"ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACIES" IN EUROPE:
AN AUTHORITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF LIBERALISM

Edited by
Katerina Kolozova and
Niccolò Milanese

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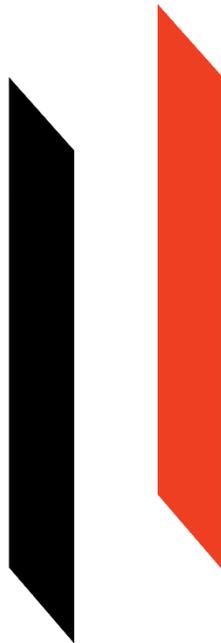
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Introduction:
On the Phenomenon of Illiberal Democracy in Europe

Katerina Kolozova and Niccolò Milanese

"Illiberal democracy" is a troubling term: when, in 2014, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán appropriated it from a 1997 *Foreign Affairs* article by Fareed Zakaria,[1] and transformed its negative connotations into a positive political program, the reaction of those commentators and scholars who did not totally ignore it was to declare the phrase contradictory or absurd. "Democratic backsliding," "authoritarianism," and "populism" were all more familiar general terms that were readily applied to specific country cases. Before 2016 and 2017, articles examining "illiberal democracy" as a phenomenon in its own right were rare,[2] and when we started the series of events, research collaborations, and exchanges in advance of the 2019 European elections that led to this book, many were still reluctant to engage with the term.[3] We believe this reluctance can be attributed to a number of factors, but above all to the fear that by using the term there is a risk of contributing to the disruptive project of illiberal leaders such as Orbán, and legitimating the possibility of an illiberal democracy as one acceptable political alternative among many. Our sense in editing this book is that the years since 2014 have shown that, however unpalatable, incoherent, and internally contradictory illiberal democracy may be, it is a political choice that is available at the ballot box in many countries, and as scholars committed to democracy and to the necessity of defending the notion of freedom, which is to some extent indebted to the classical European ideas of liberalism and considerations of liberty as matter of practical philosophy, we have an obligation to understand its socio-historical construction, its emotional appeal, and its rhetorical force, to more effectively combat it. Ultimately, we believe that the difficulty many have had of admitting the political efficacy of illiberal democracy as a term is due to an underlying crisis within liberalism itself: this is the fissured terrain that the phenomenon exploits.

Illiberal Democracy in Europe

Illiberal democracy can be understood as the program of political forces that seek to maintain voting as a form of collective decision-making and conferring legitimacy, but dispense with such things as migrant rights, gender equality, media and judicial independence, or human rights, which are seen as undermining the urgency of safeguarding national traditions, religions, or cultural heritage. In the European context, this combination of features has particular historical and geographical salience. Where the transition to democracy and the unification of Europe was understood globally as a success story, for many people in the region the move to freer markets and opening up of the economy to outside competition also meant greater unemployment and a decline in living standards. To the extent that liberalism is understood in common parlance as the combination of the liberalization of markets and the language of human rights (understood as being the two sides of the post-Soviet transition), "illiberal democracy" can be understood

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[1] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (November/December 1997): 22–43.

[2] Michael F. Plattner, "Illiberal Democracy and the Struggle on the Right," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 30, no. 1 (2019): 5–19; Jacques Rupnik, "The Specter Haunting Europe: Surging Illiberalism in the East," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 27, no. 4 (2016): 77–87.

[3] See Adam Ramsay, Ivan Krastev, Ivan Vejvoda, Shalini Randeria, Venelin Ganev, Jacques Rupnik, Ana Blazeva, Katerina Kolozova, contributions to a series of roundtables titled "Liberalism in Crisis: Between Totalitarian Responses and Progressive Dreams," organized by the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (Institute for Human Sciences) in Vienna, February 25–26, 2020), https://youtu.be/TovwgBkG6XE.

as the countermovement to this process. We will see in this volume that this binary framing is too simplistic, but to the extent that elites in Western countries bought into the post-1989 "end of history" thesis,[4] or at least a whiggish version of history as progress towards democracy and the extension and deepening of rights, the prospect of *illiberal* democracy 30 years later is particularly disorienting, and it is perhaps precisely this obnoxious quality of the term that its proponents and supporters find most attractive about it.

If this contested history of democratic transition has particular importance in Central and Eastern European countries, and in Germany as a country reunited, the ingredients for illiberal democracy to seem tempting can be easily transposed to other European contexts. In common parlance in France and Italy for example, "liberalism" is readily confused with globalization, in such a way that opposition to the disruptive effects of globalization can be reframed as opposition to liberalism. Furthermore, demographic aging in much of Europe, and the proximity of Muslim-majority countries with youth bulges in the neighborhood, have been manipulated by right-wing actors to create the impression that national cultures are under threat, and the phantasm of "population replacement" via migration is a common conspiracy theory. The biannual Budapest Demographic Summit has been held since 2015, attracting illiberal figures from around the world to espouse a highly conservative model of the family and of women's place in society, and rage against rights for LGBTQ+ communities. In general, toxic masculinity is an important component of the illiberal-democratic phenomenon, often performed publicly and on social media, especially in the form of militias organized against migrants at the borders.

The "illiberals" always put the vague term of "the people" first, ahead of individual and minority rights. During the European Parliament elections in 2019, it became clear that "the people" does not necessarily have to refer to a given nation: it can be a stand-in for Europe as well. At the beginning of the campaign, then-Deputy Prime Minister of Italy Matteo Salvini and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán announced their intention to transform the European Union into an illiberal democracy.[5] In his July 2018 speech at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp, Orbán presented his diagnosis of the "once great" European civilization, now moribund thanks to the detrimental policies of its "liberal elites," while also announcing its resurrection through illiberal, nationalist values that are at the same time protective of European civilization, ending his speech with the following words: "Thirty years ago we thought that Europe was our future. Today we believe that we are Europe's future. Go for it!"[6]

Left-Wing Illiberalism?

If anti-liberalism has a long pedigree on the far right of the political spectrum in Europe, in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008 and the attendant Eurozone crisis within the European Union, liberalism came under increasing attack from the left as well. While political science during the 2010s was preoccupied with the critique of neoliberalism, or the concept of "late capitalism," the distinction has not always been made between neoliberalism and liberalism as such, and an exaggerated commitment to free markets, privatization and market ideology applied to all social and political questions has become synonymous with liberalism as a whole. This is altogether to give, the Austrian Friedrich August von Hayek and the American Milton Friedman, too much space, firstly buying into their preposterous assertion that markets are spontaneously "free" without constant government intervention, enforcement, and protection of capitalist

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[4] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

[5] Mark Leonard, "How Europe's Populists Can Win by Losing," *European Council on Foreign Relations* (February 4, 2020), https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_europes_populists_can_win_by_losing, accessed April 11, 2020.

[6] The Prime Minister: Viktor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp," Website of the Hungarian Government, July 29, 2018, https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp, accessed April 11, 2020.

socio-economic order (consider the 2008 bailout of the investment banks)[7]. David Harvey, on the other hand, demonstrates in his *Enigma of Capital*,[8] that neoliberalism has been achieved through aggressive state policies, fashioned by UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government and US President Ronald Reagan's administration, paving the way for what became the unchecked "freedom" of the financial market that even the banks were reluctant to embrace at first.[9] A younger generation of scholars has pursued this line of critique excluding Harvey's Marxist approach, such as Ian Bruff most prominently, but not only.[10] The state and its policies as the source of the financial bubble and as the infrastructural foundation for the most recent major crisis of neoliberal economy is cited in the US government's appointed Financial Inquiry Report on the 2008 crisis, and is thus not the isolated view of the Marxist Harvey or of Ian Bruff and the others cited below (chapter 3 and passim). Consider the following passage from said report:

> First, we describe the phenomenal growth of the shadow banking system—the investment banks, most prominently, but also other financial institutions—that freely operated in capital markets beyond the reach of the regulatory apparatus that had been put in place in the wake of the crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. This new system threatened the once-dominant traditional commercial banks, and they took their grievances to their regulators and to Congress, which slowly but steadily removed longstanding restrictions and helped banks break out of their traditional mold and join the feverish growth. As a result, two parallel financial system of enormous scale emerged.[11]

The left-wing attack on liberalism is often dressed up as Marxist, perhaps to differentiate it from similar arguments made on the right. Yet such self-proclaimed Marxist analysis rarely shows any sustained engagement with the writings of Marx himself, which would lead to a more nuanced approach to liberalism. In her article "Le libéralisme de Marx," published in 2014, Paulin Clochec executes a comprehensive in-depth reading of Marx's engagement with the question, arguing that his critique of liberalism is one of a radical and Communist vision of liberalism that seeks to identify and transcend the inner contradictions of the Young Hegelians, a group to which Marx belonged when he first espoused liberalism.[12]

The liberalism of the early 19th century in Germany was subject to Marx's critique seen from the perspective of a radical liberal identifying the flaws of the bourgeois liberalism of his era, neatly summarized by Paulin Clochec in five tenets:

1) autonomy of civil society from the state;

2) freedom of the media and freedom of information concerning parliamentary debates, government decisions, and the judgements of the justice system;

3) a constitution based on the legal equality of individuals, not on old-regime status and rank;

4) secularization of the state and religious tolerance; and

5) German unity.

These five tenets do not prescribe any particular form of government, but with time Marx and others found them insufficient. Clochec concludes:

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[7] Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission [FCIC], The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report: Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2011).

[8] David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16–17, 48, and passim.

[9] Harvey, *Enigma*, 15, 71.

[10] Ian Bruff and Kathryn Starnes, "Framing the Neoliberal Canon: Resisting the Market Myth via Literary Enquiry," *Globalizations* 16, no. 3 (2019), 245–259, DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2018.1502489.

[11] *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report: Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), xx.

[12] Paulin Clochec, "Le libéralisme de Marx," *Actuel Marx* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France: 2, no. 56, 2014), 109–123.

> This internal criticism is manifested under the guise of a paradoxical continuity, consistent within the circle of Young Hegelians such as Bauer, Bakunin, or Marx in terms of outlining the problems with liberalism to the point of its getting away from itself. For Marx, then, this continuity is manifested in the project of a self-organizing society, freed from political tutelage, the prospects for which he would begin researching from 1844 onwards within a philosophy of labor.[13]

Underlying the liberalism of Marx's peers is perhaps a more basic principle, which Johann Christoph von Aretin, a German liberal political and legal philosopher of the turn of the 19th century, identified in his influential article of 1816, "Was heißt liberal?"[14] (What does it mean to be a liberal?), as the demand that a rational constitution and legal order must be the foundation of any form of government. Liberalism in 19th-century Germany was to incarnate the Kantian Enlightenment and spirit of progress. The left's critique of liberalism today is perhaps to do with the crisis of this principle of rationality, and particularly where the kind of rationality in question is a technology of power, or form of governance. From this point of view, an uncanny convergence in distrust of experts and expertise can occur between proponents of neoliberalism, post-structural leftists, and illiberal democrats.

Liberalism and Its Enemies

In this volume, we seek to unpack the term "liberalism" in the context of the utopia and current practice of an illiberal democracy, with its inevitably accompanying aspects of authoritarianism and populism. If illiberalism is our enemy, what elements of liberalism do we need to defend? This approach opens many questions: What do the self-proclaimed "illiberals" consider liberal? Does their ideological vision consist of an attack on the notion of freedom, and is freedom considered a luxury that degenerates the healthy body of conservative national selfhood? Do they believe that individual freedom and collective rights (but also collective freedoms, such as that of expression) and solidarity are mutually exclusive? Should we defend these rights, or should we defend the intellectual tradition of liberalism? Can we defend these rights under attack while dispensing with the notion of being liberal and without some vindication of the legacy of liberalism? These are some of the questions we have invited the contributors to this book to address. In spite of the compromised liberal core of contemporary supposedly liberal democracy, we argue that the attack targets the liberal tradition and the political philosophy that values liberties, be they individual or collective, and we see serious danger in it. We are thus called upon defending the right to freedom, the right to conceiving freedom as a politically meaningful and practicable value, even if some of the contributors choose to avoid the traditions of liberalism and seek to reinvent language in defense of that referent behind the contested signifier.

We understand illiberalism to be a multifaceted phenomenon: as a set of techniques of power that is parasitical on the liberal democratic order, as an ideology which is flexible and adaptable to contexts, and ultimately as a feature of late-capitalist societies arising from structural reconfiguration. Our critique of illiberalism therefore necessarily acts in three dimensions: critique of what is said by illiberal actors, critique of what is done by those actors, and analysis of the socio-economic and cultural conditions in which what is said and what is done has political efficacy (including the psycho-social conditions in which they find support).

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[13] Clochec, 123. The original French quotation reads as follows:
Cette critique interne se manifeste sous la forme d'une continuité paradoxale, consistant chez des jeunes-hégéliens comme Bauer, Bakounine ou Marx à développer la problématique du libéralisme jusqu'à sortir de celui-ci. Chez Marx, cette continuité se manifeste donc dans le projet d'une auto-organisation sociale, débarrassée de la tutelle politique, dont la possibilité est recherchée à partir de 1844 dans une philosophie du travail.
[14] Johann Christoph von Aretin, "Was heißt liberal?," *Neue Allemannia*, vol. 1 (Sulzbach: Seidel, 1816), p. 163–175.

We ask each of the authors to relate to this definition by Marlene Laruelle, which captures well the ideational content of illiberalism:

1) illiberalism is a new ideological universe that, even if doctrinally fluid and context-based, is to some degree coherent;

2) it represents a backlash against today's liberalism in all its varied scripts—political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational—often in the name of democratic principles and thanks to them (by winning the popular vote);

3) it proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric or sovereigntist, favouring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity; and

4) it calls for a shift from politics to culture and is post-post-modern in its claims of rootedness in an age of globalization.[15]

We have also invited authors to discuss specific policies, as we believe that identifying the underpinning motives and systemic effects of certain policies whose discussion might at first seem tedious (like the legislative acts through which academia, the media, and the economy are regulated by the executive branch, which itself is always already captured by a ruling party) in fact uncovers what exactly is at stake. Namely, one can establish whether indeed only "selfish" individual concerns are affected by the illiberal model, or if certain national and collective minority concerns are at stake too. Some of the chapters represent detailed and empirical elaborations of models of governance that reveal the same core value: a state- and ruling-party-controlled media, judiciary, and academy. These values too have easily been dismissed as "liberal"—as if their very labeling as such disqualifies their relevance—but their collective rather than (or just as much as) individual value is apparent. The majority of the contributions that make up this volume seek to demonstrate precisely this fact: whether individual or collective, certain freedoms are at stake that are valued across different ideologies and historical periods. One could say they both precede and succeed the concept of liberalism as a European political tradition.

While Viktor Orbán in Hungary is taken as the paradigmatic example of an illiberal democrat throughout the volume, and the Jarsosław Kaczyńzski-led Law and Justice government of Poland a second variation, the examples considered in the chapters of this book cover the European territory, including examples coming from France and Germany at the core of the European Union, or the United Kingdom, considered by many for centuries as a bastion of liberal democracy. Far from seeing illiberalism as a kind of 'Eastern European' disease that risks spreading, the volume attempts to develop a critique of illiberal democracy which explains how its techniques of power, ideological universe and political attractiveness relate to a terrain of liberalism which is fissured across borders. The advantage of this approach is to be able to integrate examples of illiberalism which are not only the doings of self-revindicating 'illiberal' actors, and indeed in some cases are the deeds of those claiming to be liberal.

The volume also considers the important example of Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of North Macedonia from 2006 to 2016, in two chapters (3 and 7), whose government displayed many traits of illiberal democracy, including rampant corruption, state capture of the judiciary,[16] limitations on press and academic freedom, and the scapegoating of minorities. The first illiberal leader overthrown by popular uprising, in the so-called Colorful Revolution of 2016 (see chapter 3 in this volume), Gruevski was offered political

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[15] Marlene Laruelle (2022): Illiberalism: a conceptual introduction, East European Politics, DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079, 2

[16] Vurmo, Gjergji, "Tailor-Made Laws in the Western Balkans: State Capture in Disguise," Center for European Policy Studies Policy Contribution, May 11, 2020 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Archive of European Integration), http://aei.pitt.edu/103372/.

asylum by Orbán to evade an international arrest warrant and continues to interfere in North Macedonian politics from his exile in Budapest, a testament to the cross-border project of illiberal democracy.

Despite holding many rallies and conferences making common cause with each other, self-proclaimed illiberal democrats have not yet established a common European political party in the European Parliament or Council of Europe. This can partly be attributed to financial and other incentives for their remaining distinct parties that work strategically in collaboration. But it is also due to important cleavages between even those actors who are happy to call themselves illiberal, most notably when it comes geopolitical attitudes towards Russia, which vary greatly between the Polish and Nordic illiberal democrats, those in central Europe, and in countries like France and Italy where illiberal parties have recently distanced themselves from previous links to Putin and attempted to situate themselves in the orthodoxy of NATO and Atlanticism. It may be that by the time of the 2024 European elections such a common party is established. But the variations amongst illiberal democrats in Europe, both inside and outside of the European Union, might also show the ways in which illiberal democracy is a reactionary symptom of the fragmenting of liberalism under different European contexts, rather than a positive and comprehensive ideological proposal for the future.

Overview of the Chapters in This Volume

Combining different examples, scales, and variations, this volume sees illiberal democracy as having emerged as a feature of the current evolutionary state of the European governance system, with local variations but systemic properties.

The first chapter, by Jacques Rupnik, who as a scholar and advisor to the late Czech President Václav Havel followed closely the post-Soviet transition in Central Europe, revisits the region more than 30 years after 1989 to look at the sources, scope, and specific forms of the illiberal regression of democracy that has developed there. It also tries to define the nature of the regimes emerging from a decade of democratic backsliding: they are no longer liberal democracies reflecting the values of the European Union, but neither are they examples of full-fledged authoritarianism of the kind found in these countries' Eastern neighbors such as Russia or Turkey. Rupnik deploys the concept of *democratura*, a contraction of democracy and dictatorship, to reflect the hybrid nature of these European illiberal regimes.

The second chapter, by international relations scholar Luke Cooper, examines autocratic nationalism as a hegemonic strategy of Viktor Orbán's. Despite the Hungarian statesman's dramatic turn from liberal poster boy of the Alliance of Young Democrats in 1989 to leader of the illiberal avant-garde in 2019, Cooper argues that Orbán and his government should not be seen as post-ideological or pragmatically flexible, but as having developed a distinctive and effective ideology based around autocratic nationalism, which attempts to change the ideological rules of the game in Hungary and internationally. Cooper argues that Orbán can thus be understood as a hegemonic actor in Gramscian terms. Three tools of power are highlighted as central to this hegemonic struggle: 1) fervent nationalism that presents migration and liberal rights as a threat to the inner sanctity of the Hungarian nation, 2) control of the media and judiciary, and 3) massive use of fraud and corruption to centralize power and dominate the domestic economy.

Where the first two chapters have started with central European examples paradigmatic of illiberal democracy, the third chapter, "From East to West, or Is It So?," by philosopher Katarina Kolozova, sees illiberalism as more of a general trend that favors the good of the state and the nation—that is, abstract collectives, at the expense of the socially- and culturally-defined groups that are more immediately experienced as tangible realities in one's daily life such as class, culture, neighborhoods, families, activist groups, etc. Unlike many of the ideologues of illiberalism or mere critics of liberalism, such as the right-wing French philosopher Alain de Benoist, she argues that the illiberal approach to governance of a totalitarian penchant seeks to not only suppress individual rights and individualism, but many collective

rights as well. It may be that the weakness of liberalism to defend itself against its illiberal critics is precisely a result of not appreciating the centrality of these collective rights. A trenchant division, introducing a dualism of the individual and the collective, is a fallacy that undermines the possibility of society itself. Furthermore, when attacked by "illiberal" leaders, certain groups – classes, social strata, gendered and sexed realities – can be counted on to be moved and mobilized against the totalitarian grasp not by individual but by collective shared interests, as with the example of the Colorful Revolution against Nikola Gruevski in North Macedonia has shown. A full appreciation of the relationship between individual and collective interests is therefore essential for an adequate theory of resistance to illiberalism.

The fourth chapter, "The Kidnapped Hyperdemocracy: From Citizen of Rage to Citizen of Fear**,**" by Amélie Jaques-Apke, director of the Berlin-based think tank Young Security Conference, focuses on the popularity of Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which started as a political party questioning Germany's adoption of the euro currency in the context of the Eurozone crisis, but rapidly turned into a xenophobic, authoritarian party in the context of the migration crisis in Europe from 2015 onwards. With particular support in the former East Germany, by following a populist playbook the AfD has successfully exploited the anger of citizens at social injustice while further stoking their fears. Jaques-Apke argues that the electoral success of the AfD shows the risks of European politics becoming a contest between technocratic management and hyper-populist response, or even the combination of the two in 'technopopulism', particularly if the populists are seen to be the only ones connecting with emotion and identity, themes picked up again in the seventh chapter of this collection in particular.

The fifth chapter, "From Berlin to Budapest and Back: Illiberal Democracy and the Mirror of Neoliberal Post-Democracy," by Seongcheol Kim, looks further at the relationship between neoliberal technocratic governance and populist illiberal democratic backlash, in the context of the management of economic crisis. It finds in Viktor Orbán's "illiberal democracy" and Angela Merkel's "market-conforming democracy" a paradoxical point of convergence consisting in the "post-political" denial of the need for democratic conflict, whether in the name of neoliberal economic rationality or a reified conception of a homogeneous "national interest." A key implication is that both forms of post-politics undermine not only liberal democracy as the terrain of a productive tension, but also democracy understood even in the narrower sense of popular sovereignty.

In the sixth chapter, "Core Values under Attack, Despite the Existence of Common Rules," Elise Bernard traces the origins of Europe's rule-of-law crisis back to the tensions implicit in the passing of sovereignty from monarchs to a depersonalized political authority at the beginning of modernity. As Pitkin observed, where freedom can be understood in general terms as ranging from the rejection of slavery to an absence of psychological or personal encumbrances, liberty requires a system of rules, a "network of restraint and order." In Europe, this means the supremacy of the rule of law and the system of fundamental rights. Through a close reading of the Polish legislative attack on the independence of the judiciary, the Hungarian government's limiting of the freedom of the press, and then opening up to consider wider European examples such as the yellow jackets movement in France, Bernard shows how certain conceptions of freedom can come into conflict with liberty, and the difficulties the European Union has had in maintaining a united approach to democracy buttressed by the rule of law.

"The Affective Landscape of Populism as Background for Illiberal Democracy," by Ana Blazheva, shows that populism works with a small number of closely related emotions, namely fear and its derivatives—anxiety, panic, paranoia, uncertainty, pride, shame, and anger. The strength of populism's approach in comparison to those of its competitors is to publicly articulate these privately-held feelings. The chapter elaborates the phenomenological background of these affects and how they shape the social landscape of illiberal and liberal democracy, including through shaping the political sphere itself, what counts as political, and what relationships political competitors have with one another, as rivals or as enemies.

In chapter 8, Zachary De Jong examines the phantasm of the annihilation of the West in Russian philosopher and geopolitical strategist Aleksandr Dugin's political thought. If Dugin himself cannot be considered an

illiberal democrat, his thought has proved an important reference point those developing an ideology of illiberalism. Dugin's conception of a world historical conflict between what he refers to as "Eurasia," with Russia as its central power, and its values system of tradition, spirituality, nationhood, solidarity, and ethnicity, which is opposed to the Atlanticist world of individualism, materialism, consumerism, and personal liberty, is essential to the worldview of many far-right and illiberal political ideologies and projects, even if Dugin himself remains a marginal figure. Showing both the roots of much of Dugin's thought in Western philosophy and its internal contradictions and slights of hand, the chapter aims to lay bare the racist, nihilist, and fascist tendencies often concealed in mystical and obscurantist language.

The concluding chapter of the collection, by Niccolò Milanese, aims to use the spatial-temporal interruption of the covid-19 pandemic as a radically-changed backdrop against which some of the underlying traits of illiberal democracy can be more clearly seen. By following the political reactions and responses to the pandemic in the United Kingdom, Hungary, and France, the chapter aims to show the ways that illiberal democracy is a systemic feature of the ways in which contemporary European governments relate to changing circumstances, the way governments seek to make the world governable while simultaneously seeking to gain political capital from unexpected events. Complicating the relationship between illiberalism and neo-liberalism to suggest that illiberal democracy is not a straightforward rejection of neoliberal ideas, but rather a reinforcement of authoritarian statist tendencies in a context in which the global norms of governance of the economy are changing dramatically, it suggests that illiberal democracy in Europe is deeply connected to the process of Europeanization itself. The integration of the European Union is a primary example of the political reorganization of space and time, or of scalar politics, which has profound implications for the fundamental elements of democracy, including of countries which are not or are no longer EU members. The political reaction to the pandemic has accelerated much of this reorganization, exacerbating inequalities and the gaps in rights and protection for an ever-increasing group of workers and migrants who slip between the cracks in governmental coverage, while promoting greater economic and political integration on a different plane, with different beneficiaries. The building, consolidation, and reorganization of political community in the 21st century is necessarily very different compared to what has gone before. Examining illiberalism, liberalism, or democracy as static concepts is just as barren an approach as examining them in one country in isolation from their interactions with others. It is above all to the dynamic, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach to the study of liberalism and its alternatives that this collection aims to contribute.

Illiberal Democracy and Hybrid Regimes in East-Central Europe

Jacques Rupnik

After the fall of the Communist regimes in 1989, the new political order in East-Central Europe (ECE) was inspired by the liberal project. This pertained primarily to the political realm, with the transition followed by democratic consolidation, ushering in a political system founded on free elections, constitutionalism, and the separation of powers. Furthermore, it also concerned the economic system being converted to a market economy, integrated into that of the European Union and, more generally, open to international trade. Finally, it brought about, to varying degrees, an evolution toward the development of civil society and more open societies characterized by a culture of tolerance and pluralism. This triple transformation created the conditions for integration into the European Union for these countries, which was then considered a point of no return. The European perspective and the process of accession based on conditionality functioned as an external anchor for the transition and the consolidation of these new democracies. Their integration into the Union was perceived as an irreversible democratic commitment, if not "the end of history" as described in Francis Fukuyama's essay.[1]

The Regression

Nowadays, Central and Eastern Europe has recaptured the attention of Western Europe, but for the opposite reasons of those of the early 1990s. It is no longer the "third wave" of democratization as described by Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington,[2] but quite to the contrary, an authoritarian reversal named "illiberal democracy" by Huntington's protégé, Fareed Zakaria,[3] that is the central issue. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall (which has now been down longer than the period during which it divided the city, symbolizing the divisions of a country and a continent), new walls and barbed-wire fences are being erected on the Eastern borders of the continent. Democratic change has been associated with dissidents, the fight for human rights, and the growth of civil society. Nowadays, we witness the rise of nationalism and the introduction of measures seeking to stifle the role of NGOs that could contest certain government policies. The motto of the post-1989 era was the "return to Europe" while major reforms necessary to join the European Union were adopted; now, the Union itself has become contested and even compared to the Soviet tutelage of the past.

The instigators of this backsliding from the post-1989 wave of democratizations are not the nostalgic Communists associated with the former regimes, but often some of those who had contributed to the democratic changes in their countries: in the late 1980s, Viktor Orbán, now the Hungarian prime minister, was the founder of a liberal dissident student movement that became known as Fidesz; Jarosław Kaczyński, now the uncontested leader of the Law and Justice party (PiS) in power in Poland, emerged from the Solidarność (Solidarity) movement that helped bring an end to that country's Communist regime and was an advisor to its leader and former president Lech Wałęsa. In October 2016, at Krynica in the Polish Tatra Mountains, Kaczyński and Orbán together called for a "counter-revolution" in Europe. The democratic revolutions of 1989 combined mobilization and negotiations. The "counter-revolution" does not take place

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

[2] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

[3] Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003). Fukuyama, like Zakaria, had also done his graduate studies under Huntington in Harvard University's Department of Government.

on the barricades but by way of elections. Orbán's Fidesz has won four consecutive parliamentary elections with half of the vote and a two-thirds majority of the seats in parliament. The PiS party in Poland won the majority of seats in the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament) in 2015, and again in October 2019. The revolutions of 1989 were accompanied by a brutal economic recession as a "shock therapy," which accompanied the transition to a market economy. The "counter-revolution" is taking place in the context of economic growth and an improvement (albeit unevenly distributed) in living standards.[4] Things have gone from the "return to Europe" of 1989, including the explicit goal of becoming member states of the European Union and catching up with the western part of the continent, to today's forces of nationalist populism riding the wave of distrust or even defiance toward Brussels while developing a sovereigntist rhetoric of a "Europe of nations."

How are we to explain this regression? What are the main features of the authoritarian drift? How are we to define the political regimes in the East of the continent?

Democracy Receding

The countries of the Visegrád Group (consisting of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) had been treated within the study of "transitology" (comparative studies of transitions to democracy) for almost two decades as being successful in consolidating their democracy as confirmed, year after year, by the evaluation of the institutes and think tanks specialized in democracy monitoring. The institutes in question have, however, identified an erosion since 2010, in some cases yielding to a striking backsliding. Long considered a "model student" of the transition, according to the reports on "Nations in Transit" published by the Washington-based think tank Freedom House, in the 2021 edition of the report Hungary ranked 15th out of the 29 post-Communist nations spanning Eastern Europe and Eurasia in terms of freedom, ahead of Bosnia & Herzegovina but just behind Albania and North Macedonia. Poland has been faring better, coming in at 7th place just ahead of Bulgaria and Romania, though still well behind Slovakia's 6th-place standing in terms of the countries' respective overall democracy scores.[5] The introduction to the 2020 "Nations in Transit" report puts it as follows:

> Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary has similarly dropped any pretense of respecting democratic institutions. After centralizing power, tilting the electoral playing field, taking over much of the media, and harassing critical civil society organizations since 2010, Orbán moved during 2019 to consolidate control over new areas of public life, including education and the arts. The 2020 adoption of an emergency law that allows the government to rule by decree indefinitely has further exposed the undemocratic character of Orbán's regime. Hungary's decline has been the most precipitous ever tracked in *Nations in Transit*; it was one of the three democratic frontrunners as of 2005, but in 2020 it became the first country to descend by two regime categories and leave the group of democracies entirely.[6]

Moreover, as far as corruption is concerned, according to Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index, Hungary is ranked 73rd in the world, at roughly the same level as or worse than some of its Balkan neighbors.[7] According to Reporters Without Borders, freedom of the press is under threat: its

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[4] Thirty years ago, Poland was among the poorest countries in Europe, whereas today, its GDP per capita is equal to that of Portugal and is higher than that of Greece.

[5] Elisha Aaron, David Meijer, Shannon O'Toole, and Tyler Roylance, "Nations in Transit 2021: The Antidemocratic Turn," Washington, DC, Freedom House, p. 26, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NIT_2021_final_042321.pdf.

[6] Zselyke Csaky, Introduction, in Noah Buyon, Shanon O'Toole, Tyler Roylance, and Mike Smeltzer, "Nations in Transit 2020: Dropping the Democratic Façade," Washington, DC, Freedom House, p. 1, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/05062020_FH_NIT2020_vfinal.pdf.

[7] Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2021, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021.

World Press Freedom Index ranks Hungary under Orbán 89th in the world and Poland 62nd, a situation in Europe that is comparable to that of Serbia or Kosovo.[8]

Evaluating Democracy

Beyond evaluations that resort to quantitative indicators (too precise to be accurate!), it is the trend that counts as well as the variations they suggest among countries and regions that used to be part of the Communist world. One can identify three post-1989 trajectories that refer to the notions of "hybrid regime," "electoral authoritarianism," or "democratorship," each of them according to rather different dynamics.

The accession of the countries of Central Europe (the Visegrád Group: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) into the European Union in May 2004 was considered a "success story," the completion of the democratization process, though by the 2010s some of the Central European states had witnessed an illiberal backsliding. In the Balkans, meanwhile, the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and the creation of new nation-states was accompanied by the rise of nationalist and populist movements favoring the emergence of authoritarian regimes—the idea of "the unity" of the nation as being under threat clearly not being conducive to the development of political pluralism. Certain countries (North Macedonia, Albania, and post-Milošević Serbia) have experienced a slow and uncertain evolution toward pluralism, in spite of the fact that its institutionalization and that of the and the rule of law remain rather rudimentary (hence the hybrid characterization of these regimes and the possibility of setbacks).

