norms of the international democratic community. The fight against corruption would include joining the European Public Prosecutor's Office and to respect the conditionality mechanisms linked to the payments coming from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).The Russian connection would become irrelevant and Hungary might try to find real solutions to ensure its energy independence from Gazprom, in cooperation with its European partners.

Otherwise, with another Fidesz win, dark and depressing times would continue for Hungarian liberal democrats. Our values, our future - and not only for Hungary - are all at stake in this election. The 'Orbanisation' of the country has not yet been completed. But even in such a case, the 'other Hungary' would survive and the alternative offer of an open, liberal, democratic political future for the country will prevail one day.