The countries of Europe's post-Soviet East along with the Caucasus and the Central Asian republics constitute a trio of geographic areas containing two distinct variants. One the one hand, there are the hard authoritarian regimes: Belarus under Aleksandr Lukashenko; Kazakhstan under the rule of Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has been described as "a combination of a Soviet leader and a mafia boss";[9] Azerbaijan and its dynastic regime based on the Aliev clan; or Tajikistan under Emomali Rahmon, in power for more than a quarter of a century and characterized by a personality cult that could compete with that of North Korea. On the other hand, there are the semi-authoritarian post-Soviet regimes that have gone through processes of democratization brought about by "color revolutions," such as in Georgia in 2003, Moldova in 2009, Armenia in 2018, and most importantly in Ukraine, in 2004 and again 2014. Asked about the difference between the Orange Revolution in Kiev in 2004 and that of 1989 in Prague, former Czech

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[8] Reporters Without Borders, "World Press Freedom Index 2022," Hungary, https://rsf.org/en/country/hungary. The 2020 report (https://rsf.org/en/2020-world-press-freedom-index-entering-decisive-decade-journalism-exacerbated-coronavirus) stated that in Poland, which was ranked 62nd (down three places from 2019), the government's control over the judiciary had adversely affected press freedom. Some courts use Article 212 of the penal code, which allows sentences for journalists of to up to a year in prison for defamation charges. In 2019, Poland had been ranked 59th, having repeatedly fallen from higher positions since 2015 (see Reporters Without Borders, "Poland: Journalist Investigated for Coverage of Gdansk Mayor's Assassination," February 27, 2020 [updated March 2, 2020], https://rsf.org/en/news/poland-journalist-investigated-coverage-gdansk-mayors-assassination). Up till now, judges have only imposed fines, but the damage has been done and an underlying climate of self-censorship has now come to the surface. In parts of southern Europe, a crusade by the authorities against the media is very active. In Bulgaria (111th place), which remains in the region's lowest position, an attempt by the public radio management to suspend (see Reporters Without Borders, "Grave Threat to Public Media Independence in Bulgaria," September 20, 2019, https://rsf.org/en/grave-threat-public-media-independence-bulgaria) the experienced journalist Silvia Velikova, a government critic, has highlighted the lack of independence of Bulgaria's public broadcasting media and the hold some political leaders have on editorial policy.   EU candidate countries Montenegro (105th place) and Albania (84th place) both fell two places after a year that saw journalists detained on the pretext of the fight against disinformation, and instances of legal harassment exemplified by the Kafkaesque trial of investigative reporter Jovo Martinovic (see Reporters Without Borders, "RSF Decries Montenegrin Journalist's 18-Month Jail Sentence," January 15, 2019, https://rsf.org/en/rsf-decries-montenegrin-journalists-18-month-jail-sentence). During the same period, many abuses directed against reporters in the Balkans went unpunished. Serbia came in at 93rd place, down another three places in the 2020 Index.

[9] Bakhytjan Toregojina, who opposes the regime, quoted in Benoît Vitkine, "The System of Nazarbaïev, Golden Hand and Astana Steel Handle," *Le Monde*, December 6, 2014.

President Václav Havel responded: "The 'velvet revolutions' of 1989 were revolutions against communism. The 'color revolutions' are revolutions against post-communism, a combination of an authoritarian regime and mafia style capitalism."[10]

The term "democratorship" (a contraction between "democracy" and "dictatorship") emphasizes the duality of a regime that seeks to combine elements of both systems. The term, similar to that of *democradura* originally coined by students of Latin America (a contraction of the Spanish words *democracia* [democracy] and *dura*, which is both the suffix for the word *dictadura* [dictatorship] as well as a standalone adjective meaning "hard") is, however, most often used to suggest that the reference to democracy mainly serves the purpose of camouflaging a confiscation of power.[11] The idea that democracy could become a façade that conceals the manipulation of the media system ("repressive tolerance," to use Herbert Marcuse's phrase)[12] dates back to the 1960s. However, the idea of a lure, a manipulation that seeks to achieve a pacification of the "silent majority" in Western democracies, has, of course, little to do with Vladimir Putin's Russia or the authoritarian regimes that prevail in much of the post-Soviet part of the world. The problems of the countries of Central Europe, are now partly like those of other members of the European Union and concern the old distinction between "formal democracy" and "substantive democracy,"[13] and partly the result the above-mentioned illiberal drift.

In a similar vein, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way put forward the concept of "competitive authoritarianism,"[14] which seems pertinent in describing the development of certain political regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. These regimes ensure a degree of political competition by virtue of an electoral process that is, however, distorted or perverted given that the incumbent party is able to use all the levers at its disposal (the executive branch, the legislature, the security apparatus, and the media) to curtail the opposition's access to the public sphere and thus consolidate its hold on power.

Orbán's Hungary and Kaczyński's Poland represent two prime examples of democratic backsliding, even though there are other countries in the region that have been following a similar trend. "To make Budapest in Warsaw," was the declared ambition of PiS in Poland in the 2015 election campaign, and indeed the Hungarian model was applied rather thoroughly. What are its main traits?

Illiberal Democracy

Orbán came to power in the spring of 2010 by winning half of the votes cast in the election, enabling him to form a constitutional majority with two-thirds of the seats in parliament, which permitted him to unleash a "legislative storm" (Orbán's term) with astounding speed, leading to a series of measures undermining the separation of powers as well as the independence of the constitutional court and the judiciary. The same approach was applied by PiS in Poland, which, since it came to power in 2015, has adopted legislation concerning the appointment of judges as well the control of the media. In October 2018, the former

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[10] Václav Havel, interview with Jacques Rupnik: "Il est impératif de poser des questions dérangeantes à M. Poutine," *Le Monde*, February 24, 2005).

[11] The first to attempt an Anglicization of the Spanish term was the Swedish author Vilhelm Moberg, in his provocatively-titled article, "Sweden, Democratura?" *Dagens Nyheter*, December 14, 1965.

[12] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

[13] Mary Kaldor and Ivan Vejvoda, "Democratization in Central and East European Countries," *International Affairs* 73, no. 1 (1997): 59–82. The authors' assessment of the state of democracy distinguishes the adoption of elections and democratic institutions from a broader notion of democracy that entails participation, the development of a vibrant civil society, and a pluralist public space. On the definitions and distinctions between democracies as modes of governance, see Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (summer 1991): 75–88, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/225590.

[14] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

president of the Constitutional Court of Poland, Andrzej Rzepliński, stated that his successor's appointment by PiS in 2016 was meant to turn the Court into the tool of a government engaged in the "destruction of the rule of law."[15] After establishing control over the Constitutional Court, new laws adopted in 2017 and 2019 on the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court raised even more broadly the question of the subordination of the judiciary to the political branches of government. This reopening of the issue of the separation of powers is made in the name of a certain rejection of what Kaczyński has called a "legal impossibility," as well as in the name of a majoritarian concept of democracy specific to the populist discourse: "In a democracy, the sovereign is the people, their representative parliament and, in the Polish case, the elected president," said Kaczyński. "If we are to have a democratic state of law, no state authority, including the constitutional tribunal, can disregard legislation."[16]

Such words and, more generally, such an approach, correspond with those of Orbán in Hungary. They resonate with the position of the former president of the Hungarian Constitutional Court, András Sólyom, who stated in March 2011 that "the rule of law no longer exists in Hungary."[17] This statement was made following the adoption of a constitutional amendment authorizing a parliamentary majority of two-thirds to annul or modify a decision issued by the Constitutional Court. In Poland, however (and this is an important difference between it and Hungary), PiS does not have at its disposal a majority that would permit it to modify the constitution; it suffices that it can circumvent or bend the constitutional law. According to Jarosław Kurski, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Gazeta*, "the parliament has become an instrument to enable [the] adoption of laws that are unconstitutional, without deliberation and without consultation."[18]

In Hungary as in Poland, these repeated examples of the calling into question of the very foundation of the rule of law were accompanied by attacks on the independence of the media. In Poland, the preferred target was the public broadcasting service, from which more than 200 journalists have been fired. The same happened earlier in Hungary, where a council responsible for monitoring the "objectivity" of the media had been appointed by the government. It is now easier to compare the Hungarian public broadcasting service to that of China than to the BBC.[19] Finally, the third element is the end of the political neutrality of public administration: loyalty to a political party trumps competence. The result of such a takeover by the political party in power was described by legal scholar Kim Lane Scheppele as a "Frankenstate," combining the worst practices from different existing systems of governance.[20]

All of these attacks on the separation of powers and against the freedom of the press are made in the name of a certain idea of democracy. That is exactly what Orbán did in his 2014 speech on "illiberal democracy": "We must affirm that democracy is not necessarily liberal. The fact that something isn't liberal does not mean that it is not democratic."[21]

From such a vantage point, democracy is based on the sovereignty of the people, incarnated in a government created by a party majority that should not be impeded by anything—neither constitutional nor institutional constraints. This calls into question the role of institutions presumed to be politically neutral (such as the constitutional court, the central bank, the audit court, etc.) more generally, in the sense of what Kaczyński has called "legal impossibilism." Elected officials cannot be constrained by unelected bodies. Somewhere between the "will of the nation," in the words of Schmitt, and the "general will," in the words

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[15] Andrzej Rzepliński, interview by Jacques Rupnik, October 18, 2018, Academy of Science, Warsaw, Poland.

[16] Christian Davis, "Poland Is 'on Road to Autocracy,' Says Constitutional Court President," *Guardian*, December 18, 2016.

[17] MTI (Magyar Távirati Iroda), "Ex-President Urges Successor to Veto Constitutional Changes," *MTI*, March 11, 2013.

[18] Jaroslaw Kurski, (editor-in-chief, *Gazeta*, comments made during a seminar on "Les démocraties illibérales en Europe" (Illiberal democracies in Europe), September 13, 2018. National Assembly of France.

[19] In 2010, a delegation from ORTT, the regulating body of audio-visual services in Hungary, visited China, where both parties expressed a willingness to cooperate in this area. According to the Hungarian news agency MTI, the Hungarian delegation requested from its Chinese counterpart documents that concern TV broadcasting and details on programming policies. "Tirts Tamás, Pekingben a magyar-kínai médiakapcsolatokról," HirExtra.hu, April 18, 2010.

[20] Kim Lane Scheppele, Princeton professor, lecture given at the Council on European Studies, Paris, July 7, 2015.

[21] Full Text of Viktor Orbán's Speech at Băile Tuşnad (known as Tusnádfürdő in Hungarian), Romania on July 29, 2014, available at BudapestBeacon.com.

of Rousseau, there are essential ingredients of what is being deemed to justify the attacks on the separation of powers and their concentration or confiscation by the executive branch—more specifically, by the PiS in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary—and, of course, by their respective leaders. It is in this sense that these representative cases are linked with the more general problematics of the populist challenge to liberal democracy.

An important element in understanding the electoral successes of the nationalist-populist parties is the resonance of some their preferred issues among the societies of Central and Eastern Europe. Despite a broader context of democratic disenchantment, for the majority of citizens in the region, democracy remains the best political regime. However, already a survey published on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall showed that only a third of the citizenry believed that they had a greater influence on the government than before 1989, whereas half of the respondents "did not see any change."[22] In a survey published 10 years later, democracy still had no rival, but only a minority of the citizens polled in five Central and Eastern European states (24% of Hungarians, 33% of Slovaks and Romanians, 43% of Poles, and 50% of Czechs) were satisfied with the functioning of democracy.[23] A "government of experts" is favored by 92% of Czechs and Slovaks, as well as by 86% of Hungarians, as opposed to slightly more than a half in the West of the continent. Moreover, a worrying fascination with the idea of a "strongman" as head of state has been emerging: 46% in the East (with even a majority of those polled in Romania, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic) as opposed to 27% in the Western Europe, embrace the idea. If we take into consideration the very low trust in the institutions of parliamentary democracy and in the political elites, and even in the judiciary (with reference to "corrupt" and "inefficient" judges), one can see the emerging appeal in some of these societies of centralizing political power at the expense of the checks and balances associated with the rule of law.

Apart from democratic disillusionment, the second major source of the illiberal or authoritarian drift is nationalism. The alter ego of people's sovereignty is national sovereignty, the conviction that a strong devolution of political power should protect an individual member state from the European Union's intrusions, as well as from the migration wave. The latter enabled Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, Robert Fico in Slovakia, and Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic to elevate themselves to the status of defenders of the nation against these new threats (partly from the surge in Middle Eastern migrants, but also from the European Commission with its policy of quotas for the distribution of migrants among EU member states).

In his classic work on nationalism in the region, "The Miseries of East European Small States" (1946),[24] the Hungarian political thinker István Bibó argued that democracy was under threat when the cause of freedom came into conflict with the cause of the nation. Democracy in Central Europe should, however, be able to avoid having to choose between individual and collective liberties. The situation created by the migrant crisis in 2015, one without precedent in postwar Europe, was framed by the political elites in Central Europe precisely in that way: the nation (its identity, its culture) is under threat from the freedom of movement (of migrants) in a Europe without borders. In this sense the migration crisis was a catalyst for the nationalist-populist turn in Central Europe.

In the context of democratic backsliding throughout the region, the political leaders as well as the media in the Visegrád Group countries have been reproducing variations on a theme that engenders anxiety about an invasion of Muslim migrants making use of the historical Ottoman route through Turkey and the Balkans

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[22] New Europe Barometer, as quoted in Richard Rose, *Understanding Post-Communist Transformation: A Bottom up Approach* (London: Routledge, 2009), 101.

[23] For an analysis of Central and Eastern Europe as part of an international survey, see Jacques Rupnik, "Hongrois, Polonais, Slovaques et Tchèques considèrent la démocratie comme le meilleur système," in *Democraties sous tension: une enquête planétaire*, ed. Dominique Reynié (Paris: Fondation pour l'Innovation Politique, 2019), p. 112–113. See also the previous survey in Dominique Reynié, ed., *Où va la démocratie?* (Paris: Plon, 2017), 127–141.

[24] István Bibó, "The Miseries of East European Small States," in *The Art of Peacemaking: Political Essays by István Bibó*, World Thought in Translation, trans. Péter Pázstor, ed. Iván Zoltán Dénes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

to reach the heart of Europe. This poses a security threat, and a risk of epidemics, according to Kaczyński. The exploitation of the migrant crisis has been proven to pay off during elections. Orbán, who was losing his advantage in the polls in the spring of 2015, witnessed a spectacular resurgence of his popularity by the beginning of the summer, with the referendum on immigration being held on October 2, 2016.[25] In Slovakia, Robert Fico, an "Orbán of the Left," also wanted to transform the anti-migration disposition of the voters into an electoral victory, without the anticipation that he would have to face competition on a political terrain overcrowded with those on the nationalist right.[26] Two elements are essential to understanding the specificity of the Central European approach to the migration crisis.

The first element consists of the ethno-cultural concept of the nation, borrowed from the 19th-century German model of a nation as being construed around a shared language, culture, and often religious affiliation as well. This model of a *Kulturnation* has recently been transposed on a European level: the fence built on the border with Serbia supposedly turned Hungary into a bulwark of European civilization.

The second element is linked to the fact that, since World War II, the nations of Central-Eastern Europe have become ethnically and linguistically more homogeneous, not having experienced, in the era of the Cold War, the migrations coming from the Mediterranean. They do not have the "postcolonial complex" of the Westerners and consider the model of a multicultural society a complete failure. Nationalism and opposition to multiculturalism cement their ideological sense of themselves.

The Concept and the Context

The democratic backsliding among the newer member states of in Central Europe raises concerns that, thirty years later, there has been a return to a division between East and West: between liberal democracy in Western Europe, and dictatorships and authoritarian regimes to the East of the continent (Vladimir Putin's Russia, Aleksandr Lukashenko's Belarus, or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey), with the rise of "illiberal democracy" causing Central Europe to lean toward the Eastern pattern. The question of democracy's consolidation thus also has high geopolitical stakes.

However, such a reading of the situation is an oversimplification. The surge of nationalist-populist movements and of an authoritarian temptation is a pan-European and indeed an international phenomenon. After Brexit in the United Kingdom and the election of Donald Trump in the United States in 2016, two pillars of liberal democracy have been faltering, and the neo-authoritarians of Central Europe have seen these two occurrences as legitimizing their own projects at home. These have converged in their campaigns for the European elections in May 2019, in order to defeat the pro-EU "liberal progressives."

In other words, the rise of authoritarian populist movements is not merely a post-Communist but rather a pan-European phenomenon. One significant difference is the fact that in the East of the continent they have actually been in power. The question then arises: are the illiberal regimes in the East an anomaly, a trend that is a passing fever, or are they the harbingers of a coming new normal of a post-liberal or post-democratic European order?[27]

This leads us to a twofold realization. On the one hand, in the 1990s, the concept of "democratorship" could be applied to the post-Communist transitions toward a different form of authoritarianism: the Serbia of Slobodan Milošević, Croatia under Franjo Tuđman, Slovakia under Vladimír Mečiar, and Ukraine under Leonid Kuchma. All these countries have, at a differing pace and in different degrees, evolved toward

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[25] Certainly, the rejection of immigration was approved by an overwhelming majority of registered voters, although the quorum of 50% participation was not attained and the outcome of the referendum thus not binding.

[26] Henry Foy, "Anti-Migrant Rhetoric Dominates Slovakia Vote," *Financial Times*, March 4, 2016.

[27] For further developments on this issue, see Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005).

becoming more democratic. By its very nature, hybridity is not fixed and can evolve either towards a positive outcome, as in Slovakia, or into a pattern of backsliding, as in Serbia under Vučić.

Conversely, the backsliding toward authoritarianism observed in some Central European member states confronts the EU with the need to address the rise of illiberal democracy in its midst, with the awareness that challenges to the rule of law and the free press (the core of liberal democracy in the EU) represent a threat to the very foundations of the European Union. An unprecedented situation has developed, posing important questions for the future: did the societies of these countries, in the course of their first two decades since independence, build up sufficient "antibodies" to resist and rein in the forces of authoritarian regression? Such may be the case in Poland but, as is often the case in history, it seems difficult to draw broader generalizations from the Polish case. It seems also that the geopolitical challenge posed by Russia's war in Ukraine has made the European Commission more cautious or even reluctant to implement rule-of-law conditionality on Poland. Finally, the essential question remains: does belonging to the European Union constitute for the countries of Central Europe a sufficient constraint, framework, or dam that can stem the illiberal tide?

Translation from French by Katerina Kolozova

Autocratic Nationalism in Hungary:
Viktor Orbán as a Hegemonic Actor

Luke Cooper

"The regime of Viktor Orbán is post-ideological." This is a common refrain of contemporary Hungarian opposition leaders and activists, but is it correct? They argue the system created by Orbán is not underpinned by a coherent ideological worldview. Instead, it constitutes a vehicle for the extension of his personal power through the control of the governing party, Fidesz, which holds an increasingly vise-like grip on the Hungarian state itself. When I met the Hungarian academic and former politician András Bozóki in the fall of 2018, he reflected this wider sensibility found in Hungary, describing Orbánism as "postmodern despotism"[1]—that is, a vision that deliberately avoids building upon a firm foundation within a particular ideological family. In written form, Bozóki has elaborated further on this point: "Instead of ideas, Orbán believes in maximizing power, because for him it is not freedom but tight-fisted leadership that can assure order."[2] Distinguishing this from conventional conservatism, he adds: "Viktor Orbán is in no way a conservative politician; he is a nationalist and populist leader who prefers confrontation to compromise. He thinks that competition is always a zero-sum game in which 'either-or' choices cannot be transformed into "more or less" kinds of solutions."[3] Orbán's somewhat flexible ideological history often serves to underpin this perspective. A one-time liberal student leader and activist in the peaceful revolution of 1989, Orbán would turn the Fidesz party towards conservatism after its unsuccessful campaign in the elections of 1994. Zsuzsanna Szelenyi, a fellow veteran of 1989 who left the party at the time of its conservative turn away from liberalism, recalls how Orbán had already exhibited autocratic tendencies from the moment he assumed the presidency of the party in 1992: "When Orbán took over the party he changed the internal structures very quickly." And there was a similarity, she argues, to his eventual takeover of the Hungarian political system: "it was completely the same story."[4] This emphasis on Orbán's personal ruthlessness, ambition, and lust for power is common among the liberal opposition in Hungary. Yet there is also a recognition by Hungarians and other Europeans alike that the rise of authoritarianism is an international phenomenon, requiring reflection on its structural qualities. In this respect, the global significance of Orbán lies in the ideas that he has promoted internationally: the ideological ambitions that he advocates other states take up.

This poses the question of whether there is indeed such a thing as "Orbánism." Opponents of the Hungarian government tend to eschew this claim, instead arguing that Orbán's rule is characterized by three main features. Firstly, Orbán is represented as holding a preference for maximizing personal power and control more than any specific ideological commitment or vision. Secondly, he is seen as a chameleon character who is able to adopt different ideological standpoints as and when necessary in order to maintain and extend his power. Thirdly, he rejects seeking consensus through deliberation; instead, politics is treated as a zero-sum game to maximize personal power and vanquish political opponents. In what follows, I will offer a broader conceptualization of Orbánism that treats it as a coherent ideological movement, rather than a kleptocratic enterprise for the expansion of Orbán's personal power (although, as we shall see, these two possible characterizations are far from mutually exclusive).

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[1] András Bozóki, Professor in the Department of Political Science at the Central European University, interview with the author, November 5, 2018, Vienna.
[2] András Bozóki, "Broken Democracy, Predatory State, and Nationalist Populism," in *The Hungarian Patient: Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy*, ed. Péter Krasztev and Jon Van Til (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 15.
[3] Bozóki, "Broken Democracy," 15.
[4] Zsuzsanna Szelenyi, interview with the author, September 19, 2018, Vienna.

Drawing on Orbán's speeches since the Fidesz party's return to power in 2010, as well as a 2019 interview with the Hungarian government's international spokesman Zoltán Kovács, I question the claim that the love of power alone drives Orbán forward and argue there is ideological coherence to the political system Fidesz has created. At the heart of this lies Orbán's rejection of liberalism and advocacy of an "illiberal state."[5] Strikingly, Orbán's original take up of this term in a 2014 speech[6] was novel in its embrace of a term that has primarily been used pejoratively to describe formally democratic states with weak constitutional and rule-of-law protections.[7] In contrast, Orbán has positively vaunted his illiberalism in Hungary and overseas. In doing so, Orbán has become, I argue, a hegemonic actor in the Gramscian sense: that is, he has sought to bind Hungarian society around a new ideological framework counterposed to the *status quo ante*.[8] This, in turn, made Orbán a counter-hegemonic actor within the broader international scene as he openly rejected the liberalism that has been a central assumption of post-war European governance.

In combination, these kinds of discourses can be labeled "autocratic nationalism,"[9] a distinct amalgam of ideologies that constitutes a new rival hegemonic force in 21st-century Europe. This conception is consistent with what the editors of the present volume define as "illiberal democracy," a mode of institutional politics that maintains the ritual of voting to confer collective legitimacy on governments but dispenses with a range of rights-based and rule-of-law elements associated with liberal democratic practices. However, the conception used here foregrounds the identitarian element in this political vision, highlighting the critical relationship between a form of legitimacy based on ethnic nationalism and a type of rulership that is highly centralized, illiberal, and corrupt. I pursue the argument for Orbán as a coherent autocratic nationalist in three parts.

First, I contrast the accounts of power offered by Bertrand Russell and Antonio Gramsci. While these two figures are rarely considered in combination, they are relevant to this discussion in the following respects: Russell argues that power must always be socially contextualized; Gramsci explores the modalities that govern how power is exercised and contested. Both suggest, correctly in my view, that power is always and everywhere an ideological phenomenon. I introduce through this discussion Gramsci's three-part distinction between *hegemony*, *fraud/corruption*, and *domination* as distinct forms of power maximization. Second, I use this framework to distinguish between the hegemonic side of Orbánism, which derive from his specific articulation of illiberal, conservative, and nationalist themes, and the autocratic side. The latter is closer to what Gramsci referred to as fraud and corruption as tools of power that lie between force (domination) and persuasion (hegemony). Third, I argue that autocratic nationalism represents a coherent set of ideas that constitutes a new ideological challenge to the dominance of liberalism in Europe and elsewhere.

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[5] Viktor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp,' " website of the Hungarian Government, July 26, 2014, http://2010-2015.miniszterelnok.hu/in_english_article/_prime_minister_viktor_orban_s_speech_at_the_25th_balvanyos_summer_free_university_and_student_camp.

[6] "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp.' "

[7] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (November–December 1997): 22–43; Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, Revised edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

[8] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

[9] The present piece was originally written in 2020. In my 2021 book, *Authoritarian Contagion,* I advanced the concept of "authoritarian protectionism" as an analytical formula for the phenomena of contemporary anti-democratic trends. See Luke Cooper, *Authoritarian Contagion: The Global Threat to Democracy* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021).

Gramsci and Russell: Power Is Always and Everywhere Ideological

Orbánism is generally cast as an exercise concerned above all with the love of power. It is a depiction that recalls Bertrand Russell's statement that "[p]ower, like vanity, is insatiable."[10] For Russell, this desire was impossible to ever satisfy, yet was also the animating force in the lives of elites across a variety of fields. The dark side of power lay in the satisfaction derived from inflicting pain or discomfort, a pleasure that might be attained from saying "no" to the requests of those over whom power is exercised.[11] But Russell argued that power also has positive potential: seeking influence, and pursuing scientific discovery, education, or knowledge in whatever form could all be seen as motivated by a desire to hold power, at least in the form of desiring authority and standing. And this nuance led Russell to strictly qualify his critique of power in two ways. On the one hand, he argued that the desires animating the pursuit of power were context-dependent: the environment mixed symbiotically with the interests and motivations of those seeking power to determine the form it took.[12] This context was as important as the desire itself to whether power would be pursued in a self-serving or socially productive fashion. On the other hand, in relation to politics specifically, he argued actors were also motivated not only by the trappings of power but also the "desire to see some state of affairs realized which … [they] prefer to the status quo."[13] Such ideological coordinates therefore go hand in hand with the pursuit of power.

Through these steps Russell suggests that love of power alone is insufficient to capture the modalities governing its use. To explain a particular strategy for power, one is forced to return to the ideas mobilized by those seeking it *and* the social and institutional context they inhabit. In short, in any particular circumstance, strategies for power maximization require a set of justifications. The harshest act of brute force and oppression, for example, is always combined with a language justifying its use. Even though such discourses may themselves entail a violent othering of the victims they are, nonetheless, mobilized to create support amongst the populace for these hateful acts. In other words, power is always and everywhere ideological. Orbán's desire for power is evident from his personal history. He shifted pragmatically from young liberal (1989) to conservative (1994) and authoritarian (2010). But to understand how he secured and consolidated his dominance of the Hungarian political scene requires an exploration of the links he serviced and maintained in the country's body politic.

Gramsci was famously interested in these ideational relations that create a codependence between power and consent.[14] Indeed, his famous distinction between dominance (force) and hegemony (persuasion) can be located within the logic of Russell's assumptions. For it provides an account of the tools of power that actors can draw on within particular settings to lead on the political terrain. Gramsci argued that domination (force) and hegemony (consent) "balance each other reciprocally."[15] And these two elements, domination and hegemony, have occupied the focus of most readings of his work. However, there is a third element that Gramsci once ventured, fraud and corruption, which seems particularly relevant to the ideological form of Orbánism:

> The "normal" exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so called organs of public opinion newspapers and associations which,

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[10] Bertrand Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 163.

[11] Russell, *Human Society*, 163.

[12] Russell, *Human Society*, 164.

[13] Russell, *Human Society*, 164.

[14] Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation Between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[15] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 80.

therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied. Between consent and force stands corruption/fraud (which is characteristic of certain situations when it is hard to exercise the hegemonic function, and when the use of force is too risky).[16]

Gramsci was, of course, analyzing the quite different political environment of the early 20th century. However, there are elements of this picture that resonate with the European context a century later. Notably, while the ways in which public opinion is constructed have been transformed by the digital age, those seeking power in democratic societies must still construct consent by building an apparatus of persuasion that is able to effectively project messages through the media, public associations, and all available communicative channels. Continuously measured, contested, and subject to interventions aimed at coalescing particular sensibilities and outlooks, this public sphere is critical to the democratic struggle for state power.

Drawing on Gramsci, we can identify three tools of power: firstly, the use of domination and force to secure control; secondly, the articulation of hegemony (persuasion and consent) to win popular support; and thirdly, developing Gramsci's intermediate category, the use of corrupt practices to centralize power and assert greater influence in the conduct of public debate. While, as Max Weber long ago argued, all states ultimately rest upon the existence of force,[17] it is notable that Hungary under Orbán has not witnessed the use of violent repression as a political tool—a contrast, for example, to Vladimir Putin's Russia.[18] Rather, the autocratic nationalism characteristic of Orbánism has focused instead on the two other tools. It has sought hegemony through the mobilization of ethno-nationalist conceptions of belonging and interest, and it has utilized corrupt practices at the intersection of the state and public to assert much greater levels of autocratic control on institutions and the media.

Ethno-Nationalism as a Hegemonic Tool of Power

Orbán's ethno-nationalist rhetoric has radicalized over time, particularly following his second consecutive election victory in 2014. The hegemonic qualities of this intervention can be seen in how it was constructed as a radical alternative to the status quo order in Europe; he looked to change how Hungarians think about their community, sense of belonging, and the outside world. To use Chantal Mouffe's term, this created a frontier of the political (that is, it established, in a typically populist fashion, "others" against which Orbán's vision would be defined).[19] The term *illiberalism* has, in itself, a strong counter-hegemonic quality. By subverting its pejorative analytical usage and positively embracing the term,[20] Orbán has used this concept as a point of critique for the rest of Europe. He could, potentially, have pursued more or less the same domestic policy with a euphemistic language, grounding his nationalist politics in traditional conservative rhetoric. Instead, by making this shift to illiberalism, he moved on to a more overtly counter-hegemonic terrain. Challenging the European status quo, he linked his efforts in Hungary to a global rise of authoritarian nationalism, citing Singapore, China, India, Russia, and Turkey as examples of the exhaustion of liberalism and backing an alternative to the 1989 paradigm.[21]

Orbán argued that his "illiberal state" constituted "a different, special, national approach,"[22] which was

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[16] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 80.

[17] Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in John Dreijmanis (eds), *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2008): 155–208.

[18] Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, iBook edition (London: Bodley Head, 2018); Leon Aron, "Putin versus Civil Society: The Long Struggle for Freedom," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 3 (July 11, 2013): 62–74.

[19] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 2005);
——— *For a Left Populism*, Reprint edition (London: Verso, 2019).

[20] Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy."

[21] Orbán, Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp.

[22] Orbán, Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp.

tailored to the experience of central and eastern Europe while also drawing on these other global illiberal models. Only later radicalizing his rejection of individual freedoms and minority rights, his focus in 2014 implied a preference for the conservative notion of organicity: "the Hungarian nation is not simply a group of individuals but a community that must be organized, reinforced, and in fact constructed."[23] Nonetheless, the speech still defined what he meant by this in authoritarian terms, indicating the intended direction of the Fidesz government rather pointedly. Orbán denounced nongovernmental organizations as "paid political activists who are attempting to enforce foreign interests here in Hungary."[24] This nationalist *Aufheben* of the conservative concept of organicity thereby departed from the classical notion considerably. Classical conservative political thought was hostile to "pure democracy" on the grounds that it could exercise "cruel oppressions upon the minority."[25] Orbán, in contrast, declared for the *absolute* rights of the national majority. The hegemonic device lay in the mobilization of hostility to foreign interests and liberal thought, which then fed into the construction of an increasingly autocratic state domestically. A relationship between the use of hegemonic and corrupt practices thereby emerged; nationalistic rhetoric provided the legitimizing framework for state measures (see below) that closed down opportunities for public accountability.

Hegemonic interventions create narratives that seek to change how people think about state and society. In this respect, one can now see British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and American President Ronald Reagan as the exemplar cases of hegemonic transformation on the right. Both saw political conflict as "a war of ideas," which was "an orientation that generated a particularly polemical type of politics."[26] Recall how we noted that Bozóki described Orbánism in similar terms at the outset. This resemblance is indicative of how both Reagan and Thatcher shared with Orbán a hegemonic desire to change the rules of the game. They sought radical disruption of the status quo, not accommodation to existing mindsets. Thatcher, in particular, attempted to actively change how British citizens thought about their everyday lives and political community. The narrative focused on the failure of socialism and the tyranny of trade union organization at the close of the 1970s. This was attached to a political theory of conservative individualism. "We have a simple rule to guide us," she wrote, during the election of 1979. "[If] there's an argument about whether the State or the individual should decide, we give … the benefit of the doubt to the individual. We believe that the very essence of freedom is individual responsibility—and we trust the creative majority to take sensible decisions for themselves and their families."[27] Thatcherism "exploited the necessarily contradictory structure of popular ideology, playing the discourse of the liberal economy off against the discourse of the organic nation and the disciplined society."[28] Drawing this close connection with the muscular individualism of the free market and the cultural image of the hard-working middle-class family gave Thatcher this fervent—indeed fanatical—moral agenda, which sought to recast the sensibilities of the British public around a new mission based on muscular capitalism.

Hegemonic intervention can therefore be distinguished from everyday politics by its strong focus on transforming what might be called the political assumptions underlying public consciousness. A similar focus on narrative and popular philosophy is found in Orbánism. Interestingly, while Thatcher showed a strong predilection for nationalistic and strong state ("law and order") rhetoric, notably over the Falkland Islands (1982) and Brixton Riots (1981), her account of the centrality of the hard-working individual to the body politic of the nation was radically different from how Orbán has come to view this question. For Orbán departs significantly from the individualism that was so fundamental to the 1980s Anglo-American new right. Whereas Thatcher placed individualism, in a highly egotistical form, at the center of the hegemonic political practice she pursued, Orbán has completely rejected this. As he puts it:

> According to the liberal notion of freedom, you can only be free if you discard everything

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[23] Orbán, Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp.

[24] Orbán, Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp.

[25] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Reprint, London: J. M. Dent and Sons, [1790] 1951), 121–22.

[26] Deudney, Daniel, and G. John Ikenberry, "Who Won the Cold War?" *Foreign Policy*, no. 87 (1992): 133.

[27] Margaret Thatcher, "Create Not Destroy," *Yorkshire Post*, May 1, 1979, available at Margaret Thatcher Foundation, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104058.

[28] Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), 85.

that involves you in belonging somewhere: borders, the past, language, religion, culture, and tradition. If you can free yourself from all this, if you can leave it all behind, then you're a free person. As tends to happen, the antithesis of this has also come into being, and this is what I call "illiberalism." This way of reasoning states that the individual's appeal to freedom must not override the interests of the community. There is a majority, and it must be respected, because that is the essence of democracy.[29]

Through this reactionary rhetoric, Orbánism has created a new form of hegemonic thinking that offers a sweeping rejection of constitutional liberties and individual and minority rights in favor of a vulgar national-majoritarianism. Orbán's historical narrative starts with the liberal transformation emerging with the fall of Communism in 1989 and the crises of the next decade. Fidesz's electoral victory in 2010 is seen as setting Hungary on a new path to an era of "illiberal or national transformation."[30] This self-consciously hegemonic reasoning seeks to put society on a new ideational grounding. As Orbán has put it, "similarly to that transformation [in the 1990s], we have put our thinking and culture on a new footing—also in terms of relations between individuals."[31] In short, this is conceived as a "new order" with its own political thought and promoted regionally and globally as a far-right alternative to liberalism.

In the spring of 2019, I interviewed Zoltán Kovács, the Hungarian government's international spokesman. He emerged as the face of the Hungarian government as it entered the international spotlight due to its absolute opposition to refugee protection in the course of the 2015 migrant crisis. According to his office, he gave between 5,000 and 6,000 interviews between 2015 and 2018.[32] Like Orbán, Kovács attempts no concealment of the Hungarian government's complete opposition to liberalism. But he also frankly locates this within the 1990s experience of post-Soviet transition: "the connotation, the memories of liberalism as a political ideology are bad in this region."[33] Thus in the minds of this new far right the hegemonic shift they are seeking from liberalism to authoritarianism emerges strongly out of the popular resentment over the disappointments of post-Communist society. Highly solipsistic reasoning is used to justify the rejection of a rights-based order. Kovács argued, for example, that the very concept of NGOs was undemocratic because they wield influence in the public sphere despite "never [having] been elected … never [having] tested themselves at democratic elections."[34] NGOs are, of course, simply associations whose activity constitutes the civil society so important to the free public discussion and enquiry on which fair democratic elections depend. They are the lifeblood of this democratic culture that has been brought into question by Orbánism. A form of regulatory repression, which we will come to below, has been used as a political tool to squeeze the space available for public criticism of Fidesz.

Another element of Orbánism's hegemonic intervention lies in a highly racialized vocabulary regarding immigrants and alleged foreign interference in Hungary. A central figure in Orbán's ideological attack on civil society has been George Soros, the Hungarian-American financier and philanthropist. During the 2018 Hungarian elections the Fidesz campaign focused overwhelmingly on his alleged influence in Hungary. Fidesz argued his philanthropic support for the Central European University and Hungarian civil society organizations was part of a conspiracy against the interests of the Hungarian majority. The campaign aggressively mobilized anti-Semitic and Islamophobic rhetoric to make its case. This involved the ancient anti-Semitic canard of a Jewish financial oligarchy controlling global political events. "We must speak frankly and unequivocally," Orbán argued in the closing speech of the campaign, "about the future that is

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[29] Viktor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 30th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp," website of the Hungarian Government, July 27, 2019, https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-30th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp/.

[30] Orbán, Speech at the 30th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp.

[31] Orbán, Speech at the 30th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp.

[32] Fidesz international department, email message to author, March 28, 2019.

[33] Zoltán Kovács (international spokesman, Hungarian government), interview with the author March 27, 2019.

[34] Zoltán Kovács, interview with the author.

intended for us in Brussels, in the United Nations, and in the *alchemical* workshop of George Soros."[35] (emphasis added) He argued these groups were part of a global elite conspiracy to flood Hungary with immigrants:

> [W]e must tell everyone about the danger that threatens our country … Look around: the world we live in is not exactly peaceful. Europe is afflicted by a number of conflicts: armies are fighting immediately to the east of us; and there is the threat of a trade war between the European Union and the United States. But the greatest threat of all is posed by the millions of immigrants coming from the South, and Europe's leaders—in partnership with a billionaire speculator—have no intention of defending the borders, but want to let in the immigrants. This is the truth of the matter … Everyone who wants to preserve Hungary as a Hungarian country must go out and vote, and must cast both their votes for Fidesz.[36]

In this speech, Orbán made reference to the liberation from Turkish rule to make clear he was referring above all to Muslim immigration to Europe.[37] But elsewhere his government has been more explicit still. Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén said bluntly in 2017, for example, that Hungary "defines itself in the face of Islam as the protective shield of Christian Europe."[38] A classic far-right trope is present in these narratives, which invoke a picture of a Jewish, globalist elite conspiring to flood Europe with non-white immigrants. Indeed, many of Orbán's discourses closely resemble claims of the extreme right—in particular, that the global elite is conspiring to destroy the white majority under the guise of multiculturalism and human rights.[39] In Orbán's version of this idea, Christianity is used as a substitute for white ethnicity and to legitimize ethnic exclusion. "If we fail to defend our Christian culture we will lose Europe, and Europe will no longer belong to Europeans," as he has put it.[40]

These narratives form the cornerstone of the Orbán project of hegemony. Highly racialized images are mobilized to secure popular support. Hungary is envisioned as a white Christian space at risk from Muslim invaders supported by a globalist, Jewish elite represented by the totemic image of George Soros. Notably, this project departs from the free-market individualism of the Anglo-American new right. In its place it promotes a vulgar national majoritarianism, which openly opposes the rights of minorities. This is the hegemonic, legitimizing core of the project. As we shall now see, these hegemonic devices are used in tandem with the other element of autocratic nationalism: corrupt practices that employ regulatory repression and clientelist measures that deliberately close down opportunities for public scrutiny.

Autocratic Power and the Authoritarian Social Contract

The rise of Fidesz to power in the 2010 general election is inseparable from the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis, which had a pronounced effect on Hungary (GDP fell by some 6.8% in 2009 alone). However, it also reflected a longer-term disenchantment with the Hungarian Socialist Party. This had particularly set in after the 2006 Őszöd speech crisis—mass protests prompted by the leaking of an expletive-laden private speech

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[35] Viktor Orbán, "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the Final Fidesz Election Campaign Event," website of the Hungarian Government, April 6, 2018, emphasis added, https://miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-final-fidesz-election-campaign-event/.
[36] Orbán, Speech at the Final Fidesz Election Campaign Event.
[37] Orbán, Speech at the Final Fidesz Election Campaign Event.
[38] Zsolt Semjén, "Brussels Cannot Tell Us Who Should Live in Hungary," website of the Hungarian Government, October 9, 2017, https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/brussels-cannot-tell-us-who-should-live-in-hungary.
[39] Abby L. Ferber, ed., *Home-Grown Hate: Gender and Organized Racism*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[40] Viktor Orbán, "Without Christian Culture There Will Be No Free Life in Europe, If We Fail to Defend Our Christian Culture We Will Lose Europe, and Europe Will No Longer Belong to Europeans," website of the Hungarian Government, March 15, 2019, https://miniszterelnok.hu/without-christian-culture-there-will-be-no-free-life-in-europe-if-we-fail-to-defend-our-christian-culture-we-will-lose-europe-and-europe-will-no-longer-belong-to-europeans/.

by the prime minister that had frankly admitted the party's failings in government.[41] Orbán successfully capitalized on these moments of crisis. He both promoted, and benefited from, a dramatic rise of nationalist sentiment in Hungary in the face of these events. Indeed, in the 2010 election, which brought Orbán back to power, the combined vote for Fidesz (53%) and the far-right Jobbik party (17%) came to a quite extraordinary 70%. Hegemony is, in this respect, a two-way process: the very idea of consent and persuasion as a moment in the construction of leadership involves reciprocity between political elites and citizens. But while there is an important element of Orbánism that is responsive to nationalistic and anti-immigrant feelings in the population, Orbán is also filtering and calibrating these inchoate sensibilities around a codified set of political meanings based on anti-liberal thought.

Orbán's autocratic practices emerged out of the opportunity provided by the 2008 financial crisis. What Juliet Johnson and Andrew Barnes refer to as Orbán's "financial nationalism" utilized economically interventionist policies to overcome the fallout from the global economic downturn.[42] These policies went in tandem with the discourses described above and the effect was a strengthening of the state in relation to the market. While the policy mix had some resemblances to Keynesianism,[43] Orbán ultimately pursued a form of state intervention that was highly autocratic and clientelist, with an eclectic mix of left- and right-wing economic policies. He nationalized a series of private assets including pension funds, shares and properties. He also introduced a windfall tax on other economic sectors; notably, in the banking sector after the financial crash, but also in energy, telecommunications and retail. But these leftish measures were coupled with targeted austerity towards parts of the public sector that Orbán associated with his political opponents, notably universities.[44] As Bozóki notes, "Orbán skillfully attacked the banks (most of them being in foreign hands), the multinational corporations, the foreign media, and EU officials on the basis of [his own preference for] economic nationalism and sovereign independence, but he also combined this with business-friendly domestic policy, such as the introduction of a flat tax, reduced employment rights, and attacks on the homeless, unemployed and trade unions."[45]

To the surprise of the IMF and European Union, Orbán's interventionist policy was successful according to most economic indicators. Hungary even left the EU's Excessive Deficit Procedure in 2013, which it had been subjected to since joining in 2004, as its budget deficit fell below 3%.[46] This has created the basis for the construction of an authoritarian social contract in Hungary. After the sharp collapse following the 2008 financial crisis, Orbán and Fidesz were able to create a hegemonic legitimacy through this combination of interventionist economic policy and ethnic nationalism. Yet, he also transformed the state in such a way that it became a vehicle for his private interests, rather than a protector of the public interest. Under Orbán, a new crony capitalism emerged, at the center of which was his own on power.

The form that Orbán's state intervention took was highly autocratic and clientelist. Indeed, it is reminiscent of what Gramsci referred to as the use of corruption as a political tool that stands between domination and hegemony as tools of power. As Dániel Bartha, Director of the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy, put it to me in Budapest: "Orbán's goal was always to change the playing field … to create a new [Hungarian] elite … they created their own media … their own businessmen, the oligarchs, and did so

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[41] András Bozóki, "Hopes and Illusions: The Farewell to Idealism in Hungarian Politics" (paper presented at the conference "The 'Brave New World' after Communism—1989: Expectations in Comparison," Vienna, Austria, June 15, 2009), ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andras_Bozoki/publication/292352269_Hopes_and_Illusions_The_Farewell_to_Idealism_in_Hungarian_Politics/links/5bea8ad092851c6b27ba5cdd/Hopes-and-Illusions-The-Farewell-to-Idealism-in-Hungarian-Politics.pdf.

[42] Juliet Johnson and Andrew Barnes, "Financial Nationalism and Its International Enablers: The Hungarian Experience," *Review of International Political Economy* 22, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 535–569, doi:10.1080/09692290.2014.919336.

[43] For example, Robert Skidelsky's discussion of job guarantee programs as an answer to unemployment: see Robert Skidelsky, "The Case for a Guaranteed Job," World Economic Forum, August 27, 2019, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/the-case-for-a-guaranteed-job/.

[44] Johnson and Barnes, "Financial Nationalism," 551.

[45] Bozóki, "Broken Democracy," 15.

[46] Johnson and Barnes, "Financial Nationalism," 551–552.

quite self-consciously."[47]

The very relationship between the public and private spheres has been blurred by these practices.[48] Although Orbán has not generally used raw domination or violence, he has utilized the political tool of corruption in order to turn the state into a vehicle for the simultaneous accumulation of economic and political power. While nonviolent, these measures have substantially corroded the norms of democratic political functioning. Under the Orbán regime, EU-funded public procurement contracts have been used to create a class of friendly oligarchs. The Orbánist elite receive 90% of their income from these tenders, which, according to the Corruption Research Centre Budapest, are over-priced at a ratio of between 1.7 to 10 times their true value.[49] Lőrinc Mészáros, a gas fitter from Orbán's hometown, has become Hungary's richest man, rising to number 2,324 on the Forbes Rich List, as a result of government procurement contracts.[50] Hungarian opposition leaders and activists believe his personal wealth to be the informal property of Orbán himself. Orbán's own father and son-in-law have also personally profited from the tendering of government contracts.[51]

Ethnic nationalism has been mobilized to justify this creation of a new Hungarian economic elite based on corrupt and autocratic practices. For the internal life of the state, Orbán's dramatic pursuit of power centralization has called into question the ability of public authorities to check and constrain his personalized power. Péter Krekó and Zsolt Enyedi describe this retreat from liberal constitutional norms as "exceptional—at least in European terms," adding that, "Orbán and his party not only keep a firm grip on the legislative and executive branches, but also dominate virtually all spheres of social life, including commerce, education, the arts, churches, and even sports."[52] Orbán's favored method is through the appointment of cronies to positions of state power and public authority; notably, he controls the Public Prosecutors' Office, which protects him and his supporters from criminal sanction.

This has eroded what John Keane calls "monitoring democracy": the postwar system that combined representative democracy with "new ways of publicly monitoring and controlling the exercise of power."[53] The latter has historically involved a plethora of bodies that provide independent oversight of the government from within the state itself; the rules, behaviors, and norms that underpin the independence of public authorities; and the civil society and media institutions, networks, and groups that monitor such institutional and social arrangements of power. Taken together they provide the basis for the self-limitation of government power in relation to the public and private spheres on which the rule of law depends.[54] While Orbán has used these informal practices of corruption as a tool of political and social control, it is still noteworthy that his political theory of illiberalism *openly*—and as such, *hegemonically*—states his rejection of the constitutional systems that protect against autocratic power through the construction of independent monitoring institutions. Thus, hegemonic rhetoric and autocratic practice are brought together to forge a powerful symbiosis.

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[47] Dániel Bartha, Director, Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy), interview with the author, March 21, 2019.

[48] Dorottya Sallai and Gerhard Schnyder, "What Is 'Authoritarian' about Authoritarian Capitalism? The Dual Erosion of the Private-Public Divide in State-Dominated Business Systems," Business and Society, no., pre-publication draft as accepted and placed on SSRN (May 17, 2019), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3373637.

[49] Corruption Research Centre Budapest, "The EU Funds, Viktor Orbán, and Lőrinc Mészáros, the Hungarian Gas Fitter," March 2019, http://www.crcb.eu/?p=1791; Corruption Research Centre Budapest, "The Detection of Overpricing at EU Funded Public Procurement in Hungary," September 2016, http://www.crcb.eu/?p=1076; Balint Magyar and Balint Madlovics, "Hungary's Mafia State Fights for Impunity," Balkan Insight, Reporting Democracy section (June 21, 2019), https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/21/hungarys-mafia-state-fights-for-impunity/.

[50] Forbes Rich List, "Lorinc Meszaros," *Forbes*, real time net worth as of September 29, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/profile/lorinc-meszaros/.

[51] Magyar and Madlovics, "Hungary's Mafia State."

[52] Péter Krekó and Zsolt Enyedi, "Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's Laboratory of Illiberalism," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (July 12, 2018): 39.

[53] John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy*, Reprint edition (London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2010), xxvi.

[54] Sallai and Schnyder, "What Is 'Authoritarian' about Authoritarian Capitalism?," 3.

Autocratic Nationalism: Orbán's Challenge to Liberalism

Autocratic nationalism has an internal and holistic consistency, which reflects its position on the far right of the political spectrum in Europe. Since 2010, Orbánism in Hungary has emerged as a formidable political force that has shown no willingness, let alone need, to engage in the compromises generally associated with the broader European Union political center. This has freed Orbán to shape a new ideological system. While power is always and everywhere ideological, requiring justifications rooted in the values and visions of political thought, not all power-seekers radically challenge the status quo and fewer still are successful in consolidating their hold on a state. Orbán's triumph was, in Russell's sense, to transform his love of power into an ideological force that Hungarians found compelling and purposeful after the financial crash of 2008. Orbánism pursued hegemony in the Gramscian mode by attempting to radically change the rules of the game, to shift the underlying assumptions behind everyday political norms. This hegemonic project is aimed at challenging the rights-based system on which liberal democracy depends. Attempting to radically shift the political center of gravity towards a highly racialized political authoritarianism, Orbánism represents a major ideological challenge to the status quo of the European political scene.

This is a hegemonic project, but one that has been especially well-tailored to the practical autocracy of the Orbán era. By openly attacking systems of checks and balances on executive power, the Orbánist framework has imparted a constitutional quality to its hegemonic claims: principles and practices thus exist in an unusually close interrelationship. Autocratic nationalism has been able to fuse together two distinct Gramscian tools of power—corrupt practices and a hardline nationalist ideology—to create political consent (hegemony). This brings into the foreground of the ideological landscape the role of elements normally left implicit in most political argumentation. For as Margaret Canovan argues, "nationhood is a tacit premise in all contemporary political thinking,"[55] but in many cases it remains at this unspoken level, as an underpinning assumption in the elaboration of other, overlying ideological positions. Orbán, however, substitutes this unspoken premise for the overt and absolute centrality of national sovereignty and ethnic homogeneity to all his political interventions, connecting this to a rejection of basic liberties and minority rights. If the latter is premised on the existence of a regulatory space protecting the distinction between the public and private spheres, Orbánism seeks to close it down.

Orbán's project is also subjectively ideological and hegemonic. In this regard, it recalls strongly Stuart Hall's analysis of Thatcherism. Orbán, too, has "attempted to impose a new regime of social discipline and leadership 'from above,' " which required and was "rooted in popular fears and anxieties 'below.' "[56] Yet, as we have seen, while the new right of the 21st century shares a hegemonic impulse with the past figures of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and American President Ronald Reagan, it departs significantly from their assumptions, creating a successor ideology that rejects liberal individualism in its entirety. Orbánism is, in this sense, a genuinely novel paradigm, one which has arisen out of the crises of globalization, notably the 2008 crash, but moves political and economic development in an altogether more autocratic, racialized and authoritarian direction. It represents a major, and rather ominous, challenge to liberalism in Europe.

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[55] Margaret Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1998), 1.
[56] Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 84.

From the East to the West, or Is It So?

Katerina Kolozova

Naming the Problem

In the past decade, in Eastern Europe, be it in a part of the European Union or an aspiring member state, one has witnessed a constant rise of what has been called, among other possible names, "competitive authoritarianism." It has been a struggle for academics and analysts, politicians and journalists, both Eastern European as well as in the West of the continent, to find the adequate term for a phenomenon that is elusive, evades the hitherto available categorizations, escapes the Western European "naturalizations" of political values, does not fit the framework of what makes sense, and what is taken to be the norm in the European political mainstream. The terms "populism," a "new" or "alternative" right but also "far right," "crisis of democracy" and, finally, "crisis of liberalism," have been used interchangeably in pointing to the vague phenomenon on the rise that evades any simple definition. Amidst the confused discussion among academics, politicians, and the populace, one thing has escaped everyone's attention: no one seems to wish to defend liberalism and its values. I argue this is a symptom of the suppressed real (the term is used in the Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic sense, and its political renditions)[1] —*the embarrassment of liberalism.*

As the only reigning ideology in a post-Cold War world supposedly with no viable alternatives to it, liberal democracy has been exposed as a contingent rather than a "natural" or teleological peak of history's self-perfection.[2] It has become increasingly imperfect, susceptible to corruption, a universe of values of the imperial, belligerent, and postcolonial West. As the former Communist countries and the postcolonial states of what used to be called the Third World sought to emulate the only available political model in the context of global neoliberalism, the emperor's new clothes of what used to be called the First World were becoming increasingly visible to everyone who bothered to look. The fact that the emperor has been naked all along has become most clearly evident, first in the eyes of the "imitators," to paraphrase Krastev and Holmes:[3] that is, the new and aspiring EU member states, and later on to the rest of Europe too. The "imitators" were the first to exclaim the evident truth. If alternatives have become impossible in an era of the declared end of history, the pure negation of the dominant worldview, the anti-liberalism or illiberalism that has materialized in a method of governance analyzed here, becomes the only pseudo-alternative.

In spite of the fact that the ideologues of the phenomenon at issue have given it a name—"illiberal democracy"—or have declared an ideological war (against) liberalism, the academics, the experts, and the media have ignored the designation for years as a misnomer or a maladroit formulation "missing the point."[4] In the meantime, several academics and publishers, among which, most notably, *The Journal of Democracy*,

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[1] Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000); Katerina Kolozova, "Slavoj Žižek Imagining the Balkans," *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 16 (2011): 299–306.
[2] Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light That Failed: Why the West Is Losing the Fight for Democracy* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2019).
[3] Krastev and Holmes, *The Light That Failed*, 4–9, 14.
[4] Consider the two international workshops organized by IWM-Vienna which demonstrate the heated contestations of the term and its relevance, for example Adam Ramsey (an editor in Open Democracy), at the second roundtable organized in February 2020, whereas the first workshop took place in September 2019. The titles of the events are Liberalism in Crisis: Between Totalitarian Responses and Progressive Dreams, Panels and dicussions (25 February, 2020) with Adam Ramsay, Ivan Krastev, Ivan Vejvoda, Shalini Randeria, Venelin Ganev, Jacques Rupnik, Ana Blazeva, Katerina Kolozova and Illiberal Democracy: Contradiction, Ideology or Characteristic of our Age?, Workshop with Grigorij Mesežnikov Leszek Jazdzewski Luke Cooper Niccolo Milanese Péter Krekó Katerina Kolozova (30 September, 2019) at IWM, Vienna.

have tackled the topic. The founding co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*, Michael Plattner, has granted the notion of "illiberalism" legitimacy by addressing it in article titled "Illiberal Democracy and the Struggle on the Right," published in 2019, and before that, in an article published by Jacques Rupnik in 2016.[5] In the same journal, in 2012, Jacques Rupnik again published an article dedicated to the "illiberal turn" in Europe,[6] as Lenka Bustikova and Petra Guasti did as well in 2017,[7] whereas in the first decade of the century it analyzed the early and perhaps ideologically undefined (and ideologically not self-declared, or rather declared under the label of post-ideological technocracies) forms of the phenomenon at hand. The previous forms of the phenomenon at issue lacked the ideological definition. What makes them previous forms of the same is the mode of governance—populism amounting to excessive power of the executive branch, captured by a political party. They have appeared under the names of "competitive authoritarianism" and "hybrid regime," but also in the form of vaguer naming conventions such as "semidemocracy," "virtual democracy," "pseudodemocracy," which comes down to an axiological classification and a personal impression rather than a definition.[8] We will focus on the designations that seem to express at least the formal definition of the phenomenon, such as those of authoritarianism achieved through electoral political competition (hence preserving the form of democracy) or of "hybrid regime" types, which points to the hybridization between democratic forms and the undemocratic styles of governance (authoritarianism). I argue that the negative definition of "in-liberalism" (non and anti-liberalism) is in fact far more precise and divulges the true ideological vision and political utopia of the new political paradigm. Combined with the definition of "competitive authoritarianism," the notion of "illiberal democracy" crystallizes the value system of a society that divests liberalism of its political authority and yields a not merely authoritarian, but indeed totalitarian control over society. Authoritarianism is only a transitory form in the transformation of liberal democracy into a democracy that is not only non-liberal but anti-liberal as well.

Levitsky and Way have been among the most active in the debate on the issue and the ones who coined the terms "competitive authoritarianism" (2002) and "hybrid regime" (2010).[9] The hybridity of concepts, or in naming, is necessitated by the hybridity of the phenomenon: in spite of the elements of dictatorial governance, one cannot easily permit oneself to call a European and, moreover, EU member country a straightforward dictatorship or totalitarianism due to its nominal compliance with values that are, at least formally speaking, neither authoritarian nor undemocratic. The fact that the "dictators" and their governments are elected in multiparty democratic elections that do not go against the legal principles of the country, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe-European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (OSCE-EIDHR) complicates the possibility of such a qualification. Moreover, classical qualifications such as "totalitarianism," "authoritarianism," or "dictatorship" would perhaps be reductivist and fail to grasp the complexity and the specific definition of the phenomenon. something else is at stake and that something is in a need of an adequate designation.

One has also more often than not resorted to the qualification of "populism." However, this appears insufficient and perhaps misleading: it is not an ideological qualifier, as populism can be either left-wing or right-wing. I would say that it can exist along the center of the spectrum, too, thinking of the style of mobilization and rhetoric employed in French President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 electoral campaign. Populism is evidently something that takes place on a discursive level but discourse is not the material basis of a system. And by "material," I do not mean financial or economic only. The discursive is, of course, something that founds the material reality we inhabit, it is the symbolic universe transposed into methods

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[5] Michael F. Plattner, "Illiberal Democracy and the Struggle on the Right," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 30, no. 1 (January 2019: 5–19; Jacques Rupnik, "The Specter Haunting Europe: Surging Illiberalism in the East," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 27, no. 4 (2016): 77–87.

[6] Rupnik, Jacques. "Hungary's Illiberal Turn: How Things Went Wrong," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (July 2012): 132–137.

[7] Lenka Bustikova and Petra Guasti, "The Illiberal Turn or Swerve in Central Europe?," *Politics and Governance* vol. 5, no. 4 (December 2017): 166–176.

[8] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65.

[9] Levitsky and Way, "Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism"; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

of governance producing a particular material reality. When what takes place on the level of language is soon effectuated on the material plane it necessitates a different naming. Populism can therefore mobilize, act as a meta-narrative justifying the embodied reality but the latter, as soon as addressed in material terms, invites a different language.

Materiality is the tangible reality of a political system that serves as the construction grid of control and exploitation within a society. Of course, it could be, and often is, something that could serve the opposite goals, beneficial for both society and the individual. As the Austrian Marxist epistemologist Alfred Sohn-Rethel would say, social relations are "real abstractions,"[10] they are effectuated in the material reality and the system of governance is one of those real or material abstractions. Thus, in the tangible materiality of "illiberal democracy," we can detect something other and more than mere discursive strategy and ideological domination: that is, something very concrete and that is a constant in policymaking and a method of governance.

Regardless of whether we are dealing with left- or right-wing populism, regardless of whether we are speaking of an EU member state or a European country that is in a process of integration into the European Union, governance of the illiberal kind has certain characteristics that favor the good of the state and the nation over the freedom of the individual: that is, abstract collectivities, at the expense of the socially- and culturally-defined groups that are more immediately experienced as realities one belongs to in a lived, almost tangible way (class and culture primarily, but also neighborhoods, families, activist groups, etc.). Unlike many of the ideologues of illiberalism or critics of liberalism, such as the right-wing French philosopher Alain de Benoist (2019), I argue that illiberal governance of a totalitarian nature seeks to not only suppress the prioritization of individual rights and individualism, but many collective rights too. Even if identity-based rights and identity-centered discourses are successfully delegitimized by the illiberal autocrats, certain groups (classes, social strata, gendered and sexed realities) and not only individuals, constitute materially grounded and embodied realities that will be moved and mobilized against the totalitarian grasp not by individual but by collectively shared interests. The word "interest" is used in the sense of Marx's appeal to the term when explaining the moving force of building the class consciousness and political mobilization of the proletariat.[11] Apparently, the unavoidable gesture of division and mutual exclusion, introducing dualism between the individual and the collective, is a fallacy. Such trenchant opposition cannot be supported by experienced reality and concomitant empirical data that account for that experience.

In terms of policymaking or the practice of governance pertaining to illiberal democracies, one can argue that a universal feature of such regimes is state capture of the institutions and the economy by an executive branch that has blurred the distinction between state and party. Moreover, such an overreaching executive branch subjugates the legislature and the judiciary by way of its excessive power and party control. Such a method is enabled by way of a populist justification: the political opponents are not even part of the nation— they are traitors who should be cut off from the healthy body of the nation represented by the ruling party. (Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's or Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's rhetoric are examples of this.) The concerns of the citizens and the paternalistic care of the state are embodied by the ruling party, whereas the 29ommunaute branch becomes a mechanism for the mere execution of the priorities set by the party in power. The legislative branch is but a caterer of legislation that serves the agenda of the executive branch. There is no difference between Hungary's Viktor Orbán, North Macedonia's Nikola Gruevski, Serbia's Aleksandar Vučić, and Poland's Jarosław Kaczyński in this sense. Erdoğan's style is similar, but it does not pretend to keep up the EU façade or that of universal human

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[10] Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: Critique of Epistemology* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 58.
[11] Elizabeth Borland, "Class Consciousness," in *Encyclopedia of Social Problems, Vol. 1*, ed. Vincent N. Parrillo (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2008), p. 134; see also "Class Interest," Oxford Reference, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095615922.

rights—it veers toward overt autocracy, while maintaining the competitive electoral model in order to garner legitimation of its absolute power.

How Does Illiberal State Capture Work? Explaining the Method

In his analysis of the style of governance installed by the right-wing government led for 11 years by Nikola Gruevski, followed by a half year of governance led by the Social Democrats of Zoran Zaev, Reinhard Priebe in his EU report on Macedonia from 2017 states: "This has been described as a type of 'state capture' but is perhaps more precisely 30ommunautaire as the capture of the judiciary and prosecution by the executive power."[12]

I would add that the executive branch itself is also captured by the populist party in power and does not represent a nonpartisan technocracy as it was purported to be in the era of Gruevski (and afterwards as well). By virtue of blurring state and party, which was one of the central diagnostic insights of Priebe in his first report on the then-Former Yugoslav Republic of (now North) Macedonia (published in 2015), the government becomes the tool of both the economic and ideological subjugation of society as a whole.[13] However, these illiberal democracies do not fit into the framework of an anomie of mafia-style economics: law and order, ideology, morality, conservative values, and the allure of European Union membership still matter to the illiberals. In fact, these things may be more important to them than material gain. The executive branch maintains firm control over the society, the economy, and the nation in its totality, and therefore, the legislature is its mere instrument. In order for the executive branch to increase its power and endow itself with an authority that belongs to the other branches of government or parts of society that are supposed to be autonomous, such as academia and the media, an illiberal democracy is marked by an inflation of new legislation to fit the whim of the autocrat while preserving the illusion of preserving European-level of rule of law.[14] Since adjustments are constantly needed in order to bend the rules of the *acquis communautaire* (the cumulative body of legislative, administrative, and judicial decisions comprising European Union law) as well as to produce the simulation of an adherence to principles such as freedom of the press, to give but one example, the only legal constant is legal inconsistency: illogical solutions and legal uncertainty due to the incessant change of legislation. This uncertainty is increased due to the utter subjugation of the judiciary by the executive branch and the political majority in parliament. That was (and in fact still is, to a lesser degree) the case in North Macedonia, but it is also the case in Serbia, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey. The central question here is: is it possible to witness a similar asymmetry between the executive and other two branches of government elsewhere in the West? I argue that it depends on some structural characteristics and that the political tradition is almost irrelevant—fascism can surge anywhere. So can illiberal democracy, the degree and variations of form depend on the structural characteristics of the context.

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[12] European Union: Senior Expert Group, led by Reinhard Priebe], *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Assessment and Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on Systemic Rule of Law Issues 2017* (Brussels: European Union, September 14, 2017), 5, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2017.09.14_seg_report_on_systemic_rol_issues_for_publication.pdf. The group was headed by the German jurist Reinhard Preibe and the reports were dubbed 1st and 2nd Priebe Reports; see European Union: External Action, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/55036_en.

[13] Reinhard Preibe, *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on Systemic Rule of Law Issues Relating to the Communications Interception Revealed in Spring 2015*, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_recommendations_of_the_senior_experts_group.pdf, p. 4.

[14] Gjergi Vurmo, "Tailor-Made Laws in the Western Balkans: State Capture in Disguise," Center for European Policy Studies policy contribution, May 11, 2020 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Archive of European Integration), http://aei.pitt.edu/103372/.

The Function of Populism in the Context of Illiberal Governance

The level of analysis I propose here requires empirical insight into the practices of policymaking and governance that may reveal a shift in a political system that is at least somewhat covert while maintaining the pretense of complying with the principles and standards of the European Union. As noted in the article by Plattner quoted above, Viktor Orbán gives this shift an ideological definition and also one that intimates a shift in a political system (although the latter is not explicitly admitted, as the *form* remains one of democratic electoral pluralism): he calls it an "illiberal democracy."[15] Orbán does not use the term in the sense Fareed Zakaria used it in his 1997 article in *Foreign Affairs* to indicate certain deficiencies in systems that have aspired to be what was, back then, perceived as political normality and the self-evident model of a developed state.[16] For Orbán, illiberal democracy is an ideological paradigm he subscribes to. He has declared it in more elaborate forms prior to the tense press conference held with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2015 in Budapest, at which he reasserted his commitment to illiberal democracy while insisting it was compatible with EU membership. Angela Markel reacted with bewilderment and overt confusion when she famously remarked "I can't understand what is meant by illiberal when it comes to democracy."[17]

The fact that the logic of Orbán's statement escapes Merkel and she fails to fit it into the existing paradigms of interpretation, intimates, in my view, the fact that "illiberal democracy"—or call it far-right populism fueled by alt-right views, or call it otherwise (according to and in line with the available designations stated above, while keeping the list of possible definitions and names open)—is more than a mere misnomer but an ideological designation that is precise and entails a shift of paradigm. It is negatively defined: it goes against the liberal grain, and that is its only content. Much later in the discussion, Orbán gives it some positive content by describing it as a subscription to Christian values. Nonetheless, he subscribed to a wider European paradigm of "illiberalism" which is shared by non-Christians (pagans), atheists, secularists, nationalists, and left-wing populists. They are aware their agenda is heterogeneous as well as their traditions. Nonetheless, the fight against liberalism unites them in a single bloc, also in the European Parliament, the European Alliance of Peoples and Nations that has its numerous allies among the members of the European People's Party (EPP) group, such as the Hungarian party Fidesz and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, drawing on parties such as the Polish Law and Justice. But let us return to the empirical question of policymaking and governance of the illiberal kind, one relying on the excessive power of the executive branch which, in turn, is rooted in the triple equivalence of state, ruling political party, and "the people." Populist usurpation of the public discourse or, in fact, speaking on its behalf and performing a ventriloquism of the "people's voice," is made possible by the widely accepted postulation that there is a single homogenous entity and a generalized subjectivity (in the singular) called "the People." Any populist party pretends to embody this generalized subjectivity. Let us recall Orbán's famous statement from 2002, when Fidesz could not win the elections and became part of the parliamentary opposition: "The homeland cannot be in opposition."[18] He rejected not only his party's status of opposition but also the legitimacy of the elected government: Fidesz is, for him, the direct expression of the "Will of the People." As an organization that is in direct contact with the will, desires, and beliefs of the people,

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[15] Csaba Tóth, ed., "Full text of Viktor Orbán's speech at Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) of July 26, 2014," Budapest Beacon, July 29, 2014, https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/; see also Edit Inotai, *Hungary's Orban Tries to Give 'Illiberalism' A Makeover*, Balkan Insight, July 30, 2019, https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/30/hungarys-orban-tries-to-give-illiberalism-a-makeover/.

[16] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* vol. 76, no. 6 (November/December 1997), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/rise-illiberal-democracy.

[17] Adam Halasz, "Merkel Clashes with Orbán on Meaning of 'Democracy,' " EUobserver (February 3, 2015), available at https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/127468.

[18] Viktor Orbán's Full Speech for the Beginning of His Fourth Mandate, Visegrád Post, May 10, 2018 (published on May 12, 2018), https://visegradpost.com/en/2018/05/12/viktor-orbans-full-speech-for-the-beginning-of-his-fourth-mandate/. It is interesting to note that the same statement was reiterated as part of Orbán's speech on the occasion of winning his fourth term in office as prime minister in May 2018.

Fidesz *is* the people. Therefore, only a government formed by Fidesz is a true and legitimate government. Party and government are blurred a priori; they are the axiom of illiberal democracy.

Thus far we have been explaining the method of populism of postulating the horizon of the thinkable, a political-metaphysical utopia of a full embodiment of people's will and expression of its essence. In an era of cynicism toward the postliberal era and automated capital, in an era of a pronounced individualism and disenchantment of the world, populism caters to certain metaphysical needs of postmodern humanity.[19] By post-liberalism we are referring to the increased normalization of soft and covert or outward and open, depending on the political tradition (that is, whether East or West), of authoritarian or state control, or collective presumably voluntary control over the individual combined with state control, whose apex we could witness during the covid-19 pandemic.[20] This need is as pressing as that of physical survival—it is for this reason that people would accept as a leader anyone who "tells it like it is," even if they "just killed someone on 42nd Street," to paraphrase former US President Donald Trump regarding the unwavering loyalty of his supporters.[21] It is important to acknowledge the relevance of the metaphysical hunger of the populace, or the crisis of the current symbolic order, at stake and to note that the left fails to deliver a response to it on a systematic basis.

What Is Governance under Illiberal State Capture? Examining Methods of Policymaking

Having identified the ontological basis furnished by populism, we can continue with the analysis as to how new authoritarianisms (in particular in the former Communist states of Eastern Europe) operate in the sense of governance. The studies of the style of governance in North Macedonia (formerly the Republic of Macedonia) during the rule of the VMRO-DPMNE and DUI (2006–2016), the former a right-wing party and member of the EPP group, and the latter a political party of ethnic Albanians lacking an ideological definition in the words of its own leader,[22] I have conducted, in cooperation with my colleagues from ISSHS,[23] demonstrate the infallible correspondence, with the example of Hungary in terms of philosophy of policymaking and governance, that explicitly and overtly demonstrates the blurring of state and party. And, in this style of governance, that blurring is "in order" as long as it is legal—hence, the inflation of legislation and endless bureaucratization in order to legalize whatever is illegal in any country that adheres to the Copenhagen criteria of the European Union and as long as populist discourse provides justification for it.[24] The style of governance my colleagues at ISSHS and I have called "state capture" does not only come down to the blurring of party and institution nor to its *determination in the last instance*—subjection and instrumentalization of the legislative branch and the judiciary by the executive branch. It also seeks to fully control what is deemed to be the domain defined by individualism and that which nurtures individualism (the target of the illiberal project): freedom of expression in the widest possible sense, ranging from academia to the media and freedom of assembly. This, however, is a blind spot in the reasoning of the illiberals: these rights are not merely (if at all) individual, but rather and even more so collective.

It is not particular individuals but a nation or a populace that would soon be expected to trade off the new utopia and the metaphysical dream of certainty and realness for the basic ability to speak, think, and act

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[19] Alain de Benoist, *Contre le liberalisme: La société n'est pas un marché* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher) 91–103.

[20] Katerina Kolozova, "The Defeat of Liberalism, Murder of Freedom and Glimpse of a New Utopia," Open Democracy, April 22, 2020, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/defeat-liberalism-murder-freedom-and-glimpse-new-utopia/.

[21] Jeremy Diamond, "Trump: I Could 'Shoot Somebody and I Wouldn't Lose Voters,' " CNN, January 24, 2016, https://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/23/politics/donald-trump-shoot-somebody-support/index.html.

[22] See the interview with Ali Ahmeti, where he talks about DUI being a "thematic" rather than ideological party (referring to the theme of ethnic minority rights), Top Tema political talk show, December 7 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRGpnCzYNWw, accessed on 10 July 2019.

[23] ISSHS: Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Skopje.

[24] Eur-Lex, Accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/accession-criteria-copenhagen-criteria.html.

freely. At a point in an illiberal rule, the nation takes notice that not only has its will has been incarnated by the ruling party, that not only has the full expression of its essence not been executed but, quite to the contrary and perversely, its very ability to utter and even think without inhibition has been stifled. Governments' control over the freedom of expression and the repression of it can no longer be seen as a liberal entitlement, or selfish individualism—this is an attack on nations and collective rights, and the mantra against liberalism ceases making sense.

At the climactic point in an illiberal rule, it becomes obvious that something else is at stake, and that something can be described in pre-ideological terms. It can be best rendered visible and explained in terms of policy studies, (that is, practically and by circumventing the grand ideological narratives). By describing the concrete nature of the method of governance as well as the tangible, material effects of it, one divulges what is at stake: totalitarianism and the usurpation of society by a political-business group parading as avatars of the people's will. My claim that this realization comes about inevitably, and prompts resistance, is based on the experience of North Macedonia: a more than decade-long "Orbánesque" rule fell apart due to two years of protest and unrest that started with the students' and professors' plenum movement and culminated with the so-called "Colorful Revolution" (a name intended to mock the pro-government labeling of the movement as just another "color" revolution, carried out by the Open Society Institute). It was a heterogeneous movement in terms of ideology, ethnicity, gender, and age triggered by the ever more stifling policies with regard to specific social groups: teachers, students (and, by extension, their parents), part-time workers, and journalists, to name just a few. Thus, what needs to be defended in any "illiberal democracy," and what the illiberals seek to evacuate from a democracy, are categories of rights or freedoms that need not be seen as individualistic, but moreover as collective rights.

In a previous study,[25] I have compared North Macedonia and Hungary, occasionally against the backdrop of Poland, Croatia, Serbia, and at a certain point Russia and Turkey, focusing on the specificities of the North Macedonian model of state capture as a method of illiberal governance. In my subsequent research, referencing Russia and Turkey started to seem superfluous when this particular type of governance is studied, as it became clear that the specific definition of the EU member states and the countries participating in the EU integration process (even though not full members) constitute a standalone phenomenon. Namely, the mutation of EU legislation and its principles into a totalitarian and quasi single-party political system is perhaps the *differentia specifica* of the phenomenon of authoritarian or illiberal abuse of the European *acquis* by some member states, as well as by candidate states such as North Macedonia and Serbia. North Macedonia and Hungary (analyzed in my studies or in those published by ISSHS referenced here),[26] under the leadership of Gruevski and Orbán, respectively, have demonstrated an almost impeccable formal compliance with the European *acquis communautaire* while still managing to exert an authoritarian hold of all aspects of society.

North Macedonia, as an aspiring member state with the status of "accession country," has been submitted to constant monitoring of its progress towards compliance with the EU standards of rule of law and policymaking by the European Commission. The populists of VMRO-DPMNE, who seem to believe that "[their] party equals the will of the people"[27] and that this will is materialized through a VMRO-DPMNE-led government, had to be particularly innovative in producing legislation that was in seeming compliance with the principles of the acquis, yet providing space for details that enable almost absolute control of the executive branch over all institutions and society as a whole, including the economy. The ruse, undoubtedly, worked: only a year before receiving the label of "state capture" in 2016 as its official diagnosis established by the European Commission, Macedonia, under the rule of Prime Minister Nikola

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[25] Katerina Kolozova, *The Uses and Abuses of Neoliberalism and Technocracy in the Post-Totalitarian Regimes in Eastern Europe* (Skopje: Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2015).

[26] Katerina Kolozova and Jordan Šišovski, *Technology of State Capture: Overregulation in Macedonian Media and Academia* (Skopje: Institutot za Opshtestveni I Khumanstichki Nauki, 2014).

[27] "Gruevski: Beznarodot ne bi postoela VMRO-DPMNE, narodot e silata na nashata partija," Vecher, June 20, 2015, https://tinyurl.com/2cdmjcd8.

Gruevski, was systematically praised by that very same Commission for its stellar reform performances (surpassing many EU member states, to paraphrase statements by numerous EU officials).[28] It is thanks to the local protesting of intellectuals, analysts, and activists that the realization of a "state capture" finally reached Brussels, as well as thanks to the report of the Senior Experts Group sent to Macedonia by the Commission and led by Reinhard Priebe (the report was famously dubbed "The Priebe Report"). Amidst the ceaseless waves of protest, Brussels brokered an agreement between the ruling and opposition parties that led to early elections and a new government that is now supposed to carry out a reform process as per the recommendations of the Priebe Report. The Macedonian case of 2015–2016 resembles the current situation in Serbia under President Aleksandar Vučić (that is, as of 2022), and can serve as a case study as to what holds an illiberal regime together and what unties it: not the selfish individual interests, but rather collective ones. Let us consider several examples that corroborate the claim just made.

Examples of How Media and Academia Can Be Captured by the Government and Ruling Party and Still Be in Compliance with European Legislation

In 2013, the government of Macedonia led by Nikola Gruevski produced a law on media (on audiovisual media services, to be precise) that represented an impeccable implementation of the European directive[29] while simultaneously undermining its core principles and provisions. Quite simply, it incorporated the main elements of the directive but also expanded them in a way that rendered their application absurd. For example, the directive specifies the rules and conditions of product placement and does not go beyond provisions concerning advertisement/commercial products services, precisely in order to avoid regulating program content and anything that could be considered an issue of editorial freedom. The intention of the directive is to avoid any legal control and government policing of media; it is for this reason that it is called a directive on audio-visual services rather than a directive on media.[30] The law in question, drafted by the government in collaboration with the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, included several minor "improvements" to the directive (whose potential problematic effects were imperceptible to the Association of Journalists at the time), such as a line in the definition of product placement that permits the "advertising of ideas" (rather than products or services). As soon as the law entered into force, the government became the biggest advertiser in the country of not only ideas but the biggest advertiser of any kind, period. This tiny little detail added to the content of the directive implemented in the 2013 Macedonian law served a twofold purpose: government propaganda (the spreading of the ruling party's ideas) and "buying out" (gaining control by way of allocating advertisement money) the private national broadcasters by making them dependent on the sizable amounts of advertisement money distributed to virtually all of them. The government was running constant and multiple "awareness-raising campaigns" in all of the major media outlets, not only propagating its ideology but also promoting its good work, its "accomplishments," and, in doing so, it ran a nonstop electoral campaign. The mere 20 days of official campaigning provisioned by the law was the only access to the media the opposition parties were granted (if we exclude the virtually negligible mentions in the news). From 2006 until the end of 2016, the opposition could not really compete with the ongoing and ceaseless campaign of the ruling party. Let us emphasize that all of this was perfectly

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[28] "SA Council Praises Macedonia's Progress," Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (Skopje: August 7, 2012), https://vlada.mk/node/4025?ln=en-gb.

[29] Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of March 10, 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation, or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive), http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010L0013&from=EN.

[30] Katerina Kolozova and Kalina Lechevska, "Policy Brief: Media Policies and Editorial (Un)Freedom," Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Skopje, April 2017, https://www.isshs.edu.mk/media-policies-and-editorial-unfreedom/.

legal. No one could accuse the government of disrespecting the rule of law, while its essential contradiction with EU legislation was obfuscated by the formal general compliance with it.

Another example of the same method of governance was the control by the ruling party, and what its government managed to force upon academic institutions: a law on higher education that was adopted in 2008 and back then declared by the European Commission to be in laudable compliance with the Bologna standards, by February 2015 had undergone 15 amendments amounting to a whole different piece of legislation than the one praised in 2008. By the end of 2014, the Law on Higher Education allowed the Ministry of Education and Science to directly and indirectly decide on almost all matters that normally fall under the sole jurisdiction of the autonomous academy. Through its legislation and bylaws, by December 2014 the Ministry endowed itself with the right to test all degrees issued by the higher education (HE) institutions by introducing the so-called external examination (later misleadingly called the "state exam") organized by the Ministry by way of which the degree issued by the university was either confirmed or derogated. Thus, a double degree-granting procedure, whereby the one issued by the Ministry validates that of the university and counts as the sole valid one. In short, thanks to amendments introduced in 2014 and 2015,[31] the Ministry became the final examiner with the right to derogate the degree issued by an institution of higher education. Part of the same package of amendments to the law (once declared to be in perfect compliance with the Bologna principles, and by 2014 completely deformed) were the detailed requirements imposed on all institutions of higher education, indiscriminately, related to academic career advancement: what to publish, where, and how much, was detailed in the text of the law itself (not in the bylaws of the institutions themselves or some other agency). Regardless of whether one is a professor of Macedonian, French, or Russian philology, regardless of whether one is a philosopher or a biologist, everyone was expected to publish in the journals published by Thomson Reuters (then Web of Science) and everything else was reduced to next to nothing, including books published with internationally renowned publishers or university textbooks in the local languages. Evidently, the law was not only shortsighted and arrogant in its undercutting of academic autonomy, it was also corrupt: it literally and unambiguously favored a specific brand, spelling its name out: "Web of Science." For an article published with Thomson Reuters' base of journals, a professor was accorded 5 points, whereas for one published with Springer, Sage, or Scopus, or any other imaginable journal and base of journals for that matter, a mere 1 point. A book published with either some local publisher or even renowned international publishers like Columbia University Press or Oxford University Press was also awarded a mere 1 point. All these details were written into the law itself, which pretended to uphold European-level standards of academic quality but also illegally favored a private company. (In other words, legislation is aligned with the EU Directive, yet the Directive is abused, and national application is a deformation of the EU legislative stipulation.) As explained above, all of this raised collective, not individualistic, concerns. The state exam and the rules of academic promotion and their corrupt aspects ingrained in the law triggered the most massive student and professor protests in the history of the country, which gradually led to other protests and finally the collapse of the government.

The examples of the Macedonian illiberal state capture establish perfect analogies with some aspects of Hungarian legislation and policymaking and can, therefore, explain how it was possible for Orbán to expel the Open Society Institute and the Central European University but also ban gender studies arguably without any formal violation of European legislation. These perhaps banal and overly technical examples of policymaking reveal the true nature of the illiberal system in the context of the European Union. The almost perfect correspondence or virtually complete overlapping in policy solutions and legislation among different countries, predominantly in Eastern Europe, demonstrate that the system is essentially the same, based on a shared (negative) ideology and a shift in political system.[32]

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[31] Amendments available at: http://www.pravo.org.mk/documentDetail.php?id=799.
[32] Kolozova, *Uses and Abuses*, 16–20.

In attempting to explain what is at stake in the "illiberal turn," I have assumed a vector of thought that can be summarized in the following paraphrase of Saussure: "from the concrete to the abstract,"[33] only to return to the concrete. Namely, I believe that the explication of the banal technicalities of the state-capture style of illiberal governance reveal much more poignantly what is the true ideology of it and the utopia behind the illiberal mobilization, rather than a debate in terms of the grand ideological narratives. Values, culture, and certainly mentalities do not reveal much—if indeed anything at all—about the phenomenon at issue. Rather, they mystify and obfuscate.

De-Culturalization of the Question

If we look at the comparative studies on a global scale carried out by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way as well as the initial premises of the ambitious project on the crisis of the "liberal script" led, among others, by Tanja Börzel and Michael Zürn,[34] we arrive at the conclusion that the structural similarities in the models of governance, including the economy, are of a political nature and we cannot talk of "cultural propensities" toward totalitarianism. The presupposition that it is the "totalitarian reason" inherited from the Communist past that shapes the "illiberal turn" in Europe, spread by the new member states, does not seem to hold water as we see that virtually the same policies and populist strategies are used in different corners of the world, including Primer Minister Narendra Modi's India and post-Brexit Britain. To avoid confusion: we are making comparisons between the illiberal regimes in Europe and elsewhere, fully aware that many elements are different and tied to diverse cultures and political traditions. Some leaders of Western European countries have expressed fear toward the Union's enlargement, convinced that it is the East of Europe that has given birth to the contagion of the "illiberal turn." Emanuel Macron and others have hinted that there is an inherent link between "populism" (illiberalism) and Eastern Europe.[35] The link is implied to be a predominantly "cultural one," pertaining to Eastern Europeans, as in their lack of "Europeanness."[36] As if the Eastern European countries had never managed to surpass their totalitarian (Communist) past, and have, therefore, "smuggled" it into the European Union. The Union's vocabulary, comprising notions such as "European values" but also "Europeanization" (a process to which the new member states or those about to join the Union are subjected to) implies a cultural appropriation or, more precisely, culturalization of political values constituting ideologies that have been embraced by different civilizations and cultures worldwide. Europe seems to claim that the respect for individual freedoms, rule of law, or the freedom of expression belongs to it by virtue of its very nature (which is, paradoxically, a culture), whereas the despotic tendencies are implicitly Orientalized or Balkanized (a homologue of Orientalization, not used in the sense of the stereotype embedded in the English language verb "Balkanize"). Indeed, the form of liberal democracy and parliamentarism combined with capitalism are the creation of the Enlightenment, but under that form lie values that have been part of different cultures for centuries, prior, or in parallel, with the Enlightenment or have followed later on. Through the spreading of socialist and Communist ideologies worldwide, even the Enlightenment concept of modernity has been appropriated and "acculturalized" by so many countries in so many different corners of the globe, let alone Eastern Europe. In short, neither the spreading nor the crisis of liberalism should be viewed from the perspective of cultural studies or critical cultural studies; it should not be "culturalized," but rather considered in terms of the political sciences and

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[33] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, translated from the French by Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 53.

[34] Tanja A. Börzel and Michael Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal Script: A Research Program," Berlin University Alliance, SCRIPTS Working Paper no. 1, January 2020, https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/publications/working-paper-series/Working-Paper-No-1-2020/index.html.

[35] Richard Werly, "Emmanuel Macron: 'L'Europe n'est pas un supermarché. L'Europe est un destin commun,' " *Le Temps*, June 21, 2017, https://www.letemps.ch/monde/emmanuel-macron-leurope-nest-un-supermarche-leurope-un-destin-commun.

[36] Werly, "Emmanuel Macron."

economics in particular, in the fashion discussed in this chapter by recourse to Ian Bruff, David Harvey, to name the key references cited below.

What we have called here a mechanism of "state capture" is the model of governance in all of the cases studied worldwide referenced here[37] that can be considered "illiberal democratic" regimes (often erroneously referred to simply as "populist," a term that does not exhaust what the philosophy of governance stands for, as I hope to have demonstrated in this paper). As to the European case, it is marked by the defining specificity of emulation and simultaneous distortion of the systemic postulates of the European Union that, I argue, are political rather than cultural. The methodology of distortion through emulation has been explained above. There is a universal characteristic of all forms of competitive authoritarianism of which the European case of "illiberal democracy" is a subset: formally, they all rely on the tripartite structure of socio-political power branching out into executive, legislative, and judicial, and on the presumption that there is a division between the three branches; nonetheless, in illiberal democracies (and competitive authoritarianisms, speaking more broadly) the executive branch stands out with asymmetric predominance over the other two. Populism and the empty democratic form of parliamentary elections are the sole means of legitimation of an illiberal democracy, as well as other forms of competitive authoritarianism. Economic growth enabled by a controlling and overly interfering government is another characteristic: this is the central argument of Bruff and Harvey cited here.

Having this in mind, I would once again invite the reader to dismiss the thesis so often met among the journalists, and less so but still implicitly present among some academics, that one should assume a post-totalitarian political reason in Eastern Europe that has only mutated into a pseudo-capitalist liberal form, without ever espousing the essence of "European democracy." What is happening in Eastern Europe is no different from what has been happening in the West since the 2008 financial crisis. As argued by Ian Bruff[38] and David Harvey,[39] global neoliberal economics has reached a state at which it can survive and further perpetuate itself only by means of totalitarian intervention of the state enabled by authoritarian governance.

> In consequence, authoritarianism tends to be portrayed as an outcome of the contradictions between "pure" neoliberal ideology and "messy" neoliberalizing practices which result in a larger role for the state than anticipated. Unfortunately, this misses the point of the neoliberal agenda, which from the beginning has been less interested in giving free rein to markets than in engineering and managing the markets that it wishes to see. Moreover, state-directed coercion insulated from democratic pressures is central to the creation and maintenance of this politico-economic order, defending it against impulses towards greater equality and democratization. Nevertheless, although neoliberalism, along with more classical strands of "free market" thought, has always contained authoritarian tendencies, this has become significantly more prominent since the outbreak of global capitalist crisis in 2008.[40]

What we are witnessing in Europe, currently, is not the result of some "infection" brought to it by the Eastern part of the continent. Rather, it is the result of a prolonged political-economic crisis that has led to a change of the globally predominant political paradigm: capitalism does not need democracy anymore. Quite to the contrary, it is in its way. Moreover, democracy does not need liberalism, or liberal values, anymore. What used to be a naturalized triad (democracy, liberalism, capitalism) no longer is. Each of these elements can be divorced from the other two and combined with different forms of political-economic organization. It is important to conclude (or, for some, to reaffirm) that democracy is an empty form, it is

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[37] Dušan Pavlović, "How to Approach State Capture in Post-Communist Europe: A New Research Agenda," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* (August 25, 2022).
[38] Ian Bruff, "Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism," in *Handbook of Neoliberalism*, eds. Simon Springer, Kean Birch, Julie MacLeavy, (New York: Routledge, 2016): 107–117; Ian Bruff and Cemal Burak Tansel, "Authoritarian Neoliberalism: Trajectories of Knowledge Production and Praxis," *Globalizations* 16, no. 3 (March 2019): 233–244.
[39] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[40] Bruff, "Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism," 107.

value-free, it is a structure devoid of semantics. This form can be filled in with "undemocratic" or rather "illiberal" values, and the other way around. So, Viktor Orbán is correct: his political project introduces less liberalism rather than less democracy. There is no such thing as a democratic culture or value system: dialog—being able to hear the other side and to express oneself, allowing everyone to express their views, providing equal opportunities for socio-economic competition—all these are, rigorously speaking, liberal rather than democratic values. Democracy is, Orbán is right, a form, not content. To conclude, there are no "democratic values," but there are liberal values—or rather, more generic values that do not need to be tied down to the political definition of liberalism—such as the freedom of expression, equality of men and women, social solidarity, that are subject to suppression in illiberal regimes.

The Kidnapped Hyperdemocracy

Amélie Jaques-Apke

That there is a new form of universal crisis eroding liberal democracies around the globe has now been widely acknowledged. Recent elections in France and Italy have brought right-wing populist forces to power in an unprecedented way, and other liberal democracies are increasingly weakened by illiberal developments. *Wutbürger*, meaning "citizen of rage,"[1] a media buzzword that was elected by the Society for the German Language as the number one German Word of the Year for 2010,[2] describes a group of citizens using anger, protest, and indignation to oppose political decisions. It led to many debates, particularly about the many different shades of populism and illiberalism. Sadly, only "when a world-order collapses, then the analysis begins … though that doesn't seem to hold for the type of social theory currently prevalent," wrote Ulrich Beck when describing a world in turmoil.[3] Analysis is fundamental but often comes too late and we should not remain stuck in constant scholarly discussions about the ambiguous behavior of populists and illiberal actors, instead of addressing forcefully their root causes.

Two shocks fostered the far-right populist advance. The first, the Eurozone crisis and the bailouts of southern European economies, was endogenous; while the second, the refugee crisis beginning in 2015, was exogenous. Now, the coronavirus pandemic has produced an even bigger shock and brought the world to an abrupt halt: extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures and citizens demand rapid action. Moreover, leaders and institutions across the world are using drastic executive powers to seize sometimes dictatorial authorities, restricting liberties and freedoms in an unprecedented way, sometimes with little resistance. Once more, we see liberal democracies could be corroded very quickly. The current political system struggles to adapt itself to the deep political and societal fragmentations that are taking place; populism and illiberal forces will therefore be likely to take center stage of the political framework in the very near future.

Disentangling common denominators of the various political strands ascribed to a heterogeneous right-wing populist tradition requires some clear distinctions between postwar far-right politics and the populist right, the latter being a term greatly overused. Core features of populism are generally expressed by claims that describe (a) "the people" as a single homogenous entity that stands "at the center of their vision of the world and of political institutions which organize the community" (people-centrism),[4] (b) sources of threat and related criticism directed towards "the elite and/or others" (anti-elitism), and (c) promises to provide deliverance through change (salvation).[5] Populism can thus stand for a "behavior that fulfills a specific political function which can then be either employed strategically or asserted as a matter of conviction, i.e. put on the mantle of ideology."[6] In contrast to the extreme right, which is essentially antidemocratic and opposes the basic principle of the people, the radical right often appears to be democratic: sometimes acting as a threat *and* a corrective for democracy,[7] the radical right partially opposes some of the fundamental

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[1] See the definition of *Wutbürger* in the dictionary, available at www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/wutbuerger.

[2] Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, Pressemitteilung vom 17. Dezember 201. Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache (GfdS): 17.12.10 | Wort des Jahres 2010 (archive.org), https://web.archive.org/web/20110926005735/http://www.gfds.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/171210-wort-des-jahres-2010/.

[3] Ulrich Beck, *Twenty Observations on a World in Turmoil*, English ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012).

[4] Yves Mény and Yves Surel, *Par le peuple, pour le peuple: Le populisme et les démocraties* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 12.

[5] Mény and Surel, *Par le peuple*, 10–15.

[6] Paris Aslanidis, "*Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective*," Political Studies, no. 64 (2015), 96.

[7] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, (2012). "Populism and (Liberal) Democracy: A Framework for Analysis," in *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?*, eds. Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 1–26.

values of liberal democracy,[8] with its core built around nationalism, nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.[9]

Right-wing populism can thus be defined as an expression combining anti-elitism, protectionism, and a rejection of the existing political consensus with a specific type of homogenous, nostalgic ethnos, while appealing to the "common people" and speaking in their voice.[10] Hence, populism becomes exclusionary and xenophobic when it seeks to secure the identity of "the people" from those outside (aliens, foreigners, etc.) or below (minorities or the underclass) rather than above (the elite). The contemporary type of the populist radical right in public life is probably a new variant of a much older political phenomenon that uses new ways and practices, such as the new media,[11] in order to construct a tangible, quick and impactful change, in the sense that the populist radical right promise of change might be more or less radical transformations of the status quo.[12] I thus advance several assumptions: the exclusionary interpretation of society emphasizing differences between social groups and exclusions is essential for the functioning and success of the populist radical right since it establishes its credibility:[13] control over these Manichean interpretations constitutes its political power. Populist power is fueled by the constant re-structuration of social antagonisms, often involving the distortions of complexity and reality.

Especially since the fall of the Soviet Union, the democratization literature has depicted numerous shades of democratization waves, describing intermediate phases situated between democracy and dictatorship.[14] The history of using fear as a powerful tool, distorting people's logic and turning them into unscrupulous ideological weapons, is very long. However, a constant cannot explain a change: the threats emerging from authoritarian populism attacking liberal democracies are new to the system and the populist radical right has become both internationally relevant and normalized on the political scene: the reason might be that the distinctions between a *democracy*, with its electoral institutions translating popular will into public policies; *liberal institutions* that protect the rule of law and guarantee individual freedoms (such as freedom of speech or those of ethnic or religious minorities); and a *liberal democracy*, which represents the combination of both these features together, have been blurred. While illiberal actors often claim to be acting in the name of democracy, their vision of democracy tends to be one of spontaneous, unmediated, and undivided popular will, without institutions, minority protections, or representation. Hence, liberal democracies can be perverted in two ways: democracies can become illiberal, when the popular vote enables the power of the

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[8] Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[9] Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*.

[10] Hans-Georg Betz and Stefan Immerfall, *The New Politics of the Right* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 4–5.

[11] Silvio Waisbord (2018). *Populism as media and communication phenomenon*. In: Routledge Handbook on Global Populism, edited by Carlos de la Torre, Routledge, 221-234, 2019.

[12] Mény and Surel, *Par le people*, 181; Duncan McDonnell and Davide Vampa, "The Italian Lega Nord," in *Understanding Populist Party Organisation: The Radical Right in Western Europe*, eds. Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2016), 109.

[13] James Zeemann, "Populism beyond the Nation," in *Populism and World Politics. Global Political Sociology*, eds. Frank A. Stengel, David B. MacDonald, and Dirk Nabers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 40.

[14] There is a wide range of opinions among experts over the direction populist movements have taken in the years since the Cold War, oscillating (particularly after 9/11) between realist and idealist, conservative nationalist and conservative internationalist, and more or less progressive interpretations of world affairs. Since the times of the Greek historians Thucydides and Polybius, there have been perpetual discussions between scholars on democratic gray zones of regime types. Specific types such as "electoral authoritarianism," "transitional" and "hybrid" regimes, or other designations such as "defective democracies," "democratorship," "delegative democracies," regimes with a "dominant power syndrome" or a "weak pluralism syndrome," and other forms of semi-authoritarianism, describe intermediate stages between democracy and dictatorship. For an overview of different interpretations of the democratization waves, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Julian J. Rothbaum Distinguished Lecture Series 4 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Larry Diamond, *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019); Larry Diamond, "Elections without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002); Larry Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (January 2015); Seva Gunitsky, "Democratic Waves in Historical Perspective," *Perspectives on Politics* 16, no. 3, (September 2018); and Matthijs Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism," *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (April 2009).

executive to take over independent institutions. Voting can be maintained as a collective decision-making process conferring legitimacy, but this does not automatically entail a vision of democracy representing liberal or political traditions that value individual and collective liberties and rights. Illiberalism represents a backlash against today's liberalism in all its varied scripts—political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational. It can thus be understood as a new ideological universe, a strategy and set of tactics that can be deployed by populist and non-populist actors to various degrees. Liberal systems can therefore also become *antidemocratic*,[15] often in the name of democratic principles and thanks to them (for example, by winning the popular vote). Illiberal actors proposing solutions that can be majoritarian, nation-centric, or sovereigntist, favoring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity, call for a shift from politics to culture and are post-post-modern in their claims of rootedness in an age of globalization.

Due to this increasing confusion, strong feelings of disenchantment and anger polarize societies into an opposition between citizen of anger and citizen of fear—a movement towards devolving into a modern identity-driven political tribalism.[16] The sudden rise of the Alternative für Deutschland party (alternative for Germany: AfD) in Germany, Europe's economic powerhouse, illustrates the polarized political feedback loop in which the international system currently operates. Understanding modern identity-driven political tribalism is more important than ever, given our internet-based socialization and the dramatic increase of disenchantment, anxiety, and political polarizations in all Western democracies.[17] The power of group identification linked to a nativist rhetoric seems largely underestimated in the current scholarly discussions surrounding illiberalism and populism as transnational phenomena.

The AfD, founded in 2013 as an ordoliberal professor's party and protest against the euro bailout policy, opposed then-Chancellor Angela Merkel's migration policy and the EU's financial crisis management in strong, nationalistic tones, setting itself against the euro and German economic aid to indebted EU countries with balance-of-payments problems.[18] Originally conservative-liberal, to the right of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union of Bavaria coalition (Christlich Demokratische Union

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[15] See Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018), 5–30.

[16] I refer to political tribalism based on Yale Law School Prof. Amy Chua's definition of a modern identity-driven tribalism taking over political systems. Also important here is Prof. Joshua Greene's definition of moral tribalism: according to Greene's theory of moral judgement, human behavior naturally tends towards being utilitarian and less emotional, because the brain controls different responses to moral dilemmas: one unconscious, semi-automatic and emotional; the other conscious, deliberate, and rational. Hence, human behavior might fall into a natural feedback loop reinforcing tribalism in a context of fear and deep anger. "Metamorality," the acceptance of the unnatural constraint of putting the community's interest ahead of one's selfish individual interest, is nature's solution to the "tragedy of the commonsense morality," which triggers an exacerbation of intertribal conflict. Metamorality is "a higher-level moral system that adjudicates among competing tribal moralities, just as a tribe's morality adjudicates among competing individuals." See Amy Chua, *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations*, (London: Penguin Press, 2018); Joshua David Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*, (London: Penguin Press, 2013).

[17] See Michael Kenny, Davide Luca, "The Urban-Rural Polarization of Political Disenchantment: an Investigation of Social and Political Attitudes in 30 European Countries, *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 14, no. 3 (November 2021): 565–582.

[18] These positions recall German conservative arguments from the 1990s, which finally led to the heavy fiscal constraints in the Eurozone rules. Bernd Lucke, an economist and former member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), argued along these lines for southern European countries to leave the Eurozone, and developed the party within a liberal and socio-political conservative school of thought, focusing on market economics and the Eurozone. "With Bernd Lucke, the former public figurehead left the party. This had been preceded by a long internal party dispute over direction, in which the economic liberal representatives increasingly lost influence. At the national party conference in Essen in July 2015, there was finally an official change of power, as Lucke, the candidate of the economic liberal camp, lost the election as sole party chairman to the representative of the conservative wing, Frauke Petry." Joel Rosenfelder, translation from the German by the author: "Mit Bernd Lucke verließ das ehemalige öffentliche Aushängeschild die Partei. Dem war ein langer parteiinterner Richtungsstreit vorausgegangen, in dem die wirtschaftsliberalen Vertreter zunehmend an Einfluss verloren. Auf dem Bundesparteitag im Juli 2015 in Essen kam es schließlich zum offiziellen Machtwechsel, da Lucke, der Kandidat des wirtschaftsliberalen Lagers, bei der Wahl zum alleinigen Parteivorsitzenden der Vertreterin des konservativen Flügels, Frauke Petry unterlag." See Joel Rosenfelder, "Die Programmatik Der AfD: Inwiefern Hat Sie Sich von Einer Primär Euroskeptischen Zu Einer Rechtspopulistischen Partei Entwickelt?" *Zeitschrift Für Parlamentsfragen* 48, no. 1 (2017): 123–40.

Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern: CDU/CSU),[19] the AfD was voted into the Bundestag in 2017 as the largest opposition group in Parliament. Along with its entry into the German Bundestag as the third-strongest parliamentary group, the party quickly developed a unique personality within the populist landscape. The party gained 10.3 % of the votes during the last federal elections in 2021, and moved into fifth place, just after the liberal Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei: FDP).

Initially predominantly nationalist and liberal, the AfD has undergone several metamorphoses in recent years and overlaps with the conservative right today. Political scientists classify the AfD as unambiguously right-wing populist,[20] sometimes aligning with "national-authoritarian, conservative populism" (German: *Völkisch-autoritärer Populismus*).[21] The AfD developed quickly through its highly scandal-oriented and identity-driven public policy and shifted towards the far right within the parliamentary system.[22] It built up its influence based on the inclusion of right-wing protest voters and several electoral successes during the European Parliament elections and three Eastern German state elections in 2014. With very restrictive positions on immigration policy, a conservative social policy, and an extreme anti-establishment orientation, its political categorization has thus been highly controversial so far. The party represents various political currents, from national conservatism to right-wing extremism. However, the seeds of AfD's populism were planted, sprouting into the extreme right after a split with its free-market wing in July 2015.[23] Its proven ties with other extremist right-wing groups are nonetheless constantly denied.[24]

The AfD: Which Alternative?

Parties can have a very important impact on public policies and public confidence, to a degree depending on the political system.[25] Ultimately uniting Christian fundamentalists, free-marketeers, national-values conservatives, ethno-nationalists, and direct-democracy forces, the AfD has a strongly worrying significance for postwar Germany, and Europe. With its nativist and somewhat traditional populist rhetoric built upon an anti-establishment base in favor of direct democracy and a party in defense of German culture, it developed a program in opposition and rebellion against the "left green opinion dictatorship," which, according to the AfD, conditions the "lying press" (*Lügenpresse*).[26] The party split many times into

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[19] CDU/CSU, unofficially the Union parties (German: *Unionsparteien*) or the Union, is the center-right Christian-democratic political alliance of two political parties in Germany, namely the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU).

[20] Frank Decker, "Die Alternative für Deutschland aus vergleichender Sicht der Parteienforschung," in *Die Alternative für Deutschland: Programmatik, Entwicklung und politische Verortung*, Alexander Häusler, ed. (Wiesbaden Springer VS, 2016).

[21] See Alexander Häusler, "Die AfD: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung" Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, June 25, 2018, https://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtspopulismus/271484/die-afd-werdegang-und-wesensmerkmale-einer-rechtsaussenpartei.

[22] Mounk, *People vs. Democracy*, 40–45.

[23] The economically liberal wing left under economist Bernd Lucke and was re-formed as the Alliance for Progress and Awakening (Allianz für Fortschritt und Aufbruch, ALFA) party. This party split happened when Frauke Petry, a still unknown politician, defeated Lucke and became the new chairman. The party was then led by Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen. Immediately after the 2017 German federal elections, Ms. Petry left the AfD and founded the Blue Party (Blaue Partei). Since Petry's resignation in 2017, the party has been jointly chaired by Jörg Meuthen (who allied with the AfD's current leader in the Bundestag and original cofounder Alexander Gauland, and regional leader Björn Höcke, in order to gain power).

[24] This is especially important in view of its apparent proximity with neo-fascists, such as the far-right political movement Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida), hooligans of the anti-immigration protests in Chemnitz and the Identitarian movement, a post-World War II European far-right ideology that is associated with the Christchurch massacre. See Hendrik Merker, "Rechtsextremismus: AfD-Mitarbeiter am rechten Rand". Accessible on: https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2019/02/05/ afd-rechtsextreme-mitarbeiter-brandenburg-thueringenverfassungsschutz.

[25] Consider, for example, the influence of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) during the entire Brexit period.

[26] See *Der Spiegel*, "Rechte Sprache: Warum 'linksgrün versifft?,' " (2018) https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/rechte-sprache-warum-linksgruen-versifft-a-1252819.html; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2018), "Verschwörungstheorie 'Lügenpresse,' bpb.de., https://www.bpb.de/themen/medien-journalismus/wahre-welle/270428/verschwoerungstheorie-luegenpresse/.

subgroups, somewhat similar to other German federal radical-right parties, such as the Republicans and the People's Union in the '90s.[27]

In interregional comparison, Western Germany is characterized by a rather high degree of organization of interest groups, a central feature of political integration and traditional parties.[28] This is a normal process when political associations are formed, especially in a pluralist democracy. In the case of the AfD, the very contradictory coexistence of the radical-right subgroup "the Wing," and the recent founding of the group "Jews in the AfD" (Juden in der AfD: JAfD) in 2018 naturally attracted some attention.[29] The Wing subgroup has advocated for authoritarian, nationalist, homophobic, anti-feminist, anti-Semitic, and historical-revisionist positions, and counted for as much as 40% of AfD's members.[30] The "middle-class conservative" and "liberal-patriotic" working group Alternative Middle Germany (Alternative Mitte Deutschland: AM) saw itself as a counterweight to the former, finally giving "the moderates, the bourgeois a perceptible and concerted voice."[31] Factional disputes between the two groups, however, did not change the general support for the Wing, especially by the AfD's current leader in the Bundestag and original cofounder, Alexander Gauland.[32] A claim to power within the party at the federal level would have been a short process, given the Wing's high degree of influence in the AfD strongholds of Brandenburg (23.5%), Saxony (27.5%), and Thuringia (23.4%).[33]

The Alternative for Germany is now a court-confirmed suspected case of extremist aspirations, after the decision of the Administrative Court in Cologne in March 2022.[34] The "Junge Alternative für Deutschland" (young alternative for Germany: JA)[35] and the Wing have been under surveillance by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz: BfV) since January 2019 as suspected extremist threats.[36] In March 2020, the BfV officially categorized the Wing as a right-wing extremist

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[27] See Holger Lengfeld and Clara Dilger, "Kulturelle und ökonomische Bedrohung: Eine Analyse der Ursachen der Parteiidentifikation mit der 'Alternative für Deutschland' mit dem Sozio-oekonomischen Panel 2016," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 47, no. 3 (2018), ISSN 2366-0325, p. 181–199.

[28] See Bernhard Wessels, "Bindung an Interessengruppen und politische Parteien," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2021, https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/zahlen-und-fakten/datenreport-2021/politische-und-gesellschaftliche-partizipation/330214/bindung-an-interessengruppen-und-politische-parteien/.

[29] JAfD's policy statement formulates fundamental attitudes towards "traditional AfD policy fields," such as a sharp criticism of immigration policy and opposition to Islam, the political left, and the "federal republican mainstream." Regarding its identity, the JAfD rejects an "excessive use of the [German] past," demanding a clear commitment to the "Occident," to "Germanness," and to recognition of the authority of the "traditional monogamous family." The JAfD aligns with a proper understating of Judaism, describing its agreement with the AfD as a community of interest between the Jewish and the European right. See the official policy statement of the JAfD: https://j-afd.org/index.php/grundsatzerklaerung.

[30] The Wing accounts for almost 1/3 of the approximately 33,650 AfD members. See Gregor Mayntz, "Verfassungsschutz beobachtet in NRW 1000 AfD-Mitglieder" *General-Anzeiger* (Bonn), February 22, 2020; https://www.general-anzeiger-bonn.de/news/politik/deutschland/verfassungsschutz-beobachtet-in-nrw-1000-afd-mitglieder_aid-49108265.

[31] Berengar Elsner von Gronow, Chairman of the Federal Convention of the AfD, in: Matthias Kamann, "In der AfD wächst ein zartes Pflänzchen der Mäßigung", *Die Welt*, July 23, 2017, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article166915486/In-der-AfD-waechst-ein-zartes-Pflaenzchen-der-Maessigung.html.

[32] Anne-Beatrice Clasmann, "Gemäßigte gegen Höcke: Richtungsstreit in der AfD wieder voll entbrannt," *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, October 17, 2018; https://www.saarbruecker-zeitung.de/nachrichten/politik/topthemen/richtungsstreit-in-der-afd-wieder-voll-entbrannt_aid-33786495.

[33] See "Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2020," https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2021-06-verfassungsschutzbericht-2020-fakten-und-tendenzen-kurzzusammenfassung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5.

[34] See the press corner of the BfV: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz - Presse - Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz obsiegt vor Verwaltungsgericht Köln gegen die AfD. https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2022/pressemitteilung-2022-1-afd.html;jsessionid=3D490F1621A49FDA74ACFEB700998C4E.internet282.

[35] The Young Alternative group presents itself as the youth wing of the AfD. See https://netzseite.jungealternative.online.

[36] See "Brief Summary 2021 Report on the Protection of the Constitution (Facts and Trends)," https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/EN/reports-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution/2022-06-brief-summary-2021-report-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution.html;jsessionid=3D490F1621A49FDA74ACFEB700998C4E.internet282.

political project, a "party within a party."[37] Evidence supporting this decision included apparent efforts against the basic free democratic order and principles of human dignity, democracy, the rule of law, and other types of evidence of hostility to the constitution, as well as violations of the Basic Law of the Constitution by leading party figures.[38] Although the AfD federal executive board passed a resolution calling for the dissolution of the Wing, and despite the formal self-dissolution effective April 30, 2020, former Wing members continue to be active within the AfD.[39] Björn Höcke, a leader of the faction and a central figure within the AfD, is considered as being a representative of the New Right,[40] striving for an alliance of right-wing nationalist groups for the ethnic homogenization of Germany and Europe.[41] Scholars and historians classify him as a right-wing extremist, especially in light of his adoption of the language and ideas of national socialism.[42] These highly controversial figures are not isolated cases within AfD's ranks.[43] The recent party expulsion of a very important head of the Wing faction, Andreas Kalbitz, illustrates the

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[37] "The Wing" was founded in 2015 and has been, with its approximately 7,000 members, classified in March 2020 as a right-wing extremist effort against the free democratic basic order. According to their own statements since 2019, its membership can be quantified as representing at least 20% to 30% of all AfD members. At the beginning of 2019, the BfV had announced that the AfD was being processed as a test case based on an initial report and the Wing had been classified as a suspicious case. The evidence for the decision is based on the organizational differentiation of the Wing in general; the further increase in the central importance of right-wing extremists in the Wing, such as Björn Höcke and Andreas Kalbitz; a continuing string of new violations by officials and supporters of the Wing against the free democratic basic order, its essentials of human dignity, and the principles of democracy and the rule of law during the survey period; the increased networking of the Wing within the right-wing extremist or new-right spectrum; the denigration of any internal criticism of the Wing with the term "enemy" and the accusation of party division; and the reproduction and dissemination of key evidence of hostility to the constitution from the preliminary report of January 2019.
The 2020 report by the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz can be found at https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2021-06-verfassungsschutzbericht-2020-fakten-und-tendenzen-kurzzusammenfassung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5.

[38] After having observed the latter since January 2019, the Wing was under intelligence surveillance by the Federal Office. Interestingly, the reporting of the BfV attaches a similar importance to social media posts as it does to speeches at public meetings or party events. See Andre Meister et al., "Wir veröffentlichen das Verfassungsschutz-Gutachten zur AfD," *Netzpolitik*, January 28, 2019, https://netzpolitik.org/2019/wir-veroeffentlichen-das-verfassungsschutz-gutachten-zur-afd/. The BfV finds evidence of AfD leader Alexander Gauland promoting "ethnic nationalist social images" and "deliberately delegitimizing" the credibility of parliamentary democracy, and that by "defaming those who are not part of his own revalued group" he violated Article 3 of the Basic Law of the Constitution (Frank Jansen, "Verfassungsschutz hält Gauland für problematischer als Meuthen," *Tagesspiegel*, January 17, 2019, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/verfassungsschutz-halt-gauland-fur-problematischer-als-meuthen-6418063.html. The Thuringian AfD elected Höcke again as its top candidate for the 2019 state elections. The AfD became the second-strongest force under Björn Höcke's leadership, again running as the AfD's top candidate, after the state elections in Thuringia in 2019. The AfD Federal Executive Committee withdrew its impeachment proceedings against him in July 2015 and ceased party expulsion proceedings in June 2018 (Kai Budler, "AfD-Spitzenkandidat Höcke," *BNR*, October 15, 2018, https://www.endstation-rechts.de/news/afd-spitzenkandidat-hoecke).

[39] The 2021 Report by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution BfV states: "There are many facts to indicate that followers of 'The Wing' remained active in 2021, even though the group was formally dissolved on April 30, 2020 under surveillance by the domestic intelligence agencies as a suspected extremist threat." See: 2021 report by the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, p. 18 at: https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/EN/reports-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution/2022-06-brief-summary-2021-report-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3.

[40] The report from 2020 by the BfV defines the New Right as follows: "For the first time, the New Right is listed in the report on the protection of the constitution with several actors and groups. The term 'New Right' refers to an informal network of groups, individuals, and organizations in which right-wing extremist to right-wing conservative forces work together to implement partly anti-liberal and anti-democratic positions in society and politics using various strategies." (translation by the author) See: Verfassungsbericht 2020, p. 18.

[41] Höcke, as one of two spokespersons in Thuringia, has been the leader of the AfD parliamentary group in the Thuringian state parliament since the 2014 regional elections.

[42] Höcke's claim that the *Erinnerungskultur* (culture of remembrance) has become a "cult of guilt" explains why he refers to the Holocaust Memorial as a "monument of shame" and a "stupid coping policy." The BfV keeps records of his fascist, racist, revisionist, and partially anti-Semitic positions. See BBC, "German Fury at AfD Hoecke's Holocaust Memorial remark," January 18, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38661621.

[43] Three Eastern German party chairmen are or were all confirmed members of "the Wing": Doris von Sayn-Wittgenstein, Katrin Ebner-Steiner, and Thomas Röckemann.

ongoing struggle between the two sides of the AfD, between its moderate and extreme right wings. Its outcome and development will define Germany's—and Europe's—political faith.

The socio-economic profile of AfD voters is extremely complex. The commonly-applied "losers of globalization" framework is simplifying the complexity of the number of factors at play: economic factors causing anxiety and discontent alone cannot explain this development. As a corollary of the economic crises and the accumulation of wealth, the resurgence of social vulnerability and the development of "geographies of exclusion" is one of the realities experienced everywhere on the planet in recent decades.[44] The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has put forward that the neoliberal market compressed democratic pluralism and policy formulation into such a small space that he speaks of a "programmatic emptying of politics, which shrinks to an automated policy change per se, and corresponds to the informed abstinence on the part of the voter or the willingness to acknowledge 'personal charisma.' … If the desperation is great enough, a little money for radical right-wing slogans and a remote-controlled engineer from Bitterfeld, whom nobody knows and who has nothing but a cell phone, is enough to mobilize almost 13% protest voters right off the bat."[45] Also, previous successes of radical-right parties on the local level in the East and the West may have pointed the way to the AfD's present-day success;[46] past attempts to install radical-right parties, from the Republicans to the Schill party and the National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands: NPD), had a lasting effect on voters.[47] In the federal election in 2017, the AfD's election result was still attributed to protest voters. Surveys showed that voters voted for the AfD mainly out of disappointment with the other parties and less out of conviction.[48] This picture begins to shift:[49] according to a major online survey of 10,055 participants conducted in June 2020 shortly before the elections, more than half of AfD voters appeared to be either latent or manifest right-wing extremists. Overall, according to the study, 8% of eligible voters in Germany have a closed right-wing extremist worldview. What is new, the survey said, is the strong concentration of these voters within the AfD. Among AfD voters, almost one in three (29%) had extreme right-wing views, while another quarter (27%) held latent extreme right-wing attitudes.[50]

It is also crucial to stress that the AfD is strongest in rural regions of Eastern Germany,[51] which suffer from the uncertainties of the social upheaval resulting from reunification, and fears of the future such as digitalization and the upheavals on the labor market, a massive outmigration of the young to the West, and lack of social and technical infrastructure (to name only a few such reasons). Until the last elections in 2021, its vote share in the East was more than twice as high as it was the West.[52] The party has experienced

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[44] Amélie Jaques-Apke and Felipe Hernández, "The (Ab)use of Covid-19 Pandemic Social Exclusion in Right-Wing Populist Discourses: Lessons from Western Europe and Central America," ECPR Working Paper 2022, Presented at the ECPR SGEU, Rome, June 8, 2022.

[45] Jürgen Habermas, "Die postnationale Konstellation und die Zukunft der Demokratie," Online Akademie der Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, June 5, 1998, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/akademie/online/50332.pdf.

[46] Philip Manow, Bruno Palier, and Hanna Schwander, "Welfare Democracies and Party Politics: Explaining Electoral Dynamics in Times of Changing Welfare Capitalism" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 300–303.

[47] Werner T. Bauer, "Rechtsextreme und rechtspopulistische Parteien in Europa," ÖGPP - Österr. Gesellschaft für Politikberatung und Politikentwicklung, p. 29, http://politikberatung.or.at/studien/rechtspopulismus/rechtsextreme-und-rechtspopulistische-parteien-in-europa/.

[48] Tagesschau survey, AfD attitudes, September 2017, https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2017-09-24-BT-DE/umfrage-afd.shtml.

[49] Maria Fiedler, "Bertelsmann-Umfrage: 29 Prozent der AfD-Wähler haben rechtsextreme Einstellung," February 1, 2001, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/29-prozent-der-afd-wahler-haben-rechtsextreme-einstellung-4227007.html.

[50] Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Zukunft der Demokratie. Rechtsextreme Einstellungen der Wähler:innen vor der Bundestagswahl 2021," January 2021, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/ZD_Einwurf_1_2021.pdf.

[51] ZDF, "Bundestagswahl 2021: AfD im Westen schwächer als im Osten," ZDFheute, September 27, 2021, https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/bundestagswahl-afd-ergebnisse-west-ost-100.html.

[52] Frank Decker, "Wahlergebnisse und Wählerschaft der AfD: Parteien in Deutschland," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung website, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 DE - Namensnennung - Nicht-kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitung 3.0 Deutschland, October 26, 2020, https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/afd/273131/wahlergebnisse-und-waehlerschaft-der-afd/.

a clear move to the East, and might now even grow into a regional "Lega East" party.[53] It is important to remember populism's tendency to oppose cosmopolitanism: as James Ingram notes, "populism's anti-elitism shades into anti-cosmopolitanism because the elites and outsiders, whether they are perceived as threatening 'the people' from above or below, are identified by their distance from, and failure to be 'of,' 'the people.' "[54]

Also, the majority of AfD voters are men (the party received 16.3% of the male vote, as opposed to 9.2% of the female vote in the Bundestag elections of 2017), and particularly those who are middle-aged.[55] The party has always attracted CDU/CSU voters (1.05 million previous CDU/CSU voters voted instead for the AfD in 2017) and succeeded in mobilizing a considerable part of the left (470,000 from the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social-Democratic Party of Germany: SPD]), as well as bringing out new voters who had not participated in previous elections (approximately 1.2 million). The AfD's electoral success is therefore not due to a decline in European social democracy, but rather to dissatisfied CDU voters, among other factors. Its rapid establishment within four years as the largest opposition group, facing off against the CDU and the SPD, clearly shows it outperforming vis-à-vis the leftist newcomers the Greens and the Left (die Linke)/PDS (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus: Party of Democratic Socialism) that were established in the 1990s. Given the historic decline of the *Volksparteien*[56] CDU and SPD since the 1980s (also due to demographic change and the aging of the party) the AfD's rise has been able to attract different constituencies, whereas the Greens have portrayed themselves as the anti-AfD party, based on a vision of a pluralistic, cosmopolitan, and open society.

Since 2015, the AfD's impact on established parties has been highly successful, through fracturing traditional partisan relations by dominating the public debate on migration and security. The center-right has hardened its approach in order to win back voters from the AfD, whereas the SPD appears to be helpless within its coalition with the CDU.[57] The old standing consensus among traditional parties to never work with extremist parties was broken when the AfD openly offered to form a technocratic government with the Free Democratic Party FDP, resulting in an elected minister-president in the state of Thuringia with the support of the CDU and FDP. Hence "the unrestraint has reached big politics."[58] Considering the AfD's

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[53] See ZDF, "Bundestagswahl 2021: AfD im Westen schwächer als im Osten," ZDFheute, 2021.

[54] James Ingram, "*Populism and Cosmopolitanism*," in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 816.

[55] Zeit Online, "Wahlen: Die Wählerschaft der AfD: Jung, männlich, ostdeutsch?," June 10, 2021, https://www.zeit.de/news/2021-06/10/forscher-afd-punktet-eher-bei-mittelalten-waehlern?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ecosia.org%2F.

[56] According to Dieter Nohlen, a people's party (*Volkspartei*) is "a self-designation of large parties such as the SPD, CDU, and CSU, which strive for as many votes as possible for strategic majorities by expanding their voter base. Their political rhetoric and advertising self-portrayal is based on the claim that they want to include broad strata of the electorate across all social strata and ideologies and to represent them in a balanced manner in their diversity of interests." See Dieter Nohlen and Florian Grotz, eds., "Kleines Lexikon der Politik," C.H. Beck, Munich 2007.

[57] The 2019 European Parliament elections marked the worst election results for the SPD since the imperial era (with a mere 15.5% of ballots cast). This can be traced back to Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's neoliberal policy and permanent problems within the coalition with the CDU: Chancellor Angela Merkel successfully adopted much of the SPD's socially progressive program, thereby minimizing the party's options to demonstrate its own distinctive brand. The party has since been divided over upending the governing coalition with the CDU.

[58] Translation by the author ("Nun aber habe die Hemmungslosigkeit die große Politik erreicht.") In: "Die AfD is tzu einem Königsmacher in der deutschen Politik geworden," *Die Zeit*, February 6, 2020, https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2020-02/thueringen-ministerpraesident-fdp-thomas-kemmerich-presseschau. The three parties (CDU, FDP, and AfD) elected FDP politician Thomas Kemmerich as minister-president of the regional parliament in Thuringia in February 2020. The latter announced shortly after new elections his intention "to remove the blot of the AfD's support for the office of the premiership," stressing that there had not been any cooperation with the far right and accusing the AfD of cheating and harming democracy. In a contrasted line, after two political failures, the previous incumbent minister-president from the Left (die Linke) had voted for the AfD candidate Michael Kaufmann as vice president, stating that he made a decision as a matter of principle in favor of the AfD's parliamentary law. Furthermore, this scenario is due to the CDU's and former Secretary General Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer's policy in Thuringia to not cooperate with the extreme-left Die Linke, nor with the extreme-right AfD. This instruction coming out of Berlin was met with skepticism by the CDU's regional headquarters, which ultimately ignored Kramp-

representation in parliament, traditional parties applied a *cordon sanitaire*,[59] or containment policy, against the AfD, rejecting any cooperation with or election of an AfD member in the Bundestag as long as the debate on its right-wing populist nature remained ongoing.[60] However, some members of the CDU are in favor of cooperation with the AfD, on the condition that the party expels its extreme-right-wing faction, since the party initially had an influential moderate wing. The 2020 elections in Eastern Germany demonstrated the importance of a very large right-wing movement, spanning both the CDU and the AfD. Merkel tragically qualified this regional incident as "a bad day for democracy [… and the] proud tradition of the CDU's values. This is in no way in line with what the CDU thinks, how we have acted throughout our party's existence."[61]

This containment policy has been hotly debated: does it enable the AfD to play the victim as the "forbidden party"? Another political fear is the CDU's temptation to join forces with the AfD given its growing popularity in the East and its potential transformation into the "best option" for a radicalized minority. In the future, a coalition with the AfD might be a good alternative for the CDU to return to power, and the AfD might very well govern in Saxony and Thuringia over the long term.[62] In this sense, AfD leader Jörg Meuthen predicted a coalition between the CDU and the AfD by 2025 at the latest, "at least at the state level."[63] Finally, and contrary to some analysts, I argue that the AfD's internal factions illustrate its ambiguous populist nature[64] and may ultimately contribute to its future success, as it manages to appeal to different types of voters.[65]

Hyperdemocrats and Hyperpopulists

Contemporary populism thus confronts us with both traditional democratic core principles and modernist intellectualism, a combination of ultimate freedom, liberty, *and* bondage: us against them, the people versus the elite, good versus evil. The radical-right populist is, in the end, an *antidemocrat* and an *antipluralist*,[66]

Karrenbauer's ban. See also "Das ist Demokratie!" *Die Welt* (Berlin), June 2, 2020, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article205639833/Internationale-Presse-zu-Thueringen-Das-ist-Demokratie.html.

[59] The term was introduced into the rhetoric on parliamentary politics in Belgium in the 1980s and since then has been used in many countries as a policy of non-cooperation.

[60] A majority of members of parliament (MPs) across the political spectrum have refused to ever vote for an AfD politician in the Bundestag.

[61] "Germany AfD: Thuringia PM Quits amid Fury over Far Right," *BBC News*, February 6, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51399445.

[62] The two vice presidents of the CDU state parliamentary group Saxony-Anhalt stated in an internal document that the CDU and AfD were following similar goals. See "CDU Politiker fordern Debatte über Koalition mit der AfD," *Die Zeit* (Hamburg), June 20, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-06/ulrich-thomas-sachsen-anhalt-cdu-afd-koalition.

[63] "I should be surprised if there is no coalition of CDU and AfD in 2025, at least at the state level." Sophie Garbe, "Trotz Koalitionsabsage: Wo sich CDU und AfD näherkommen," *Spiegel Online*, August 8, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/cdu-und-afd-wo-sich-die-parteien-naeherkommen-a-1280726.html.

[64] See Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni, "Analysing and Explaining Populism: Bringing Frame, Actor and Context Back In," ch. 5 in Reinhard Heinisch et al., *Political Populism: A Handbook* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017).

[65] In 2018, the party officially counted 33,516 members, with a 21.3% growth in membership year-on-year. According to the party's spokesperson, the party counts as of today around 28,636 members and has recorded a steady drop in membership since 2019. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "Die AfD schrumpft," July 20, 2022, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/die-afd-hat-binnen-eines-jahres-2500-mitglieder-verloren-18185854.html. The AfD also lost its 3rd-place standing from before the last federal elections in 2021. Back then, the party was well ahead of the FDP and other parties. The 2021 elections shifted the rankings and the FDP now occupies 4th place with 11.5% of the seats in parliament, though it remains very close to the AfD with 10.3%. See Bundeswahlleiter, "Bundestagswahl 2021: Endgültiges Ergebnis," Pressemitteilung Nr. 52/21, October 15, 2021 https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/info/presse/mitteilungen/bundestagswahl-2021/52_21_endgueltiges-ergebnis.html.

[66] According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Pluralism, in political science, [is] the view that in liberal democracies power is (or should be) dispersed among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups and is not (or should not be) held by a single elite or group of elites. Pluralism assumes that diversity is beneficial to society and that autonomy should be enjoyed by

who wants his fellows to seize power, and while silencing others by any means necessary (until he knows his power is secure), he makes it all look halfway democratic. He wants freedom of speech, but only for his own opinion, so that the others will finally give him peace.

In this sense, supporters of the AfD can be considered to be "hyperdemocrats" and "hyperliberals" who demand liberation from the impositions of representative democracy.[67] *Hyperdemocracy*, according to the late Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, describes a condition in which "the mass (of people) acts directly, outside the law, imposing its aspirations and its desires by means of material pressure.[68] More recently, scholar Brian McNair has defined the term as a form of political unpredictability that is an outcome of "cultural chaos" in the media, enhanced by "ideological competition rather than hegemony [and] increased volatility of news agendas."[69] This is especially important when assessing that the specificities of populism are above all moral assumptions: at the center is the idea of exclusive representation of the people through a political grouping. Only "we" represent the people. Power belongs to the people and politics is an expression of the will of the people. "We are the people!" (German: *Wir sind das Volk!*) is the AfD's main chant, claiming the mantle of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 that brought down the Berlin Wall, and with it the German Democratic Republic, while complaining of the illegitimacy of the current system and fighting the "dictatorial 'Merkel System' " just as the protestors did against the GDR dictatorship.[70] It also projects the AfD as the sole representation of an ethnically homogenous entity, *das Volk*. Populists tell the story of the people betrayed by the elite: the people realize that they are oppressed by a corrupt elite and follow the path of their liberation, at the end of which populism promises power will be returned to the people. Whether this exclusiveness is really antidemocratic becomes apparent only when the populists are in power, when we observe how the opposing part of the people relates to those in power and how identity and group tribalism are used to manipulate smaller parts of the society.

In the eyes of hyperdemocrats, traditional parties are too mainstream, too elitist, and too politically correct, working through old, corrupt networks. With this description of populism by those who defend liberal democracy, all kinds of fears are brought together: "liberals" fear the strengthened populist alliances and the coming of a transnationally threatening illiberalism. These omnipresent risks are dominating national and international decision-making today, especially in crisis-driven periods such as the present one: realpolitik risks being absorbed by *hyperpopulism*, the latter being a fusion of an extremely depoliticized technocracy with a hyper-politicized populism.[71]

Unfortunately, many policymakers and institutions have persisted in a long honeymoon period during which they gave authoritarians like former Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India, President Donald Trump in the United States, President Vladimir Putin in Russia, the late President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, or President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (to name a few), the benefit of the doubt that they might eventually strengthen (or at least maintain) liberal-democratic institutions or somehow benefit liberal democracies. However, as Putin has recently demonstrated to the world, this calculation never holds: it usually takes only few years for illiberal actors to consolidate power for the long term, even if their somehow populist rhetoric starts out by encouraging liberal values with a stated desire to put an end to an

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disparate functional or cultural groups within a society, including religious groups, trade unions, professional organizations, and ethnic minorities." See: https://www.britannica.com/topic/pluralism-politics.

[67] See Justus Bender, "Gauland: Özoguz in Anatolien entsorgen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 28, 2017, https://www.faz.net/1.5171141.

[68] Stephen Welch, "Introduction: Hyperdemocracy, the Cognitive Dimension of Democracy, and Democratic Theory," chap. 1 in *Hyperdemocracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), esp. p. 1.

[69] Welch, "Introduction: Hyperdemocracy," p. 1.

[70] Alexander Gauland, "AfD-Chef für 'friedliche Revolution" gegen das 'System Merkel'," *Die Zeit*, September 5, 2018: https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2018-09/afd-gauland-alexander-forderung-friedliche-revolution.

[71] In his recent book, Sir Paul Tucker, former deputy governor of the Bank of England, explains that contemporary democracy is "flirting with a peculiar cocktail of hyper-depoliticized technocracy and hyper-politicized populism, each fueling the other in attempts to maintain effective government and to re-establish majoritarian sensibility." Paul Tucker, *Unelected Power: The Quest for Legitimacy in Central Banking and the Regulatory State*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2.

authoritarian past.[72] As we observe throughout history, in cases of repeated re-elections and longer-lasting authoritarian regimes, any political system can be damaged in a fast, consistent, and lasting way; democracies are no exception to this rule. We can systematically assess this development in many different countries around the world, especially in the 21st century. Populism in different illiberal and antidemocratic shapes has entered many governments all over Europe, the democratic backslidings in Russia under Putin, Poland under the PiS, and Hungary under Fidesz are only the most prominent examples of how well illiberalism works.[73] Populists do not want freedom for "other" minorities, but maximum and radical rule by *their* own majority, restoring rule to the "true" people while combating the apparent illiberal status quo.

After the 2017 elections, AfD party leader Alexander Gauland stated that, "since we are now obviously the third-strongest party, this federal government … can dress warmly. We will hunt them; we will hunt Ms. Merkel or whomever—and we will take back our country and our people."[74] Its total defense of the national identity, culture, and liberal way of life against advocates of a multicultural society and the remembrance of the Prussian past and its values demonstrates that this nostalgic use of language, combining promises of cultural and political change, seriously corrodes public political discourse, and ultimately trust in politics.

Most importantly, the party's repeated violations of constitutional rights, as well as electoral rules, demonstrate its consistent ignorance and disregard of the rules-based nature of German politics.[75] Right-wing populist parties, according to critical discourse analyst Ruth Wodak, "instrumentalize some kind of ethnic/religious/linguistic/political minority as a scapegoat for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective group as dangerous and a threat 'to us,' to 'our' nation; this phenomenon manifests itself as a 'politics of fear.' "[76] Similarly, Wodak defines another main feature, the "arrogance of ignorance," which is directed at the "common sense"—as opposed to "intellectualism"—wanting an "intuitive" return to "pre-modernist/pre-Enlightenment thinking."[77] The AfD's strategy specifically focuses on presenting

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[72] For instance, in 2004, months after the first time Vladimir Putin stood for re-election, Freedom House rated Russia's democracy still as "partly free" in its list of electoral democracies and states: "Although the current survey reflects findings and trends of events through November 30, 2003, Russia's elections of December 7, 2003, were neither free nor fair, and Russia would no longer remain on Freedom House's list of electoral democracies." (Freedom House Report: "The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties," https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Freedom_in_the_World_2004_complete_book.pdf. When, however, new elections were significantly less democratic in 2008, the country was rated "not free" (Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2008*, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Freedom_in_the_World_2008_complete_book.pdf. Similar developments happened in Turkey, (see Steven A. Cook, "How Erdogan Made Turkey Authoritarian Again," *The Atlantic,* July 21, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/how-erdogan-made-turkey-authoritarian-again/492374/; and for Venezuela, (Freedom House, "Venezuela," in *Freedom in the World 2003*, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Freedom_in_the_World_2003_complete_book.pdf]; and "Venezuela," in *Freedom in the World 2017,* https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FIW_2017_Report_Final.pdf.

[73] Consider parties such as the Freedom Party of Austria, the Danish People's Party, the Party for Freedom (Netherlands), the Finns Party/True Finns, the Swiss People's Party, the Progress Party (Norway), Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary, Law and Justice (PiS, in Poland), the Slovenian Democratic Party, the Bulgarian National Movement II, the Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary, the Vlaams Belang (Flanders), the National Front (France), the Lega Nord (Italy), the Golden Dawn (Greece), the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, in Germany), and the UK Independence Party, as well as many others. Many politicians on the international stage have adopted authoritarian-populist agendas to various degrees, such as President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and President Miloš Zeman in the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand, Presidents Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India and President Donald Trump in America.

[74] Alexander Gauland, original quote in German: "Da wir ja nun offensichtlich drittstärkste Partei sind, kann sich diese Bundesregierung […] warm anziehen. Wir werden sie jagen, wir werden Frau Merkel oder wen auch immer jagen—und wir werden uns unser Land und unser Volk zurückholen." *BR24*, September 24, 2017, https://www.br.de/bundestagswahl/afd-politiker-gauland-ueber-merkel-wir-werden-sie-jagen-100.html.

[75] During the 2019 Saxon state election for instance, the party defended formal deficiencies in the nomination process and lost another appeal to the German Federal Court due to formal shortcomings in its lawsuits.

[76] Ruth Wodak, "Ruth Wodak: entretien avec Silvia Nugara," in *Mots: Les langages du politique,* no. 115, November 2017, p. 166, https://www.cairn.info/load_pdf.php?ID_ARTICLE=MOTS_115_0165&download=1&from-feuilleteur=1.

[77] Wodak, "Ruth Wodak: entretien avec Silvia Nugara."

itself as the only party that is prepared to address major threats and risks to society by the promotion of fake news, conspiracies, misleading information, and the use of force.[78]

But these conclusions do not really get at the heart of the phenomenon that the AfD represents. One of the general and fundamental problems in dealing with populists lies in the fact that populism and democracy are not necessarily opposites. The Covid-19 pandemic showed very well how the chameleonic nature of populism adapts to different contexts and added another layer to the "liberal democratic face" of populist actors: populists on both sides of the political spectrum choose very often not to adopt a protectionist narrative (the basic imperative to protect "the people"). Instead, they choose to endorse individual liberties, since covid-19 measures are perceived as limitations on such freedoms and violations of the basic order of liberal democracies.[79] In this case, populists gain strength by presenting themselves as the "true democrats." Populists are concerned with freedom and equality in an *immediate* sense, rejecting domination and prioritizing the equality of people. This comes very close to the original democratic idea, as the Austrian constitutional law expert Hans Kelsen summarized it in his essay "On the Nature and Value of Democracy" in 1920: "If we have to be dominated, we only want to be dominated by ourselves. … Politically free is he who is subject to no one but his own will."[80] Thus, we can deduce that those who feel dominated are not free, and therefore ruling is, in line with this desire for immediate freedom and equality, not legitimate. In his famous essay "Two Concepts of Liberty," the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin distinguished between what he called "negative freedom," meaning that nobody can force others into servitude, and "positive freedom," which refers to a state of complete self-mastery and determination, and thus to a total subjective perspective on a higher self, which can manifest itself in the people. That fine line between both concepts explains why positive freedom (and thus democracy itself) can lead to autocracy, dictatorship, and tyranny sometimes at its populist end. Within democracy itself, the risk of its own destruction is ever present. According to Plato, democracy, as he described in the *Republic,* encompasses too much "freedom" which can turn into "too much slavery in the individual and the state."[81]

The populist strategic agenda can generally be described as "popular, often demagogic politics characterized by opportunism, aimed at winning the favor of the masses (with a view to elections) by dramatizing the political situation."[82] On the other hand, we can also observe that the populist moment resides in a simpler recipe for success: providing simple answers to complex questions and alternative claims. According to many scholars and to the definition by Jan-Werner Müller, populism does not connote specific political content, due to its chameleonic, opportunistic and ambiguous nature.[83] However, observers and scholars should take care not to oversimplify and generalize populist agendas, nor reduce them to content-less or dramatizing discourses.

First, cultural backlash and urbanization are other essential factors framing contemporary populism. Urbanization, being a process of spatial and social sorting, divides society according to economic and cultural values. Smaller and rural populations become increasingly uniform in terms of composition and

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[78] The party has always used the language of former Eastern German democratic movements. A recently published study by Hestermann and Hoven (2019) analyzed AfD press releases from 2018 dealing with criminal offenses: 95% of the suspects whose nationality is mentioned are immigrants, and only 5% are Germans, amongst whom reference is consistently made to an insignificance of the purported crime. It focuses on immigrants from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, arguing in favor of a clear rejection of pro-immigration policies. See Tony E. Hestermann, "Kriminalität in Deutschland im Spiegel von Pressemitteilungen der Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)," *Kriminalpolitische Zeitschrift*, 2019, p. 127–139.

[79] Hande Eslen-Ziya and Alberta Giorgi, "Populism and Science in Europe," in Hande Eslen–Ziya and Alberta Giorgi, eds., *Populism and Science in Europe*, Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), p. 7.

[80] Lars Vinx, "Kelsen's Theory of Democracy—Reconciliation with Social Order," in *Hans Kelsen's Pure Theory of Law: Legality and Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; online edn. 2009), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199227952.003.0004.

[81] Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 5 and 6, translated by Paul Shorey (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1969), https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D8%3Asection%3D564a.

[82] Definition from the German dictionary, the Duden: https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Populismus.

[83] Jan-Werner Müller, "Was ist Populismus? Ein Essay" (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016).

social conservatism:[84] a logical development provoking long-term generational shifts in values and sometimes disenchantment in view of existing but far-flung political institutions.[85] In addition, neoliberalism accelerated the atomization of social structures, proclaiming a particular type of identity: individualism. This unique blend of political tribalism, resulting from a revival of anger, nostalgia, and individualism, is one of our era's most pressing issues.[86]

"The Alternative for Germany … is grass-roots democratic with rough edges and flaws, which stands for changes and reforms," states the opening of the party's strategy paper for 2017: "it gathers men and women with great life and work experience, who defend their opinions openly, even when rubbing the establishment the wrong way."[87] The party upholds democratic procedures, for instance direct democracy in the form of referendums, referring often to the Swiss model.[88] As stated below, populist parties are driven by some democratic core values, but this is also rooted in the fact that liberal democracies have sometimes partially abandoned liberal and democratic cultures due to established undemocratic practices within our current systems, such as non-elitist thinking, protest culture, and a certain sense of urgency when it comes to improving important policies and polities. It is impossible to minimize the challenges our democratic systems and the European Union are facing. Western democracies and the EU are far from being perfect, and decision-making has been further removed—and was always quite remote to begin with—from the people. Important decisions are gradually being made at a higher level, very often beyond popular control.[89] These have gradually become even further isolated and some financial institutions exert de facto control over a large part of democratic processes without being accountable.[90] But what shall we do when, compared to our somehow naive ideals of how Europe could be made to work, average voter participation in European Parliament and national parliamentary elections remains limited?

Third, moderate populism, which also enjoys a strong presence within the AfD, is marked not only by strong criticism of the EU, but very often by a rejection of extensive supranational rule and undemocratic practices existing within international organizations. Throughout the entire history of the AfD, and this despite the strong support for EU integration and climate protection amongst Germans generally,[91] the party has maintained a strong position of EU skepticism and denial of human responsibility for climate change responsibility. The AfD mentions in its last electoral program from 2021, that it considers "it necessary for Germany to leave the European Union and to establish a new European economic and interest community," and that "it has not been proven to date that humans, especially industry, are significantly responsible for

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[84] Will Wilkinson, "The Density Divide: Urbanization, Polarization & Populist Backlash," Niskanen Center, June 2019, p. 71, https://www.niskanencenter.org/the-density-divide-urbanization-polarization-and-populist-backlash/.

[85] Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 10–45.

[86] The cultural polarization theory explains electoral divisions between social liberals and social conservatives as the main root cause for authoritarian populism. See Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, 10–20.

[87] Alternative für Deutschland, Strategie 2017, Bundesvorstand GP/RE December 22, 2016, p. 3, http://www.talk-republik.de/Rechtspopulismus/docs/03/AfD-Strategie-2017.pdf.

[88] Three points of the AfD's 2021 election program take a central role: (1) the demand for Germany to leave the EU, (2) the party's refugee policy, and (3) criticism of the German government's coronavirus measures: https://cdn.afd.tools/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf.

[89] Peter Mair, "Popular Democracy and the European Union Polity," European Governance Papers (EUROGOV), 2008.

[90] See Adina Akbik, *The European Parliament as an Accountability Forum: Overseeing the Economic and Monetary Union* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[91] Around 49% of AfD voters were in favor of Britain's withdrawal from the EU. See *Der Tagesspiegel*, "Vor dem Brexit-Referendum: Zwei von drei AfD-Anhängern für Austritt Deutschlands aus der EU," June 22, 2016, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/vor-dem-brexit-referendum-zwei-von-drei-afd-anhaengern-fuer-austritt-deutschlands-aus-der-eu/13769670.html. Among AfD members, around 81% show little interest in climate protection. The AfD is the only party in the Bundestag that denies human-caused climate change. In Germany, according to the opinion poll ARD Deutschlandtrend and infratest dimap, European integration and climate-change-fighting policies enjoy a strong support amongst the general population, as only 14% of all voters see German EU membership as disadvantageous. See infratest dimap, "EuropaTREND im Auftrag der ARD," 2019, https://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/europatrend/2019/mai/.

climate change."[92] The party's goal of breaking up the "political cartel that is controlling state power"[93] is derived from this principle—a clear objective including the rejection of any direct forms of supranational rule.[94] The EU should be reduced to its internal market and replaced by a "Europe of the Fatherlands," a right-wing reformist vision of sovereign nation-states ruled by international law as a community of states.

Fourth, the AfD's recent partisan subgroups are one of the central features of its political tribalism. The views of numerous AfD leaders closely align with some features of the Weimar Republic and the Conservative Revolution.[95] Whereas the AfD officially rejects antisemitism, referring to Judeo-Christian culture as antithetical to Islam (similarly to the majority of right-wing parties), its frequent trivialization of National Socialism and the German culture of remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*) contradicts this. Moreover, the AfD's identity-politics language should thus always be seen in connection to the argument of combating political correctness, pushing the limits of acceptability in public discourse. An internal party document even mentioned provocation as a fundamental communicative tool: "The more they [Germany's old parties] try to stigmatize the AfD because of provocative words or actions, the more positive this is for the profile of the AfD. No one gives the AfD more credibility than its political opponents."[96]

But how can we explain liberals being weak in the face of illiberalism? The growing success enjoyed by the instigators of European illiberal partisan policymaking, such as Hungary since 2010 or Poland since 2015, and the institutional blockages the EU has faced for a long time now, illustrate the near total impotence of the EU in the face of such anti-democratic and illiberal practices within its Union.[97] The still apparent powerlessness of the Rule of Law toolbox and the Rule of Law Review Cycle proves that institutional approaches are still not prepared for the future fight against the rhetorical-ideological orientation of European populism and its distinct blend of authoritarianism and illiberal governance.[98]

The nation-state remained in advanced industrial countries all too often a project in the hands of elites. Populism wants to reverse this logic, by declaring the return of the "real nation" and societal roots back to the people: a highly emotional and often fatal process (witness the Weimar Republic), especially in the case of authoritarian populist rhetoric built by a small number of public figures using this logic to retain power. As such, the "real Germany" (as perceived by AfD leaders of the New Right) corresponds to a unique

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[92] Translation from the German: "Wir halten einen Austritt Deutschlands aus der Europäischen Union und die Gründung einer neuen europäischen Wirtschafts- und Interessengemeinschaft für notwendig," and "Es ist bis heute nicht nachgewiesen, dass der Mensch, insbesondere die Industrie, für den Wandel des Klimas maßgeblich verantwortlich ist," p. 175. See "Afd Parteiprogramm 2021," 20210611_AfD_Programm_2021_DRUCK_AK.indd; Deutschlandfunk, "Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag," 2021, https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2021/06/20210611_AfD_Programm_2021.pdf.

[93] Its platform outlines that "Germany's state apparatus has meanwhile developed an unpleasant life of its own. The distribution of power no longer corresponds to the principles of the separation of powers. Moreover, the public sector has grown beyond appropriate boundaries. To bind the state organs back to their mission and remind the state of its core tasks is an essential part of our policy. With the [EU treaties] … the inviolable sovereignty of the people as the foundation of our state has finally become a fiction." See https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2018/01/Programm_AfD_Druck_Online_190118.pdf.

[94] Such as the European confederation of states, the monetary union, EU budget taxes, EU regulations on social benefits entitlements, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and refugee reception.

[95] The Conservative Revolution aimed at overcoming the Weimar Republic by means of authoritarian dictatorship, restoring lost values such as leadership, the elite, the nation, nature, race, God, and ethnic community. It was meant to replace Enlightenment liberalism, parliamentarism, democracy, and pluralism, among other things. Its leaders Oswald Spengler and Carl Schmitt are often referred to when conceptualizing the *Volk* as a biological, predetermined entity.

[96] Cited in Thorsten Benner, "Handling the Alternative for Germany: How Established Parties Can Reclaim the Public Debate," September 9, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2017-09-29/handling-alternative-germany.

[97] The EU obviously failed to force the two member states to comply with Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union and triggered Article 7 of the Treaty, the so-called "nuclear option," on December 2017 against Poland and September 2018 against Hungary, respectively. Article 7 provides for the most serious political sanction the Union can impose on a member country: the suspension of the right to vote on EU decisions.

[98] There is concern that Hungary's recent authoritarian drift may open an alarming new chapter in a long process of democratic regression, violating the EU's treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights.

metaphysical and ethnically homogeneous community of destiny, which must be protected from aliens.[99] After the development of the modern welfare state, society did not turn towards a post-material existence, and parts adopted a postwar existential melancholy, a revival of nationalistic nostalgia.[100] Immigration, rising refugee numbers, and economic stagnation—especially after the 2008 crisis led to increased labor-market insecurity—were finally enough to undermine any post-materialist turn. In Europe, different regional models of nostalgia and memory cultures have emerged for over 50 years, emphasizing the popular sovereignty of imagined communities, prioritizing the nation-state, and blaming incomplete and imperfect democratic structures over enhancing international legal frameworks and liberal-democratic norms. These factors might explain the general disenchantment with European liberal-democracy models and fundamental differences between regional populisms.

As Ivan Krastev has stated, "Nations and states have the habit of disappearing in the recent history of Eastern and Central Europe … Alarm over 'ethnic disappearance' can be felt in many of the small nations of Eastern Europe. For them, the arrival of migrants signals their exit from history, and the popular argument that an aging Europe needs migrants only strengthens the growing sense of existential melancholy."[101] "The kidnapped West," as Milan Kundera has called Central Europe, is (in contrast to the postwar system of liberal democracies in the West) still experiencing many legacies of Cold War divisions, in spite of an occasionally all-too-naive EU integration and accession process. Krastev and Kundera refer not only to Central and Eastern Europe but to many regions around the world. Memory cultures and the legacy of Communism in Eastern Europe developed differently, as the change from Nazi to Soviet rule reinforced the quick development of one-party states. Despite the desire of Central European countries to integrate into the EU, views of history and common legacy are still very far from being shared.[102]

Nationalistic bombast can be partially explained by the chronic rejection of Western multiculturalism and Euroskeptic attitudes; but parts of many Western societies are possessed by patriotism and a sense of cultural singularity, sounding the alarm against internal and external threats. The references made by Gianfranco Miglio, the Italian Lega Nord strategist, that "civilized" Europe should use the atavistic nationalism of a barbaric Eastern Europe as a "border wall against the Muslim invasion"[103] seems less grotesque today than in the '90s.

Three developments appear to cause, at present, the gradual erosion of liberal democracies. First, social tensions and illiberal and antidemocratic systems are gradually imploding democracy. Second, contemporary populism is (unlike in the 1980s or before) entirely and even naturally part of the political landscape in the West, alongside the common usage of fake news and conspiracy theories promoted by political parties. The AfD relies heavily on social media to further its message, and this does not hamper its message of criticizing traditional media's power as being itself a form of censorship, all the while trying to build a new "free media." According to comparative research, the AfD is responsible for 85% of all posts shared by German political parties on Facebook.[104] Third, insecurities characterize modern politics around

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[99] Numerous AfD politicians refer to the "annihilation of the German people," being threatened by "repopulation" and the "great exchange." See also Christoph Kopke, "Verschwörungsmythen und Feindbilder in der AfD und in der neuen Protestbewegung von rechts," in *Neue Kriminalpolitik*, Forum für Kriminalwissenschaften, Recht und Praxis 29 (2017) 1, S. 49–61.

[100] I refer to the post-material turn on the basis of Ronald Inglehart's work and his sociological theory, arguing that Western societies are undergoing a transformation from individual materialist values into a new panorama of post-materialist values, gradually emphasizing "non-material goods" such as self-expression, autonomy, and esthetic and intellectual satisfaction, causing a long-term intergenerational value change. See Ronald F. Inglehart, "Changing Values among Western Publics from 1970 to 2006," *West European Politics* 31, nos. 1–2 (January–March 2008): 130–146.

[101] Ivan Krastev, "Utopian Dreams beyond the Border," Eurozine, June 24, 2016. https://www.eurozine.com/utopian-dreams-beyond-the-border/.

[102] Peter Verovšek, "Between 1945 and 1989: The Rise of 'Illiberal Democracy' in Post-Communist Europe," in *Social Europe*, vol. 2, Cas Mudde, ed. (Berlin: Social Europe Publishing, 2019), 34.

[103] Pankaj Mishra, "The Divided States: Trump's Inauguration and How Democracy Has Failed," *Guardian*, January 13, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/13/divided-states-trump-america-failed-democracy.

[104] *Der Spiegel* cites research by George Washington University researcher Trevor Davis: Jörg Diehl et al., "Warum die AfD auf Facebook so erfolgreich ist," April 26, 2019, *Spiegel* 18/2019, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/warum-die-afd-auf-facebook-so-

the globe: more and more liberal democracies are becoming illiberal and antidemocratic, and the world, according to scholar Pankaj Mishra, is gradually coming to live under conditions of militant tribalization.[105] When democratic postwar societies became more affluent and peaceful, they also became more anxious about the future, even though citizens took the meeting of their basic needs for granted.   Already in 1989 Francis Fukuyama described in his famous essay how "*a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia, in fact, will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post-historical world for some time to come. Even though I recognize its inevitability, I have the most ambivalent feelings for the civilization that has been created in Europe since 1945, with its north Atlantic and Asian offshoots. Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again.*"[106] Some argue that illiberal democracy is finally the most dangerous threat to our societies, ahead of even political Islam and other "democratorships."[107] It was not until Putin, Chávez, or Erdoğan won their second or third victories that their countries descended in dictatorship.

Lessons Learned for Europe

The dangers of illiberal and undemocratic developments are manifold. Criticizing deficiencies within liberal-democratic systems through constructive arguments is an integral part of our democratic thinking. However, illiberal and antidemocratic groupings, like the AfD, are taking advantage of the generalized disenchantment with our political systems, discrediting any kind of constructive development to build back better.

Unlike other European countries such as Hungary or Poland, who must withstand authoritarian governance, Germany has proven to have applied the institutional protection of its liberal-democratic institutions and values well, through its cordon sanitaire, the rule of law, the constitutional defense of human rights, and the separation of powers. The end of World War II showed Western Europeans that the "will of the people" could only operate within a constrained sense of democracy. However, it is not enough merely to promote a Western-centered analysis of liberal democracy: in Europe, for example, it is easy to recognize a lack of common language between East and West. We need to pay much closer attention to historical, economic, cultural, or societal factors conditioning different types of illiberal developments: Putin's war demonstrates not only the immediate fatality of Western misunderstandings and maintained miscalculations, but also the historic roots of Western blindness. The European Parliament reiterated in 2009 that "Europe won't be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognizes Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy and brings an honest and thorough debate on their crimes in the past century."[108] Following Putin's invasion of Ukraine, these words leave a particularly bitter aftertaste.

A truly effective strategy against right-wing populism can be found neither in exclusion nor in harsh discourse. Populism remains oftentimes a rough, overused concept; it should always be analyzed within a specific context that describes regional and local phenomena, with a global, common heritage. The AfD shares many nostalgic and identity-driven tribalistic characteristics with other populist movements: I refer

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erfolgreich-ist-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000163612064. According to netzpolitik.org, a platform for digital liberties, the party is also using highly questionable methods on Twitter and networks of fake accounts that strengthened party members with coordinated retweets. See Markus Reuter, "Studie zur Europawahl: AfD dominiert Facebook, die PARTEI Twitter," June 24, 2019, https://netzpolitik.org/2019/studie-zur-europawahl-afd-dominiert-facebook-die-partei-twitter/.

[105] Mishra, "Divided States."

[106] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), p. 18.

[107] Nicolas Baverez, *L'alerte démocratique*, (Paris: Éditions de l'Observatoire, 2020); A "democratorship" can be broadly defined as a system that simulates elements of democracy, but is in fact dictatorial in nature. Examples include Iran following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Chinese Communist one-party rule masked by market-driven elements of state capitalism, and Russian minimalist electoral democracy acting as a cover for one leader's plans of military interventionism.

[108] European Parliament Resolution of April 2, 2009 on European Conscience and Totalitarianism, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0213+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN.

to a very strong group identification, bound to a specific cultural space (*Kulturraum*) of a fundamentally nostalgic nature deeply linked to Germany's history and constant evolution. Even objective debate will not alleviate resentment, and after some centuries of democratic practice, we should know that "good reasons do not create democratic legitimacy."[109] Democratic self-rule is self-limitation. If democracy does not want to fall into self-contradiction by resorting to the means of dictatorship, then, as Kelsen argued in his article "Defense of Democracy," it must even tolerate movements that could be dangerous for its own existence. However, in the case of ideological, populist authoritarianism, political actors should not maintain long-running debates about populism: this concept is politically overused and has lost its political value. Rather, scholars should name the true nature of authoritarian parties such as the AfD: a newborn and insidious neo-fascism using new types of references. We should watch out for those who consider equal opportunities to be positive discrimination, who speak of the unalterable hierarchy of cultures and of the import of grievances, should they ever come into power.[110]

To what extent do we, in our liberal societies, tend towards rough oversimplifications of complex matters and unduly subjective cultural viewpoints and judgements? The story of the AfD shows that this is not the story of a faltering pluralism or a failing political left; it is the story of a worldwide minimization of the dangers that we shall face if we do not redefine *together* the threats that authoritarian, exclusionary populism and illiberalism can provoke. What we need now is a self-reflective turnaround, a change of perspective to critically examine our liberal habits and expose how authoritarian policymaking directly affects citizens. It should create social and institutional momentum.

First, liberals should work for and offer a forward-looking, progressive vision, able to contest historical revisionism and highly influential populisms present in many countries. Women, minorities, and young people need to have their fair share of power. We should pay attention to always including experts who do fieldwork, think-tankers, and independent organizations within our policy processes, to build a renewed, progressive, and non-elitist vision of a common political future and better strategic foresight.

Second, demographic differences between East and West (a key factor behind the growth of the AfD) will persist in the case of a failure to develop expansive state investment programs. As long as uneven economic performances exist, regional inequalities will fuel resentment and trigger forms of countervailing extremism. The current model of globalization will accentuate imbalances if the EU does not take the lead in reshaping globalization. This also applies to the economic differences between East and West, North and South. The German example and the rise of the AfD clearly demonstrate that we need to think in terms of regional and subnational inequalities across Europe and focus on the existing link between the rise in right-wing populist and illiberal sentiment and poverty-stricken geographies; inequalities within states have proven to be triggers of violent populism. If not, it will also be extremely difficult for political actors to tackle anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiments, given the temptation for them to court voters lost to them because of these issues.

Third, the rise of nationalism and political blocs is due to serious failings in European governance. Institutional reforms and novel policy solutions, particularly those related to structural democratic deficits, must be undertaken as soon as possible. On the EU level, the "value conditionality approach," linking the disbursement of EU budget funds to the respect for values outlined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the rule of law,[111] needs a bottom-up strategy—a strategy that works, for instance, with

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[109] Constitutional law expert Christoph Möllers argues in his recent working paper on democracy that we owe the opponents of democracy reasons for democracy, not moral outrage; democracy cannot promise everyone the good life. See Christoph Möllers, *Demokratie: Zumutungen und Versprechen* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, 2008), 4.

[110] Klaus Staeck, "Propagandisten der neuen Wende," *Berliner Zeitung*, November 13, 2019. Partial translation taken from the following passage: "Wer Chancengleichheit für positive Diskriminierung hält, von der unverrückbaren 'Rangordnung der Kulturen" und vom 'Import der Missstände" redet, wenn er Flüchtlinge meint, vor dem müsste man sich in Acht nehmen, sollte er einmal einen Zipfel der Macht in postdemokratischen Zuständen in die Hände bekommen," https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/afd-fordert-konservative-wende-und-verdreht-motto-der-friedlichen-ddr-revolution-li.1325.

[111] See: Consolidated version of the treaty on the European Union. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

Hungarian and Polish civil societies and explains recent developments and EU decisions. We need to empower European citizens more than ever to "learn from past experiences of international sanctions and know that populations—especially those who are already aggrieved—often blame the outsiders rather than their own leadership for external punishments, and their loss of funds might eventually not be attributed to their national leader's policies."[112]

Fourth, innovative strategies must be applied in many areas, especially during crises. Illiberal governance tries to polarize and split communities within liberal societies. The Great Recession was first to kill our utopia of a harmless European integration. The Eurozone crisis and structural inequalities triggered the emergence of populism, and the 2015 refugee crisis resulted in its far-right shift. Following Putin's invasion of Ukraine, many other crises could undermine constructive efforts to establish healthier democratic practices and protect liberal democracy. We need to take more care of our constitutional protection mechanisms against illiberalism, fascism, autocracy, and historical revisionism. It is irresponsible for any expert or established political party to not think about its institutional strategy for dealing with radical right populists, autocrats and illiberal actors in that context. We should also think of establishing another international order based on a less threatening environment for non-liberal states. Putin's war is a wake-up call on many levels: liberals need to understand that non-liberal states will always feel threatened by liberal democracy and its institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It is the equal status in deliberation (in the words of Jürgen Habermas)[113] that will help, which recognizes that people pursue competing and sometimes incompatible goals. While liberals might be able to tangle with some states and actors, political, economic, and diplomatic cooperation will not remain a secure currency as has been the case these last years. We shall guard not to make liberal democracy dependent on those who are incompatible with our worldview. Being a liberal democrat does not mean always wanting to be right. It means to do everything to build a better world.

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[112] Amélie Jaques-Apke, "The Covid-19 Crisis as an Ideological Armory for the Populist Right in Spain and Italy," RE:CONSTITUTION WORKING PAPER 2022, https://www.reconstitution.eu/en/working-papers.html.

[113] Kevin Olson, "Deliberative democracy," in B. Fultner, ed., *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts* (Acumen Publishing, 2011) pp. 140–155.

From Berlin to Budapest and Back:
"Illiberal Democracy" and the Mirror of Neoliberal Post-Democracy

Seongcheol Kim

On September 1, 2011, at a joint press conference in Berlin with Portuguese Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho, Angela Merkel was asked by a journalist whether she thought the effectiveness of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) mechanism would be hampered by the co-decision rights of the national parliaments. "We live in a democracy and are also happy about it," Merkel began. "This is a parliamentary democracy. Therefore, the budgetary right is a core right of parliament. As such, we will find ways to organize parliamentary co-decision in such a way that it is also market-conforming, so that appropriate signals result on the markets."[1] Merkel's invocation of "market-conforming democracy," echoing her previous references to the 2010 Troika[2] memorandum on Greece, the 2009 German bank bailouts, and even the raising of the retirement age to 67 as "alternative-less" (*alternativlos*), pointed in prototypical fashion to a post-democratic neoliberalism that—following contemporary diagnoses of "post-democracy" or "post-politics," as will be discussed in this chapter—systematically privileges the demands of markets over those of citizens[3] and denies the need for a clash of political alternatives in the name of technocratic imperatives.[4]

Less than a year later and several hundred kilometers away in Budapest, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán gave a speech to the National Alliance of Entrepreneurs and Employers (VOSZ) in which he spoke of the economic challenges facing Hungary and, indeed, all of Europe. Just like after 1990, he argued, there was now a need for far-reaching economic change; whether there was also a need for a change of political system, he left tantalizingly open: "let us hope that God helps us so that it will not be necessary to invent different political systems in place of democracy in the interest of economic survival."[5] He went on to explain that the unity of society is of paramount importance—and unity, in turn, requires "power":

> The first condition for unity is power. If there is power, there is unity. If there is no power, but fragmentation, there is no unity. This is maybe not the case in every culture; there might be countries where it doesn't work this way, let's say, with the Scandinavians I can imagine. But with those of half-Asian origins like us, it is entirely certain that this is how it is. … I think Hungary is moving and reacting to the crisis better than other countries of Europe because there is such a power capable of operating the constitutional institutions.[6]

A curious convergence thus emerged between a neoliberal post-democratic response to the Eurozone crisis and what Orbán would officially christen two years later as "illiberal democracy." A technocratic

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[1] Bundesregierung, "Pressestatements von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel und dem Ministerpräsidenten der Republik Portugal, Pedro Passos Coelho," September 1, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20190620140625/https://archiv.bundesregierung.de/archiv-de/dokumente/pressestatements-von-bundeskanzlerin-angela-merkel-und-dem-ministerpraesidenten-der-republik-portugal-pedro-passos-coelho-848964.

[2] The "Troika" refers to a decision-making triumvirate consisting of the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund.

[3] Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004); Wolfgang Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit: Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013).

[4] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1999); Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005); Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

[5] Viktor Orbán, "Ne kapjon segélyt, aki munkaképes," (July 26, 2012), http://2010-2015.miniszterelnok.hu/beszed/ne_kapjon_segelyt_aki_munkakepes.

[6] Orbán, "Ne kapjon segélyt, aki munkaképes."

neoliberalism and a crude ethno-nationalism converged in the recognition that the value of democracy and democratic institutions is fundamentally secondary to economic expediency—whether the latter, in turn, is defined in terms of the confidence of the markets or the self-preservation of the nation. This chapter takes this paradoxical convergence as a starting point for exploring the contradictory relationship between illiberalism and neoliberalism as a key aspect of the past decade of European politics, keying in on how democracy and the state are constructed in formative moments in Orbán's and Merkel's projects of "illiberal democracy" and "market-conforming democracy." In line with the approach taken by this volume (see introductory chapter), both illiberalism and neoliberalism can be understood as a set of ideationally grounded practices that crystallize in a certain understanding of the role of the state: namely, as that of institutionally safeguarding the primacy of the market (neoliberalism)[7] or of "majoritarian, nation-centric or sovereigntist" solutions over liberal ones (illiberalism).[8] The basic proposition here is that illiberal nationalism, even as it positions itself as a "national" and "democratic" antipode to post-democratic neo-liberalism, ends up mirroring the latter in its denial of the basic need for democratic contestation over the formulation of popular sovereignty or the national interest. This fundamentally "post-political" orientation (following Mouffe)[9] undermines not only *liberal* democracy as the terrain of a productive tension (the "democratic paradox"), but also democracy understood even in the narrower sense of popular sovereignty. The implication is that the epithet "illiberal democracy" is problematic not only because illiberalism also ends up undermining democracy, but also because Orbán's project actually undermines democracy on its own terms.

This chapter is geared toward providing a simplified and condensed overview of the discursive constellations surrounding "market-conforming democracy" and "illiberal democracy," culminating in Orbán's "illiberal state" speech of July 2014.[10] As such, the chapter draws on arguments made in more formalized (discourse-analytic) terms elsewhere[11] and proceeds in two main steps: first, a theoretical section that seeks to delineate a usable concept of "post-democracy" in relation to democracy and liberal democracy; and second, an analytical section working its way from the beginnings of Merkel's and Orbán's ruling discourses (2009–2010) to the apex during the Eurozone crisis (2011–2014). The conclusion offers some considerations on developments following the period covered by the analysis.

Liberal Democracy, Post-Democracy … Illiberal Democracy: A Theoretical Overview

This chapter gets its bearings from an understanding of liberal democracy as a historically contingent synthesis of two fundamentally different and ultimately irreconcilable logics: the liberal defense of property rights (subsequently extended to a wider set of individual rights and freedoms), on the one hand, and the democratic principle of popular sovereignty on the other.[12] Macpherson[13] emphasizes that what we know today as liberal democracy is the product of a contested process of cross-fertilization: the democratization

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[7] See, for example, David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[8] Marlene Laruelle, "Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction," *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (2022): 309.

[9] Mouffe, *On the Political*, 1.

[10] Viktor Orbán, "A munkaalapú állam korszaka következik," July 28, 2014, http://2010-2015.miniszterelnok.hu/cikk/a_munkaalapu_allam_korszaka_kovetkezik.

[11] Seongcheol Kim, " 'Illiberal-demokratische' Legitimität: Eine konzeptuelle Annäherung und empirische Veranschaulichung am Beispiel des Bundestagswahlkampfs 2017," in *Legitimitätsprobleme: Zur Lage der Demokratie in Deutschland*, eds. Sascha Kneip, Wolfgang Merkel, and Bernhard Weßels, 205–222 (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020); Seongcheol Kim, "… Because the Homeland Cannot Be in Opposition: Analysing the Discourses of Fidesz and Law and Justice (PiS) from Opposition to Power," *East European Politics* 37, no. 2 (June 2021): 332–351.

[12] See, for example: C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Beetham, "Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization," *Political Studies* 40, no. 1 (August 1992): 40–53; Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000); Étienne Balibar, *Equaliberty: Political Essays* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

[13] See C. B. Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Toronto: Anansi, 2006).

of liberalism and the liberalization of democracy. If democracy today is unthinkable without a liberal dimension, it is not least so because liberalism itself evolved from the defense of narrow, propertied interests to the recognition of the inalienable rights of *all* individuals and even minority groups (not only when the minority in question is a property-holding class potentially threatened with expropriation via majority rule) as well as a generalizable notion of the rule of law, while also articulating these principles as necessary for—and not only as constraints on—the realization of the democratic principle of popular sovereignty. It is this productive, yet at the same time irreducible, tension that characterizes the relationship between liberalism and democracy, which Mouffe refers to as the "democratic paradox."[14] Put another way, the relationship between the two is undecidable insofar as liberalism thus becomes both a condition of possibility and impossibility for democracy and vice versa. To be sure, liberalism is not the only such *-ism* that both sustains and limits democracy: as Arditi[15] has pointed out, the same holds for the relationship between populism and democracy, insofar as populism is always an appeal to "the people" as an unredeemed sovereign against constituted forms of power. It is likewise conceivable to speak of a social dimension of democracy as both necessary and limiting for democracy, insofar as a certain level of material redistribution is necessary for safeguarding conditions of equal political participation, independently of (and indeed prior to) the actual outcomes of democratic decision-making processes. A key implication here is that if democracy is understood as a "horizon"[16] and "to come,"[17] no version of democracy with adjectives (liberal, populist, social) can exhaust the meaning of what democracy can or cannot be about; every institutionalized regime of democracy will have its blind spots—there will always be an unincorporated remainder (a "Real" in the Lacanian sense) that escapes "closure in the pure and simple normality of institutional procedures"[18]—and must therefore be open to ever newer contestations and claims to democratic rights (and recognize the "right to have rights," following Arendt[19]).

All this is important for a proper understanding of contemporary debates on "post-democracy" and "illiberal democracy" because it serves as a reminder of the contingent nature of the interplay between liberalism and democracy. Recognizing the two as separate does not mean that democracy without liberalism is desirable: on the contrary, proponents of "radical and plural democracy" emphasize precisely from this perspective that the point is to deepen liberal democracy in *both* directions—opening up ever newer claims to "freedom and equality for all"[20]—given that liberalism without democracy, or a liberalism that undermines other safeguards for democracy, is easily conceivable. What Laclau and Mouffe[21] criticized in the 1980s as a "possessive individualism" that undermines political and social equality in the name of individual freedom constituted only the beginnings of a neo-liberal revolution that has produced gaping inequalities in political participation throughout the industrialized world.[22] At the same time, there have been unmistakable advances in certain areas of individual rights (such as the rights of women, LGBT people, and ethnic or racial minorities) across Western Europe and North America within this same timeframe. Empirical scholars of democracy have noted this simultaneity between an expansion of liberalism in areas that clearly strengthen liberal democracy on the one hand and the rise of neoliberalism that undermines democratic

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[14] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.

[15] Benjamin Arditi, "Populism as an Internal Periphery of Democratic Politics," in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 72–98.

[16] Oliver Marchart, *Der demokratische Horizont: Politik und Ethik radikaler Demokratie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2023 [forthcoming]).

[17] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, [1994] 2005).

[18] Arditi, "Populism as an Internal Periphery," 88.

[19] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, [1951] 1994), 296.

[20] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, [1985] 2001), xv.

[21] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 175.

[22] Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streeck, "Introduction: Politics in the Age of Austerity," in *Politics in the Age of Austerity*, ed. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streeck (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013); Wolfgang Merkel, "Is Capitalism Compatible with Democracy?" *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 8, no. 2 (2014): 109–128.

sovereignty through the expansion of socio-political inequalities as well as technocratic invocations of market imperatives on the other.[23]

In this light, Crouch's famous diagnosis of "post-democracy"[24] can be understood to refer specifically to the decline of democratic sovereignty—despite simultaneous advances in the liberal dimension of liberal democracy—in the face of a neoliberal reordering of economic and political power relations in advanced industrial societies. While the likes of Wolfgang Merkel[25] are correct to point out that theories of post-democracy tend to overlook the substantial advances in minority rights that have enhanced liberal democracy in the past four decades, what is nonetheless notable is a paradoxical co-occurrence between the continuing liberalization of democracy and a partial de-democratization of liberalism via the expansion of a post-democratic neoliberalism that subordinates the democratic principle of popular sovereignty to the free rein of deregulated and globalized markets. There are clearly two faces of liberalism at work here: one that advances liberal democracy (in however piecemeal a fashion) in the direction of "liberty and equality for all" and an anti-egalitarian, post-democratic, or even "authoritarian"[26] one that appeals to the "confidence of the markets" as the ultimate legitimizing instance, codifies a set of "budgetary discipline" measures and sanction mechanisms into constitutional law—suggesting an intensification of what Stephen Gill once referred to as a "new constitutionalism" that "politically 'lock[s] in' neo-liberal reforms"[27]—and insists on their enforcement up to the point of replacing elected governments with expert cabinets, as was the case in Greece and Italy in 2011. The 2010s debt-crisis management politics in the Eurozone—captured in Angela Merkel's promise to "organize parliamentary co-decision in such a way that it is also market-conforming"—points in exemplary fashion to a direct subordination of democratic sovereignty to a certain (neo-)liberal version of the rule of law that privileges market interests and the defense of the ultimate liberal right—namely, the right to private property, now packaged as state debt.[28] While there is a clear clash between democratic and liberal reasoning in this case, there is arguably no such incommensurability when it comes to liberal advances in individual rights: on the contrary, critics of "liberal feminism" such as Fraser[29] argue that a liberal articulation of the demand for women's rights does not go far enough in challenging the economic underpinnings of gender inequalities.

In this vein, a defining feature of what Viktor Orbán refers to as "illiberal democracy" is that it plays off the democratic principle of popular sovereignty against precisely those liberal values that deepen, rather than undermine, liberal democracy: individual and minority rights as well as institutional checks on executive powers. "Illiberal democracy," like post-democratic neoliberalism, entails a decoupling of liberalism and democracy, but in the opposite direction: instead of constitutionally enshrined debt provisions overriding mechanisms of popular sovereignty, it is a reified notion of the "national interest"—likewise enshrined in a highly partisan and ethno-nationalist constitution in the case of Hungary—that overrides the separation of powers or the freedom of civil society organizations to operate. Orbán's "illiberal democracy" and Merkel's "market-conforming democracy" curiously mirror each other in undermining the productive tension between liberalism and democracy by playing off one against the other, resulting in either a de-democratization in the name of liberalism or a de-liberalization in the name of democracy. Yet the end result is hardly "liberal" and "democratic," respectively: Merkel's (neo-)liberalism

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[23] Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit*; Wolfgang Merkel, "Is Capitalism Compatible with Democracy?"; Wolfgang Merkel, "Challenge or Crisis of Democracy," in *Democracy and Crisis: Challenges in Turbulent Times,* eds. Wolfgang Merkel and Sascha Kneip (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018), 1–28.

[24] See Crouch, *Post Democracy.*

[25] See Wolfgang Merkel, "Challenge or Crisis of Democracy."

[26] Werner Bonefeld, "Authoritarian Liberalism: From Schmitt via Ordoliberalism to the Euro," *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 4–5 (2017): 747–761.

[27] Stephen Gill, "New Constitutionalism, Democratisation and Global Political Economy," *Pacifica Review: Peace, Security & Global Change* 10, no. 1 (1998): 23–38.

[28] See also Fritz Scharpf, "Monetary Union, Fiscal Crisis and the Preemption of Democracy," London School of Economics, Europe in Question Discussion Paper 36 (2011); Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit*; Bonefeld, "Authoritarian Liberalism."

[29] See Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013).

of dutifully enforcing legally binding debt-control mechanisms clearly does not extend onto an agenda of expanding individual and minority rights—indeed, one of the very few legislative advancements in this regard under Merkel's chancellorship, namely same-sex marriage rights, occurred in 2017 in spite of her government (with Merkel herself voting against)—whereas Orbán's democratic credentials (even in the narrower sense of popular sovereignty) become seriously questionable at best in light of such practices as the appropriation of both public and private media for openly partisan messaging or the use of the State Audit Office to impose punitive fines on an opposition party on trumped-up campaign violations charges,[30] thus endangering equal conditions of political competition. The epithet "illiberal democracy" ends up being just as problematic as "market-conforming democracy," insofar as Orbán's project ultimately undermines democracy on its own terms.[31]

One way of conceptualizing the paradoxical points of convergence between post-democratic neoliberalism and illiberal nationalism is with Mouffe's concept of "post-politics,"[32] which provides a bridge to those theories that conceptualize post-democracy in terms of a denial of the conflictual nature of politics.[33] For Mouffe, post-politics is the illusion that politics can exist outside of the political as antagonism—that is, in a conflict-free space without moments of creating an "us" vs. "them" division of the social space, whether this takes the form of a "left" vs. "right" divide or, at the very least, an opposition that poses a clear-cut alternative to the outgoing government in regularly-held elections. Mouffe diagnoses post-politics in a specifically Western European context of "neo-liberal hegemony" that has watered down left/right divisions and reduced politics to the reproduction of a supposedly rational consensus on the proper economic policy.[34] While this applies in exemplary fashion to the apodictic *Alternativlosigkeit* (alternative-lessness) of Chancellor Merkel's post-democratic neo-liberalism, there is also a post-political strain in Orbán's illiberal nationalism to the extent that the latter presents a reified understanding of a homogeneous "national interest" that does not require a democratic contestation of opposing viewpoints. In the case of Orbán, the political—if understood as a moment of constructing an antagonistic division of the social space—appears in the form of all kinds of enemy constructions, from Brussels to George Soros; yet when it comes to defining the "national interest" as the core object of democratic sovereignty in Orbán's rhetoric, there is a tendency to present it as naturally and pre-politically given—a tendency that is diametrically opposed to a democratic politics that is "explicitly hegemonic" in the sense of recognizing the contingently and politically instituted nature of social order.[35]

The Beginnings: *Alternativlosigkeit* and the "Naturalness" of the National Interest

The post-political and post-democratic convergences already become visible at what may retrospectively be understood as the founding moments of the projects of "market-conforming democracy" and "illiberal democracy" at the turn of the decade (from 2009–2010). Angela Merkel and Viktor Orbán established themselves as star figures in the wider European Christian-democratic party family by winning solid majorities in their respective countries, with Merkel securing a first center-right parliamentary majority in

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[30] "State Audit Office Issues Final Report Fining Jobbik HUF 663 Million," Budapest Beacon, January 9, 2018, https://budapestbeacon.com/state-auditors-office-issued-final-report-fining-jobbik-huf-663-million/.

[31] Jan-Werner Müller argues in this vein that the self-designation "illiberal and democratic" ought to be rejected given that Orbán's project is, in reality, illiberal *and undemocratic*—even if one does not assume an a priori understanding of democracy as tantamount to liberal democracy. See Jan-Werner Müller, "The Problem with 'Illiberal Democracy,' " Project Syndicate, January 21, 2016, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-problem-with-illiberal-democracy-by-jan-werner-mueller-2016-01.

[32] See Mouffe, *On the Political.*

[33] See Rancière, *Disagreement*; Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2009); Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left*; Yannis Stavrakakis, "The Return of 'the People': Populism and Anti-Populism in the Shadow of the European Crisis," *Constellations* 21, no. 4 (2014): 505–517.

[34] Mouffe, *On the Political*.

[35] Simon Critchley, "Is There a Normative Deficit in the Theory of Hegemony?" in *Laclau: A Critical Reader*, eds. Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart (London: Routledge, 2004), 115.

over ten years in the September 2009 elections, while Orbán led Fidesz to an unprecedented two-thirds majority in the April 2010 elections after eight years in opposition. Both re-compositions of power took place against the backdrop of economic crisis, with the German economy reeling in the aftermath of the 2007–2008 financial crash and the Hungarian economy being one of the very first in Europe to face a public debt crisis (leading to an IMF loan in 2008) under the ill-fated stewardship of the MSZP-SZDSZ (Hungarian Socialist Party and Alliance of Free Democrats) coalition. In this context, both Merkel and Orbán stepped into the speaker position of crisis managers and made their intentions abundantly clear: Merkel justified a May 2009 law enabling the bank bailouts via nationalization by referring to it as "alternative-less" (*alternativlos*),[36] while Orbán declared in a September 2009 speech that Fidesz, following its widely anticipated landslide victory, "will be capable of formulating the national concerns—and [it] does this not in constant debate, but rather represents them in their naturalness."[37] In the appeals to the "alternative-lessness" (*Alternativlosigkeit*) of a certain kind of bailout policy and the "naturalness" of a particular conception of the "national interest," the post-political pretensions of these projects come into view.

Merkel's crisis-management rhetoric was an institutionalist one (following Laclau)[38] *par excellence*, centered on the claim to preserve stability and prevent the breakdown of social order. She used the term *alternativlos* in conjunction with the May 2009 law, emphasizing the need to prevent banks "with systemic risks [from] going into bankruptcy,"[39] and again with the first Troika memorandum on Greece in May 2010, making her well-known claim that, "If the euro fails, Europe fails."[40] Here, the technocratic correctness of the measures being implemented was justified in implicit opposition to a radical absence of order, pointing to a hegemonic claim to represent the only viable form of order as such. Yet the implicit outside of non-order turned into an explicit one when Merkel, in a May 2010 speech in the Bundestag, justified the Troika memorandum, arguing that "There was the concrete threat of the path to a transfer union, in which an immediate and binding liability of all for the self-induced decisions of individual member states would have been introduced. This had to be prevented."[41] Here, in exemplary fashion, the post-political pretension that *there is no alternative* runs against its limits: the political makes its return (if only momentarily) in the form of Merkel's acknowledgement that *there is, in fact, an alternative that has to be prevented*, thus articulating her own policy in antagonistic demarcation from an opposing one (that is, politically). Yet the post-political move, in equally exemplary fashion, is to then say that *this alternative is, in fact, not a legitimate or discussable one at all*—with Merkel responding to heckling from a Social Democratic MP in the same speech as follows: "I cannot imagine, honestly speaking, that you, if you had been in such a situation, would have done something with open eyes that is legally not acceptable and economically would not have brought us forward."[42] This sequence is a telling one, insofar as it illustrates how a post-political and post-democratic neoliberal discourse cannot itself escape the constitutive nature of the political, but nonetheless seeks to render it as invisible as possible. The slide of meaning between *there is no alternative* and *there is no legitimate alternative* amounts, in effect, to a negation of democratic pluralism without any of the brute force of authoritarian regimes: the opposition can criticize all it likes, but there is nothing that it can do that would be "legally" or "economically" (in short: rationally) legitimate or even worthy of discussion.

An eerily similar operation can be seen in Orbán's "central field of power" speech of September 2009. It should be noted that Orbán and Fidesz had deployed a strongly social-populist discourse in the previous

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[36] Crouch, *Post-Democracy*.
[37] Viktor Orbán, "Megőrizni a létezés magyar minőségét," February 17, 2010, http://2010-2015.miniszterelnok.hu/cikk/megorizni_a_letezes_magyar_minoseget. The original speech is from a Fidesz event in Kőcse held on September 5, 2009, as noted by news outlets (see, for example, Attila Kálmán, "Kötcsei beszéd Orbántól," Népszabadság, February 16, 2010, http://nol.hu/belfold/kotsei_beszed_orbantol-550441).
[38] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).
[39] "Merkel verteidigt Banken-Enteignungsgesetz," *Die Welt*, February 18, 2009, https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article160309338/Merkel-verteidigt-Banken-Enteignungsgesetz.html.
[40] Deutscher Bundestag, "Plenarprotokoll 17/42. Stenografischer Bericht, 42. Sitzung, Berlin, Mittwoch, den 19. Mai 2010," (May 19, 2010), 4126, http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btp/17/17042.pdf.
[41] Deutscher Bundestag, "Plenarprotokoll 17/42," 4126.
[42] Deutscher Bundestag, "Plenarprotokoll 17/42," 4126.

three years: following the infamous 2006 "Őszöd speech" of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány—an expletive-laden secret address (subsequently leaked in the press to scandalous effect) to Hungarian Socialist Party MPs in which he admitted to lying about the country's finances to win re-election[43]—Orbán regularly appealed in his speeches to "the people" and "the new majority" as an unredeemed democratic sovereign being cheated and exploited by "the new aristocracy" in power.[44] In this regard, the September 2009 speech signaled a shift in Orbán's discourse away from the populist rhetoric of antagonistic division to an institutionalist one of fundamental harmony between "the nation" and its representatives after the widely anticipated Fidesz landslide in the upcoming elections. Orbán now spoke openly of the possibility that Fidesz would occupy the "central field of political power" with its own conceptions of the national interest for the foreseeable future:

> So much is certain: there is the real possibility that the Hungarian politics of the next 25 years will not be determined by the field of dual power that, with constant value debates, generates divisive, petty, and unnecessary social consequences. Instead, there will emerge for a long time a large governing party, a central field of political power that will be capable of formulating the national concerns—and does this not in constant debate, but rather represents them in their naturalness.[45]

Orbán's key contention here is that *there is no other "power"*—or, more precisely, *the other "power" is, in fact, not a legitimate or discussable one at all*. Relative to Merkel, the slide of meaning takes place in the reverse direction: Orbán begins by recognizing an antagonistic division of the field between competing forces that has been the norm for the past 25 years, only to then say that not only is the other "power" thoroughly discredited in light of the past three years in office, but it has been an illegitimate one all along—and that there is only one "power" that can represent "the national concerns … in their naturalness."[46] It is hard to exaggerate the post-political and post-democratic implications of this articulation: there is, in short, only one legitimate conception of the national interest—not because it is rationally and objectively correct, as Merkel would argue, but because there is only one authentic "naturalness" of the nation and only one government that can embody it. This notion was hardly a new one in Orbán's discourse; after the 2002 elections, which Fidesz lost after its first term in government, Orbán declared in an open-air rally:

> Homeland exists even if it comes under the influence of foreign powers, if the Tartar or the Turk rampages. … Homeland exists even if the governing responsibility is not ours. … It may be that our parties and our representatives are in opposition in the parliament, but we who are here on the square will not and also cannot be in opposition, because the homeland cannot be in opposition.[47]

Here, the message is that there is only one true "homeland" and only one set of parties (referring here to the Fidesz-MDF [the now-defunct Hungarian Democratic Forum] alliance) that can legitimately represent it. Whereas the Orbán of 2002 is speaking as an opposition leader—indeed, one who would call for the creation of "Civic Circles" in the same speech, an attempt to permanently mobilize civil society against the state in a Gramscian war of position[48]—the Orbán of 2009 is stepping into the speaker position of a "power" that can now afford to be institutionalist instead of populist, the simple argument being that Fidesz now has the vast majority of the nation on its side and can operate institutions as it likes without the need for "constant value debates."

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[43] Full transcript of the speech available at: "A teljes balatonőszödi szöveg," Népszabadság, May 26, 2007, http://nol.hu/archivum/archiv-417593-228304.

[44] Kim, "… Because the Homeland Cannot Be in Opposition," 338.

[45] Viktor Orbán, "Megőrizni a létezés magyar minőségét."

[46] Orbán, "Megőrizni a létezés magyar minőségét."

[47] Viktor Orbán, "Orbán Viktor beszéde a Dísz téren 2002. május 7," (May 7, 2002), http://mkdsz1.freeweb.hu/n22/orban020507.html.

[48] Béla Greskovits, "Rebuilding the Hungarian Right through Civil Organization and Contention: The Civic Circles Movement," *EUI Working Paper RSCAS* 37 (2017).

This claim found its performative institutional enactment after the 2010 elections: the two-thirds Fidesz majority in the new parliament declared in a resolution that the election result was a victory for "national unity" and a mandate to institute a new system called the "System of National Cooperation" (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere, NER), with the new parliament being a "constituent national assembly and system-founding parliament."[49] The NER was founded on this notion that it is merely restoring the only legitimate form of order: "after 46 years of occupation, dictatorship, and two chaotic decades of transition, Hungary has regained the right and capacity to self-determination."[50] The flurry of legislation that followed in the first months of the new parliament entailed far-reaching institutional changes that enacted this exclusive claim to "self-determination"—including the unilateral drafting of a new constitution by the ruling party, a systematic dismantling of institutional checks, and a large-scale system of patronage, packing formally independent state agencies with party personnel and requiring two-thirds supermajority thresholds so as to make future policy changes difficult.[51] Here, the post-political and post-democratic nationalism of the 2009 speech—a single party occupying the "central field of power" and formulating the "national concerns" on its own without the need for "constant debate"—finds its fast-tracked institutional realization. While the illiberalism of dismantling institutional checks is justified in the democratic language of sovereignty and "self-determination," the rhetorical background of Orbán's "central field of power" speech makes clear just how hollowed-out this democratic claim has already become. While Orbán's NER and Merkel's crisis-management regime are characterized by very different accents (illiberal and post-democratic, respectively) they already constitute, at this stage, two faces of post-politics whose point of convergence is the unabashed claim that *there is simply no alternative*, at least none that is legitimate and worth discussing.

The Apex: "Market-Conforming Democracy" and "Illiberal Democracy"

The years of heightened crisis in the Eurozone leading up to Orbán's "illiberal state" speech of 2014 pose a context in which both projects of TINA (there is no alternative) post-politics find a new sense of self-confidence, up to the point of introducing their own syntagmatic conceptions of democracy: Merkel's "market-conforming democracy" and Orbán's "illiberal democracy." As noted in the introduction, Merkel spoke of "market-conforming democracy" in the context of a September 2011 press conference in response to a journalist's question on the effects of parliamentary co-decision rights on the effectiveness of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) mechanism that had been set up to extend emergency loans to Ireland and Portugal following the 2010 Greek package, promising to "organize parliamentary co-decision in such a way that it is also market-conforming, so that appropriate signals result on the markets."[52] Merkel, interestingly, begins here by claiming that *parliament must remain sovereign in a democracy*— only to then add that *it must do so in such a way that upholds the confidence of the markets*. This slide of meaning is a telling one that has been pointed out by Crouch[53] as well as Streeck's notion of the "consolidation state":[54] namely, that post-democracy entails the hollowing out, but not the abolishment, of formal democratic institutions by elevating the interests of markets over those of citizens to de facto sovereign status.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that amid all the international attention that the illiberal makeover in Hungary had attracted since 2010, one of the few legal actions taken by EU institutions against the Fidesz

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[49] Országgyűlés, "A Nemzeti Együttműködés Programja," May 22 2010, 2, 6, http://www.parlament.hu/irom39/00047/00047.pdf.

[50] Országgyűlés, "A Nemzeti Együttműködés Programja," 4.

[51] For an overview, see Miklós Bánkuti, Gábor Halmai, and Kim Lane Scheppele, "Disabling the Constitution: Hungary's Illiberal Turn," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (2012): 138–146.

[52] Bundesregierung, "Pressestatements von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel und dem Ministerpräsidenten der Republik Portugal, Pedro Passos Coelho."

[53] Crouch, *Post-Democracy*.

[54] Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit*.

government in this period took the form of an infringement procedure by the European Commission against the restrictions on Hungarian central bank independence. Of all the attacks on the rule of law, it was the attack on a certain neoliberal conception of the separation of powers that provoked an EU-level response—which, however, was withdrawn in July 2012 following cosmetic changes by the Fidesz government to the corresponding legislation.[55] Orbán's July 2012 speech to the entrepreneurs' association VOSZ (cited in the introduction: see first block quote) took place just a week after this withdrawal and thus took on the aura of self-confirmation in the context of economic crisis. Orbán's simple message, couched in the language of ethno-nationalist exceptionalism ("half-Asian origins"), is that Fidesz's mode of governing since 2010—following the principle that *there can only ever be one legitimate power*—is economically necessary and even a positive example for other European countries. Orbán is speaking with a new sense of self-confidence here, articulating his illiberal project as firmly in line with Europe's search for economic survival—indeed, as showing the way for the rest of the post-political and post-democratic mainstream. If Merkel thought out loud about "find[ing] ways to organize parliamentary co-decision in such a way that it is also market-conforming," Orbán can simply point to the reality in Hungary in which "there is such a power capable of operating the constitutional institutions."

It is in this context that the "illiberal state" speech of July 2014, the internationally most well-known manifestation of Orbán's illiberal project, has to be understood. Speaking at the annual Tusványos summer festival of the ethnic Hungarian minority in central Romania, Orbán defined the "illiberal state" as a "new state organization originating in national interests" (as opposed to "liberal democracy," which "was not capable of openly declaring and obliging—even with constitutional power—existing governments that they ought to serve national interests").[56] Illiberalism, in short, is necessary for national economic survival. Orbán went on to declare that:

> today the hot topic in thinking is understanding those systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies, maybe not even democracies, and yet make nations successful. Today the stars of international analyses are Singapore, China, India, Russia, Turkey. … We are looking, trying to find a form of organizing a community that breaks from the dogmas accepted in Western Europe and makes us independent from them, which is capable of making our community competitive in the great world competition in the decades-long run.[57]

The key claim here is that illiberalism is what outsider nations like Hungary need in order to get ahead in the liberals' own game of economic competitiveness. This presupposes, of course, that what the nation needs can only be expressed by one party, as Orbán has claimed all along. Orbán went on to exemplify the illiberal defense of "national interests" with a series of measures taken by his government: restrictions on the activities of "paid political activists who are attempting to promote foreign interests in Hungary"; a re-organization of control over EU funds, so that "whoever administers European Union funds in this new state conception, the illiberal state conception, has to be in the employment of the Hungarian state"; and the return of over half of the banking sector to "Hungarian national ownership" via the state buying back banks previously "sold to foreigners."[58] While Orbán plays off liberalism against democracy (for example, the freedom of civil society organizations to operate vs. national sovereignty), he has long hollowed out the democratic claim beyond recognition and reduced it to a reified notion of "national interests" as the exclusive domain of one true legitimate power. It is also worth emphasizing here that his objection to "liberal democracy" is not at all about the undercutting of democratic sovereignty or the national autonomy of debt-stricken countries during the Eurozone crisis—once again suggesting that "illiberal democracy" and "market-conforming democracy" are not so much antipodes as two sides of a post-political coin.

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[55] European Commission, "Commission Closes Infringement Procedure on the Independence of the Hungarian Central Bank," July 19, 2012, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_12_803.

[56] Orbán, "A munkaalapú állam korszaka következik."

[57] Orbán, "A munkaalapú állam korszaka következik."

[58] Orbán, "A munkaalapú állam korszaka következik."

Conclusion and Outlook

The *pas de deux* of Orbán's illiberalism and Merkel's neoliberalism can, in retrospect, be understood as a characteristic feature of a particular crisis conjuncture that loomed large over European politics in the first half of the 2010s. While the manifold differences between Orbán's and Merkel's politics are equally important (and, indeed, much better-established in conventional wisdom), it would be difficult to grasp the emergence of Orbán's illiberal-nationalist project with the tacit consent of the European center-right establishment without recognizing the ways in which this illiberalism mirrored Merkel's post-democratic neoliberalism in its "post-political" negation of democratic conflict in the name of expedient crisis management. Following Merkel's decision to unilaterally suspend the Dublin Regulation for Syrian refugees in August 2015, however—a polarizing step not least due to Merkel's apparent departure from the standard EU-level operating procedures familiar from the Eurozone crisis—Orbán increasingly positioned himself as a nationalist and "civilizationist"[59] antipode to Merkel on refugee policy. The contention here was that Merkel, by unilaterally suspending the Dublin procedure, had undermined the democratic sovereignty of adversely affected member states such as Hungary—in apparent contrast to the previous five years of economic crisis management by the Troika, in which Orbán had dutifully mirrored the principle of "there is no alternative." In the context of the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing EU sanctions against Russia, Orbán has once again invoked "national interests" in blocking sanctions on Russian oil exports. As already signaled in his above-cited 2009 speech, however, the appeal to democratic sovereignty ultimately reproduces the TINA principle in an illiberal guise by reifying the national interest as uncontestable and given, backed up by crude propaganda campaigns in which there is no room for a clash of competing visions.

The covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine have drastically altered political settings across Europe, with some observers even heralding the end of neoliberalism as we know it after the first year of the pandemic.[60] In this context, the precise continuities and shifts in the various iterations of illiberalism and neoliberalism—including their paradoxical interplay that characterized the previous decade of European politics—require detailed examination. Illiberalism, in particular, does not appear to be going away anytime soon at the highest levels of government, with Fidesz winning a two-thirds supermajority of seats for a fourth consecutive parliamentary election in April 2022. How and to what extent its illiberal-nationalist discourse adapts to the latest (and perhaps most far-reaching one to date) in a string of crises that the party has presided over since 2010 will be a key question in the years to come.

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[59] Rogers Brubaker, "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (2017): 1191–1226.
[60] Paolo Gerbaudo, *The Great Recoil: Politics after Populism and Pandemic* (London: Verso, 2021).

Core Values under Attack, Despite the Existence of Common Rules

Elise Bernard

The Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), held during the second half of 2019, was opened by stating a priority for a particular vision of the Union: "The European success story is anchored in democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law. We need to strengthen the rule of law to enable the EU to credibly defend a rules-based multilateral system and international human rights institutions and to allow its citizens to enjoy peace and equal rights."[1] Considering the European Parliament resolution of 14 November 2018 "on the need for a comprehensive EU mechanism for the protection of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights,"[2] the Finnish presidency points to an unsolved problem. One can admit that the EU has several tools for monitoring and responding to noncompliance with the rule of law, but they are inadequate. More precisely, monitoring is too narrowly focused on judicial independence and relies on member states' submitted data. Responses to democratic backsliding are inconsistent, and the so-called Article 7 procedure, which can lead to the suspension of a member state's voting rights at the executive level, has turned out to be unusable.[3] Furthermore, these punitive measures also demonstrate that there are not enough incentives to respect the rule of law and to increase a public understanding of and support for it.

Nevertheless, above and beyond an exclusive institutional vision, one can admit the issues raised by the implementation of the rule of law are old and inseparable from our European heritage. Hence, the time has come to look back at these common pillars with the aim of understanding more clearly the contemporary threats to the rule of law in Europe.

First and foremost, the genesis and evolution of the notion of the rule of law are narrowly linked to the classical principle of sovereignty. The progressive construction of the modern state replaces the right to a feudal way of life (defined by the exercise of power based on interpersonal relations) and to the king's suzerainty; the sovereignty of the state itself is gradually affirmed. This sovereignty is clearly displayed, in Europe, in order to distinguish it from the constant flux of empires.[4] The 1648 Westphalian international recognition of state sovereignty, which is the supreme power of the state to create its own legal system and to set it up within its national borders, marked a turning point in the practice of politics through public law. Democratic theories of sovereignty convey the idea that power is only legitimate if it is instituted by the people it exerts that power over, settled in the system by official writings such as the first Swedish Constitution of 1634, the English Bill of Rights of 1689, the first French parliamentary monarchical constitution of 1791, or the Austro-Hungarian Constitution of 1848.[5]

Reconceptualized in the modern age, and drawing especially from Aristotle's philosophy,[6] the concept of the rule of law aims to give predominance to the law over the political authority in place. In this way, the rule of law appears as a mechanism of the depersonalization of political authority. The whole of society is

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[1] EU2019FI Priorities and Programme, *Sustainable Europe – Sustainable Future*, 2010, https://eu2019.fi/en/priorities/programme.

[2] European Parliament, "Resolution on the need for a comprehensive EU mechanism for the protection of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights," 14 November 2018, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0456_EN.html?redirect

[3] Ian Bond & Agata Gostyńska-Jakubowska, *Democracy and the Rule of Law: Failing Partnership?*, Center for European Reform, January 2020, 1, https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/pbrief_ruleoflaw_17.1.20.pdf

[4] "Empire" is used in the socio-political-territorial sense of the word with which students and scholars in the contemporary moment will be most familiar, but this is not an understanding of the word that ancient and medieval legal thinkers would recognize.

[5] Jean Mastias & Jean Grangé, *Les Secondes chambres du Parlement en Europe occidentale*, (Économica, 1987), 78.

[6] Didier Boutet, *Vers l'État de droit: La théorie de l'État et du droit*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), 34.

subject to the institutional power established and guaranteed by the state, while the state itself is subject to the rules it has established. This conception of checks and balances on institutional powers represents the first legal contours of the rule of law considered as a minimum standard. One can see this in the 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*[7] or in the Baron de Montesquieu's 18th-century conception of the separation and balance of powers and its principle that only "power stops power."[8] The progression of the so-called rule of law, in Europe, is part of an ideology that helps to determine the substance of constitutional law: the German theory of the *Rechtsstaat* finds an interpretation when thinking about the institutions of a unified Italy[9] and fuels the violent Spanish clashes over the maintenance of the monarchical regime.[10]

Guardian of the intra-institutional checks and balances, this first aspect of the rule of law gradually evolves into a mechanism through the process of both theorizing the hierarchy of norms and its implementation is made possible by the Constitutional Court of the Austrian Hans Kelsen,[11] as well as the distinction between the rule of law and the "police state" of the Alsatian Raymond Carré de Malberg.[12] Presented as the highest point of civilization, established in principle as the foundation of European integration, some would be suspicious towards such unanimity:[13] this overload of meanings calls for legislative and regulatory translations and this can be observed on a daily basis.

When the Iron curtain collapsed, it became essential to shed light on the implementation of the rule of law, from the candidate countries to the Council of Europe and then to the EU. This shedding of light comes from the joining of supranational legal orders with national ones, from a top-down approach of the hierarchy of norms. However, more than 30 years after the Iron Curtain's fall, one must admit that those who were seeking freedom were more or less aware of what it could imply.

As the political theorist Hanna Fenichel Pitkin observed, *freedom* covers a general meaning, which ranges from the opposition to slavery to the absence of psychological or personal encumbrances; *liberty* implies a system of rules, a "network of restraint and order,"[14] hence the word's close association with political life and legislation. Both can be presented as guaranteed, in Europe, by each national legal system and the European Union's system of fundamental rights. The latter are simultaneously protected at the levels of the member states, the EU, and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Unfortunately, as Jacques Rupnik and Jan Zielonka have stated, "most of the new democracies are experiencing 'democratic fatigue' and some seem vulnerable to an authoritarian turn."[15] However, this "fatigue" doesn't only concern post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe. Old democracies—sometimes considered the birthplaces of fundamental rights—can also reveal themselves to be in lacking in their application of the rule of law, human rights, freedom of expression, and other basic European values. Attacks on these values are also apparent in the drafting of (1) national legislation, (2) political speeches, and (3) Western "democracy fatigue."

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[7] Larry May, *Limiting Leviathan: Hobbes on Law and International Affairs*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 139.

[8] Luc Heuschling, *État de droit, Rechtsstaat, Rule of law*, (Paris: Dalloz, 2002), 373.

[9] Jean-Yves Frétigné, ''Mosca, Orlando et l'Italie 'transformiste,' " *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 50–52, (2003): 92–111

[10] Gregorio Cámara Villar, *Fernando de los Ríos y su tiempo*, (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2000), 98.

[11] Carlos Miguel Herrera, *La philosophie du droit de Hans Kelsen: Une introduction*, (Laval: Presses Université Laval, 2004), 52.

[12] Éric Maulin, *La théorie de l'État de Carré de Malberg*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015).

[13] Michel Troper, "L'Europe et les principes," *Droit et société* no. 20-21 (1992): 51.

[14] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Are Freedom and Liberty Twins?," *Political Theory* 16, no. 4, (November 1988): 528.

[15] J. Rupnik and J. Zielonka, "Introduction: The State of Democracy 20 Years on: Domestic and External Factors.", *Eastern European politics and societies* 27 no. 1, (2013): 3-25.

The Rule of Law Under Legislative Attack: The Judiciary Reform in Poland

With the generalization of the principles inherited from the Age of Enlightenment, the concept of the rule of law took on, gradually, a legislative form through the establishment of criminal and administrative procedures. The fact that individuals are protected from public authorities refers to the notion of the rule of law. For example, even if the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen did not have binding force at the time of its enactment, its Article 4[16] quickly found its implementation through the law determining the conditions for the exercise of each individual's freedoms. This logic is reflected in the primary law of the EU: national legislation implements the rights included in the Directives and Regulations, which are directly integrated into the legal order. In this context, judges of the European Court of Human Rights, the EU Court of Justice, and those overseeing civil and administrative orders, become the spokespersons for the rule of law.[17]

Consequently, introducing new procedures can directly undermine the rule of law, as was the case with the Polish reform of the justice sector. When Poland's Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: PiS) party came into power in 2015, its very first aim was to overhaul the judiciary, which was presented as a system beset by corruption and Communist-era mentalities.[18] In the words of Rafał Zakrzewski, in *Gazeta Wyborcza*:

> There is the tactical idea of using the critical attitude of some citizens towards the courts to fuel hatred of an allegedly elitist, rich and lazy professional caste. … PiS strategists must have conducted polls that indicate that they will benefit from attacking the judges. … despite the resistance, the war with the courts will remain the driving force in [President Andrej] Duda's campaign. The incumbent president and his team have invested too much energy and too much emotion in him to let him go down now.[19]

For the EU and other critics, the legislative reforms represent a fundamental threat to the rule of law.

The first controversial change concerns the Supreme Court. The aim of the legislative reform is to lower the age of retirement for Supreme Court justices, from 70 to 65. However, it allows the president of the republic to grant a five-year extension to whomever is deemed worthy. A similar phenomenon can also be noticed in the field of the general court system for judges and public prosecutors, where the age of retirement for women has been lowered to 60 and 65 for men, down from the current 67 for both genders. Under the reforms the minister of justice, who is appointed by the ruling party, would have the power to extend a judge's term. Last but not least, the law allows judges to be investigated and sanctioned for their court rulings. The disciplinary hearings and procedures were to be carried out by judges selected by the Parliament. These reforms are criticized because judges will not, under these conditions, be immune from political objectives; consequently, judicial independence is violated.

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[16] Article 4, Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du citoyen 1789: « La liberté consiste à pouvoir faire tout ce qui ne nuit pas à autrui : ainsi, l'exercice des droits naturels de chaque homme n'a de bornes que celles qui assurent aux autres membres de la société la jouissance de ces mêmes droits. Ces bornes ne peuvent être déterminées que par la loi. » English translation: "Freedom consists of being able to do anything that does not harm others: thus, the exercise of each person's natural rights has no limits other than those that ensure the enjoyment of these same rights by other members of society. These limits can only be determined by law."

[17] Bernard Stirn, "Europe et droits fondamentaux," *Le Grand Continent*, November 6, 2019, https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2019/11/06/europe-et-droits-fondamentaux/.

[18] Jan Cienski, "5 takeaways from Poland's election", *Politico*, October 25, 2015, https://www.politico.eu/article/5-takeaways-polish-election-2015-law-justice-civic-voters-kaczynski-tusk-eu-pis-szydlo/

[19] Rafał Zakrzewski, "Wojna z sędziami to pomysł na kampanię Dudy. Ale również wzmocnienie Ziobry," translation proposed by Eurotopics.net, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 20, 2020, https://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,25672830,wojna-z-sedziami-to-pomysl-na-kampanie-dudy-ale-i-wzmocnienie.html?disableRedirects=true.

Therefore, on July 29, 2017, the European Commission launched a first infringement procedure on the Polish Law on Ordinary Courts, on the grounds of its retirement provisions and their impact on the independence of the judiciary. In September, it moved to the next stage of the infringement procedure by sending a "reasoned opinion" to Poland; the Commission referred the case to the EU Court of Justice (ECJ).[20] According to the latter, the discrimination on the basis of gender due to the introduction of a different retirement age for female judges (60 years) and male judges (65 years) proves contrary to Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and Directive 2006/54 on gender equality in employment. Moreover, the independence of the Polish courts has been undermined by the fact that the minister of justice has been given discretionary power to extend the mandate of ordinary court judges who have reached retirement age. According to the Commission, this is contrary to Article 19(1) of the Treaty on European Union read in connection with Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. On June 24, 2019, the ECJ ruled that the Polish law on the Supreme Court's lowering the retirement age of judges of the Supreme Court is contrary to EU law and breaches the principle of the irremovability of judges and thus that of judicial independence.[21]

In January 2020, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (also known as the Venice Commission) underlined the fact that any legislative reform should be in line with the constitutional framework and the obligations contracted by Poland. In the field of the meaning of the rule of law, every citizen under the Polish jurisdiction is entitled to a fair hearing before an independent and impartial court. This fundamental right is guaranteed by Article 45(1) of the Constitution of Poland, by Article 6 § 1 of the ECHR, Article 47 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 19(1), of the Treaty on European Union, and Article 14 § 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Furthermore, the Venice Commission observes that the prohibition introduced by Article 107 § 1 limits the judges' freedom of speech, guaranteed by Article 10 of the ECHR.[22] Even if this limitation is supposed to be proportionate and will depend on the circumstances of each case,[23] the duty to declare current membership in associations, including the professional associations of judges (in a context of conflict between judicial associations and the Ministry of Justice, in a situation where the latter received increased powers in questions related to promotions, discipline, and administration of courts) creates a serious risk that the information obtained by the justice minister will be used for ulterior and electioneering purposes. In this context, one can read that:

> The EU should then eschew talk of a conciliatory 'reset' with Poland that has surfaced since a new European Commission took office late last year. Brussels must continue to use the European Court to challenge PiS's attempts to cow the judiciary. Above all, EU states should not shrink from linking future disbursement of lucrative structural funds to upholding the rule of law. Membership of the EU club comes with strings, for good reason. States cannot expect to enjoy all the benefits without following the rules.[24]

Here we can see the first argument in favor of promoting a real European definition of the rule of law, one that is easily understandable and not only intelligible to lawyers. Subsequently, it could help to prevent what we could call *fake* democratic debates.

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[20] European Commission, « Rule of Law; EC launches infringment procedure to protect judges in Poland from political control », *Press corner*, available on https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_1957

[21] ECJ, *Judgment in case C-192/18 Commission v Poland*, 5 Nov 2019, Press Release available on https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2019-11/cp190134en.pdf

[22] European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), "Poland: Joint Urgent Opinion of the Venice Commission and the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe on Amendments to the Law on the Common Courts, the Law on the Supreme Court, and Some Other Laws," January 16, 2020, https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-PI(2020)002-e.

[23] Including the subject matter of the speech, in particular relating to the subjects on which judges have a legitimate public role to play, the form and manner in which the judges express themselves, and the severity of the ensuing sanctions; see Venice Commission, "Poland," 7.

[24] Financial Times Editorial Board, "In Poland, the Rule of Law Is under Ever Greater Threat," *Financial Times*, February 9, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/d2390d6e-49a2-11ea-aeb3-955839e06441.

Political Speeches against the Rule of Law: Dealing with Freedom of Speech in Hungary

The legitimacy of political power is shaped through this model of functioning based on the practice of law and on the social and political power of lawyers. The presupposition of the rationality of this political legitimacy, underlined by the late German social scientist Max Weber, makes sense in that the law, applied to both civil society and those in government, is constructed out of a principle of anticipation.[25] This predictability of the rules governing society confers the means to act and to intervene in the legislative process on citizens, and allows them to access education and thus become active agents in safeguarding the rights of the society they are a part of.

All of these processes must be transparent: that is, both planned and predictable.[26] Hence, processes are there to guarantee a balance of powers within which political power is contained by the supremacy of the law, which respects the fundamental principles contained in the constitution and supranational commitments such as those involved in the EU and Council of Europe membership. Beyond the principle that no one is supposed to ignore the law,[27] a procedure makes it possible to determine to what extent a particular interest (natural person, company or association) is in conflict with the general interest of society.

In the EU context, infringement proceedings, for example, show the opposition between the particular interests of each Member State and the supranational interest of the EU as a whole, as defined by the European Commission.[28] The current problem is that too many European citizens do not (or no longer) understand this overriding interest justifying such prerogatives of the Commission and/or the Court of Justice of the EU. The latter are sometimes presented as being an external intrusion into national institutional With some even arguing that these institutions and jurisdictions attack fundamental rights meant to be safeguarded by the state, the likes of freedom of speech.

A striking example is the intervention of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who stated, at a session of the European Parliament on the May 19, 2015, that the abolition of the death penalty on the European continent is not irreversible. He defended his right to make such a speech in Strasbourg to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on the basis of the freedom of speech. Referring to "man-made rules that can be changed," he thereby demonstrated, forging his own style, that this fundamental right takes precedence over the abolition of the death penalty.[29] Moreover, Orbán argues that he is defending freedom of speech all the while actually shutting it down at home, which is another paradigmatic example of this strategy.

By extension, we can understand what illiberal democracy actually means: a state subject to the law, in which certain freedoms are clearly inferior to others in the legal hierarchy, without paying too much attention to procedural subtleties. As a matter of fact, one of the manifestations of the freedom of speech is the right of expression and information. Considered a fundamental right according to Article 10 of the

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[25] Patrice Duran, "Max Weber and the Making of Politicians: A Sociology of Political Responsibility," *Max Weber Studies* vol. 9, no. 1 (January 2010),
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273545927_Max_Weber_and_the_Making_of_Politicians_A_Sociology_of_Political_Responsibility/citation/download.

[26] Based on the principle that a minister is a head of administration, he is competent to impose restrictions on the exercise of freedoms, then the judge may sanction such restrictive measures when they are disproportionate to the disturbances to be avoided.

[27] The *nemo censetur ignorare legem* principle is specifically based on the citizens' knowledge of national laws and, more specifically in recent years, of European laws. See Henry G. Schermers, Denis F. Waelbroeck, *Judicial Protection in the European Union* (Kluwer Law International, 2001), 187.

[28] Fiona Murray, *The European Union and Member State Territories: A New Legal Framework Under the EU Treaties* (London: Springer Science+Business Media, 2012), p. 44–50; Eloi Laurent, "L'intérêt général dans l'Union européenne: Du fédéralisme doctrinal aux biens publics européens?" *Regards croisés sur l'économie* vol.2, no. 2 (2007): 27–33.

[29] "Hungary's Orban Angers EU over Death Penalty, Migrants," *Euractiv*, May 20, 2015,
https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/hungary-s-orban-angers-eu-over-death-penalty-migrants/.

ECHR and Article 11 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, its exercise is essential for guaranteeing what could be called the European rule of law. This right ensures media pluralism and diversity, media access and coverage in times of crisis, public media, independence of broadcasting regulators, the Internet and free expression thereon, professional and responsible journalism, respect for privacy, access to public information, media coverage of elections, and journalism education and training.[30] Concerning Hungary, the European Federation of Journalists has expressed concerns over the state of media freedom and independence, following the publication of a study showing that the majority of the media outlets in the country are pro-government. The study, commissioned by MEP **Sven Giegold**, shows the far-reaching media power of the ruling Fidesz party. This can be seen more specifically, by viewing the creation of the government-related media foundation KESMA (Közép-Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány: Central European press and media foundation) in November 2018, which united 400 "loyal media producers." The study underlined how 64.1% of the media outlets with political reporting are pro-Fidesz; when adding the pro-Fidesz reporting from the public broadcasting service, that figure rises to 77.8%.[31]

This vision of the state as being subject to the law—and its responsibility for promoting the rule of law—can be seen as a way of engaging in the European debate, as an illustration of the motto "united in diversity." The EU, as a laboratory of democracy, can be understood as an area permitting the introduction of incentives to experiment with innovative regional policy and legal methods and practices, a pluralism encouraging dialog, harmonizing and coordinating differences in the search for the best of each national tradition for our common future.[32] Unfortunately, in our contemporary post-truth era, the ability to accept these different points of view can be interpreted as a symptom of an overarching democratic fatigue.

A Post-Truth Era Revealing a "Western Democratic Fatigue"

Despite the impression of debate, represented by a certain variety of rhetoric, Euroscepticism, Europhobia (systematic hostility towards the EU) and populism appear to be growing in both older and newer EU member states. A first part of the answer is that the EU accession process seems to contribute to these tendencies. Indeed, the EU stands for the rule of law, a single market, shared legal norms, and the adoption of European policies without comprehensive instead of congruent European politics. One can explain this with the failed attempt to adopt a European constitution in 2004–2005, but the main problem seems to be that the nation-state remains the primary framework of democratic politics with respect for the rule of law.[33]

Since then, and even more so since the vote in favor of Brexit, one can detect the emergence of a variety of nativist populist political forces that are challenging liberal democracies, reshaping the political landscape of most EU member states as well as threatening the EU with paralysis or even disintegration.[34] This development can be explained through the counter-democracy phenomenon. By "counter-democracy," Pierre Rosanvallon means:

> a form of democracy that reinforces the usual electoral democracy as a kind of buttress, a democracy of indirect powers disseminated throughout society—in other words, a durable

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[30] Fabrice Picod and Sébastien van Drooghenbroeck, *Charte des droits fondamentaux de l'Union européenne: Commentaire article par article*, (Brussels: Bruylant, 2017).

[31] A study by Hungarian media expert Agnes Urban from https://www.investigativejournalismforeu.net/, commissioned by Sven Giegold, Member of European Parliament (DE-Greens EFA) https://sven-giegold.de/en/dangerous-media-concentration-in-hungary-78-percent-under-orbans-control/

[32] Mireille Delmas-Marty, "Gouverner la mondialisation par le droit," *Le Grand Continent*, (March 18, 2020), https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/03/18/coronavirus-mondialisation-droit-delmas-marty/.

[33] Jacques Rupnik, "From Democracy Fatigue to Populist Backlash," *Journal of Democracy* vol. 18, no. 4 (2007): 17–25, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236822026_From_Democracy_Fatigue_to_Populist_Backlash

[34] Jacques *Rupnik*, La *démocratie illibérale* en Europe centrale," *Revue Esprit* vol. 435 no. 6 (June 2017): 69–85. https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03399694

democracy of distrust, which complements the episodic democracy of the usual electoral-representative system. Thus counter-democracy is part of a larger system that also includes legal democratic institutions and extends their influence, to shore them up.[35]

In other words, the phenomenon neither counters democracy in itself, nor does it present an alternative to democracy. Indeed, states' regimes can no longer be described solely in terms of their constitutional arrangements; democratic activity has been extended beyond the framework of electoral-representative institutions. Counter-democratic powers are describing a new architecture of separated powers: in other words, a subtle political dynamic, more complex than one can find in political, philosophical, and public law theories.

Just as legislatures have been weakened, so too have political parties. Traditionally established as vehicles for the expression and implementation of the democratic will, political parties are now often perceived as mechanisms that function to manage supporters' expectations instead of channeling a collective will. The *gilets jaunes* (or "yellow jacket") movement in France illustrates this particular phenomenon. They revealed a change in the relationship between politics and a part of the French middle-class. They did not challenge the public policies their intention is more to protest a lack of political power. Following from this, since the democratic rule of law requires a stable political party system, with partisan contestation within a rules-based framework of government and opposition, one can conclude that counter-democracy weakens the authority of this type of democratic governing regime. The impact of these various trends is reflected in the decline of electoral participation rates since the end of the Cold War.[36] It might once have been possible to claim this as a proof of a certain "comfort" felt by citizens with the system, but this disengagement is now combined with a growing polarization in political views—in particular, and as studied previously, in the way to construe our European model of rule of law.

The prospect across the political landscape of Europe shows a decline of almost all established political parties and especially those promoting social democracy.[37] The void is being filled by emerging grassroots movements, which express a variety of political convictions but which are not in accordance with our European fundamental rights.[38] As populists are claiming to express the authentic voice of the people, they are critical of constitutional and supranational devices that filter majority views through electoral colleges (French senators are elected by indirect universal suffrage: they are chosen by an electoral college in each *département*, which means that the French senators are principally elected by municipal councilors), unelected upper chambers (like the British House of Lords), expert commissions, judicial scrutiny mechanisms, and transnational networks. These movements have grown as a response to increasing economic inequality, mass migration, and the consequent difficulty of maintaining a secular civic space. As Thomas Piketty and others have shown, economic inequality has been rapidly rising across advanced economies.[39]

In such political circumstances, it is difficult to maintain a common civic space for deliberative action. Intellectuals have often speculated that the trend towards democracy is a natural evolution attributable to a general law of social progress, but this approach appears to have been generally discredited.

In our post-truth era, propaganda has regained a lot of interest worldwide as it capitalizes on new technologically-minded modes of communication. Many studies have been conducted in order to explain

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[35] Pierre Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie: La politique à l'âge de la défiance*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), 352 [chapter author's translation].

[36] See *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017) 228, https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2017, showing that over the last 25 years the average global voter turnout rate has dropped by more than 10%; see further, International IDEA, Voter Turnout Database, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout.

[37] Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing Out of Western Democracy*, (London: Verso, 2013), 160.

[38] Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism*?, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 160, arguing that populism's main claim is a rejection of pluralism.

[39] Thomas Piketty, *Le capital au XXIᵉ siècle*, (Éditions du Seuil, 2019), 972.

the strategy that lies behind and targets NATO and the West. However, none of them describe the approach applied to the EU *per se*, and its linked vision of the rule of law. Therefore, one can ask what role systematic hostility towards the EU plays in the strategies of cyber-influence conducted in European countries. This can explain, in particular, external interference on a national scale. More precisely, to gain ground on the geopolitical battlefield, this interference repeats the following patterns: relying on a permanent stream of disinformation narratives, supporting a champion during election periods in order to promote its interests all the while targeting an enemy to defeat, and finally the hacking of European politics. This strategy is supposed to make Europe slowly turn into a so-called illiberal democracy, while the EU intends to foster the idea of liberalism *vs*. majoritarianism.[40]

As the European Union is facing the challenge of democratic transparency, the digitalization of entire parts of the public sphere adds a layer of complexity and difficulty to this challenge. If the EU implements policies that make it a guardian of compliance by the three branches of government with the law, of the sharing of knowledge, and of freedom of movement—on the basis of our philosophical and institutional heritage and our constitutional traditions—it must also guarantee that its principles and values are extended to the online sphere. Solutions to the contemporary crisis cannot only be found by strengthening liberal institutions. In fact, in order to survive, the European rule of law must also seek to reinvigorate its geopolitical aspirations.[41] Last but not least, the future of the European project depends on its crisis responses and on sustainable policies.

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[40] Michael Meyer-Resende, "Is Europe Problem Majoritarianism or Creeping Authoritarianism?," *Reshaping European Democracy*, Carnegie Europe, June 13, 2018, https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/06/13/is-europe-s-problem-illiberal-majoritarianism-or-creeping-authoritarianism-pub-76587.

[41] About EuropaNova's [think tank] reflections on a "Geopolitical European Commission," see *Europa Conference Report,* 2020, https://www.europanova.eu/actualites/conference-europa-2020-compte-rendu, and "Meet von der Leyen's 'Geopolical Commission,' " *Politico*, December 4, 2019, https://www.politico.eu/article/meet-ursula-von-der-leyen-geopolitical-commission/.

The Affective Landscape of Populism[1]

Ana Blazheva

Crisis and Its Affective Phenomenology

The dominant discourse of the new rise in populism and right-wing politics is discursively framed within the concepts such as crisis, social conflict, or cultural backlash.[2] Each of these concepts already incorporates a psychological dimension or some preconceptions. Since this text was finalized during the covid-19 crisis and its effects with regards to an even greater challenge to liberal democracies, the framework of crisis seemed especially meaningful.

In psychology, crisis is conceptualized as a situation that surpasses the conventional mechanisms of dealing with a present challenge. In political science, crisis refers to an event that is perceived to have dangerous, unfavorable effects on the individual, group, community, or society as a whole. Both conceptualizations share the perspective that it is a time in which change or transformation occurs. In developmental psychology, crisis is considered a challenge that leads to further development and growth. It has a meaningful potential to develop additional and new approaches and skills. In political science it is theorized that crisis leads to the refining or establishment of new institutions and practices. Crisis is a situation of radical change that can only be dealt with by a new, radical approach. The diagnosis of the crisis of liberal democracy therefore could be read in this manner, leaving the nostalgic idea of liberal democracy as the final destination and promise for a better world, and to mark perhaps another "end of history," of an idea of the 20th century.[3] Besides the potential for promising a new world of social transformation, I would also propose a phenomenological perspective on the process of crisis with the aim of entering into an analysis of its affective landscape.

Crisis is usually experienced as a state of shock during which the body struggles to cope and some mental faculties might be suspended. During the first phase of the crisis, it is experienced as a shock of loss in terms of capacities, concepts, and framework, and even a lack of language to understand it and to give meaning to the experience and the change that is emerging.

The characteristic of the crisis including that of liberal democracy is that it is not related to a particular event, but is more of a process that could be recognized in many events in ongoing political developments. Therefore, it is more of a prolonged situation or period of crisis. The complexity of change that societies are going through is the key dimension that determines the experience as crisis. The multiplicity of levels that change disrupts (personal, relational, collective-social, environmental) is unprecedented. The dynamics with which it takes place, the density, the intensity in the overwhelmingly short period of time, is also a characteristic of the situation that is emerging as major crisis. Crisis with a strong impact and that lasts for too long leads to trauma.

There are four phases of the process of crisis that are explained in the psychological literature: initial phase, acute phase, adjustment, and integration. The initial phase of a crisis is characterized by loss of control and

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[1] The paper title refers to populism as a strategy for the mobilization of public fear and uncertainty to undermine the notion of contemporary democracy or liberal democracy, and to promote authoritarian politics as an emerging and more secure and certain perspective that can tackle different crises and address global and national issues.

[2] Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Gregor Fitzi, Jürgen Mackert, and Bryan S. Turner, *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy, Vol. 1: Concepts and Theory* (London and New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); Dimitrios Theodossopoulos and Bruce Kapferer, *Democracy's Paradox: Populism and Its Contemporary Crisis* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

[3] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

safety. The acute phase includes reactions such as overwhelming anxiety, despair, hopelessness, guilt, intense fear, confusion, panic, disorientation, numbness, shock, and a sense of disbelief. In this acute stage, the victims may appear incoherent, disorganized, agitated, and volatile or, conversely, they may present as calm, subdued, withdrawn, and apathetic.[4] The authors Yassen and Harvey suggest that for some people the adjustment phase may lead to an attempt to regain control and consolidate by means of a restarting of external control through engaging in routine activities, something that could give a sense of normality and structure.[5] Others may appear to have withdrawn from society completely. The tension and fluctuating reactions involved in this phase should be noted as attempts to return to normal while still processing the trauma. The integration phase of crisis takes place when attempts are made to make sense of what has happened. An important task of this phase is to resolve the sense of blame and guilt.

The explained phenomenology of crisis could be easily associated with the dominant mental health crisis. Anxiety, panic, depression, despair, hopelessness, and numbness are easily relatable experiences for many.[6] It is estimated that, in 2017, 970 million people worldwide had a mental or substance abuse disorder. Among these, the largest number had anxiety and depression, both estimated at around 4% percent of the population. Depression is a leading cause of disability worldwide and is a major contributor to the overall global burden of disease.[7] According to official figures from the Health Insurance Fund of North Macedonia in 2017, antidepressants amount to the second-most-frequently prescribed drug, right after blood circulation drugs.[8] The ongoing covid-19 crisis elevates mental health issues significantly, primarily due to the long period of isolation, restriction of the right to movement, and radical lifestyle changes, but even more so as the result of the unavoidable socio-economic losses.

The pervasive affective appearance of anxiety, panic, depression, and despair places the prevailing crisis in an acute stage. Psychodynamic theory has explained anxiety as the result of an internal non-conscious conflict, between the id and ego. Anxiety is at the core of the psychoanalytic theory of affects, and central to an understanding of mental conflict. Freud understood anxiety as a transformation of affects and as the result of undischarged libido, or of unsatisfied needs. For example, anxiety could be the result of repressed anger and aggressive drive or impulse that was experienced as unacceptable and therefore not enabled.[9] Melanie Klein had another explanation of anxiety. She argued that anxiety is related to the death instinct within, caused by a trauma experienced at birth and by experiences of hunger and frustration. An infant who has a rudimentary and unintegrated ego, who is trying to deal with life-threatening experiences, uses fantasies of splitting, projection, and introjection as coping strategies to manage anxiety.[10] Both theories explain the survival aspect of anxiety: it is an affective response in situations where survival impulses are frustrated or challenged. I will use this notion of anxiety in the further analysis of affects as background for right-wing populist politics.

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[4] Janet Yassen and Mary R. Harvey, "Crisis Assessment and Interventions with Victims of Violence," in *Emergencies in Mental Health Practice: Evaluation and Management*, ed. Philip M. Kleespies (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 117–144.

[5] Yassen and Harvey, "Crisis Assessment."

[6] Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, "Mental Health," Our World in Data (Oxford: Oxford University, updated August 2021), https://ourworldindata.org/mental-health.

[7] World Health Organization, "Depression" (updated September 13, 2021), http://who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression.

[8] Fond za zdravstveno osiguruvan'e na Makedonja, "Godishen izveshtaj 2017 godina Potroshuvachka na lekovi na retsept na Tovar na FZOM vo primarnata zdravstvena zashtita," (Skopje: May 2018), https://fzo.org.mk/WBStorage/Files/Godisen%20izveshtaj%202017%20potrosuvacka%20lekovi%20na%20RP-skraten%20-%20za%20web.pdf.

[9] Sigmund Freud, "Twenty-Fifth Lecture: General Theory of the Neuroses; Anxiety Fear and Anxiety," in J. Strachey, ed., *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, vols. 16, (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1975d), 399.

[10] Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Hogarth, 1932), 211.

Ideology Embodied by Means of Affects

Anxiety could be defined as a deterritorialized fear, since the object of fear is vague and cannot be fixed or recognized. However, the experience could differ from a mild feeling of being uncomfortable to an overwhelming panic. The energy that is released is channeled into an obsessive repetition of acts. The paranoid aspect of fear can be initiated when the object of fear is lost, because fear has a tendency to spread and take up more space—everything becomes scary.[11] Not only fear, but the whole experience of "being-in-the-world" has become deterritorialized. Uncertainty is a pervasive feeling, which arises due to the loss and lack of stable structures and organizations of life. This continuous uncertainty destabilizes our sense of belonging, of being connected with others, others whom we know and can rely on. The experience of unsituatedness creates the mirage that "we are all refugees."

Fear is an organism's alarm system and serves as a defense mechanism in situations that are experienced as threats. It could be real, imagined, or perceived, but is nevertheless experienced as a threat. Fear is one of the oldest evolutionary emotions, which has the basic function of ensuring survival.[12] Mobilization of the entire body through physiological processes that lead to metabolic, endocrine, and neurological changes are enacted through three different behavior manifestations: fight, flight, and/or freeze. Different behavioral responses deploy different impulses into the inter-affective and inter-subjective space, which further shapes the social dynamic.[13]

The politics of fear has always been a part of the history of nation-states, as Brian Massumi stated in his "Politics of Everyday Fear" in 1993: "Fear is a staple of popular culture and politics. There is nothing new in that. In fact, a history of modern nation-states could be written following the regular ebb and flow of fear rippling their surface, punctuated by outbreaks of outright hysteria."[14] In this volume, Massumi states how social space has been shaped by the mechanisms of fear production, mostly through the role of media and with a focus on the material body "as the ultimate object of technologies of fear understood as apparatuses of power."[15] For Massumi, fear serves to set social boundaries, preserve hierarchies, and perpetuate domination.[16]

Right-wing populism uses the enormous energy of fear by promising the conservation and restoration of values as the first step in ensuring safety and hope. Slogans like "get Brexit done" and "Take back control" are responses to the need for certainty and safety, more so than the vague call for "real change" that resonates with the idea of a prolonged period of uncertainty. People like to feel more empowered and in control; in any crisis intervention the first thing to do is ensure safety, stability, and predictability. Change is associated with distress and overwhelming fear (that is, anxiety). The power of populism lies in the idea of a strong and homogenous community as well as strong leadership. The abstract ideas of equality and justice, of human rights, fade away in the face of a threatened existence. People choose what makes them feel more secure and protected, something that neutralizes their acute anxiety and fear. Nationalistic calls such as "Make America great again" resonate with the nostalgic feeling of safety and the feeling of greatness. This resonates with stability and power. It also resonates with the feeling of belonging: the sense of collective identity and connection (even if it is a past experience), and/or the feeling of national

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[11] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 69.

[12] Joseph E. LeDoux, "Evolution of Human Emotion: A View through Fear," *Progress in Brain Research* 195 (2012): 431–442; Dean Mobbs et al., *The Ecology of Human Fear: Survival Optimization and the Nervous System* (Sec. Social and Evolutionary Neuroscience), https://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2015.00055; Christian Montag and Jaak Panksepp, "Primary Emotional Systems and Personality: An Evolutionary Perspective," *Frontiers Psychology* 8 (2017), 464.

[13] Ana Blazheva, "Macedonian Affective Rhizome: Fear and Shame in the Case of the Macedonian 'Name Issue,'" *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 16, no. 1–2, (2019), 98.

[14] Brian Massumi, ed., *The Politics of Everyday Fear* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii.

[15] Massumi, *Politics of Everyday Fear*, 63.

[16] Massumi, *Politics of Everyday Fear*, viii.

connection or greater connectedness in general. These are powerful experiences and feelings since they compensate for the lack of security, trust, and certainty in and of the self.

However, the promise itself is paradoxical. There is neither a homogeneous community nor a strong leadership that could solve all problems or anxieties. I will return to this later to discuss how this paradox can be conceived of as the result of a fantasy created in the early stages of the development of the unconscious.

There are notable differences that make new right-wing politics more expressive and demographically diverse. Rather than safety, fear can also express itself in a fight mode most usually accompanied by aggression. Populism uses the idea of crisis as a main narrative in its discourse, as Müller suggests, to invoke the external threat as instrumental for legitimizing populist governance.[17] Polarization is the main strategy of populism, through which anxiety and fear are mobilized through the discursive production of a personalized threat as an enemy. Along these lines, Ruth Wodak defines the concept of right-wing populism through its focus on the exclusion of "strangers." For her, exclusionary politics, or "border politics" as she calls it, is produced by emphasizing the criteria of belonging and territorial boundaries as constitutive of right-wing populist identity politics.[18]

Polarization operates through two important processes that place the overall dynamic into fields shaped by populist discourse: division and antagonism in an exclusivist manner among two opposed identity groups, between us and them, and the tension that is produced among the two polarized positions and identities. Polarization is what turns populism into a form of identity politics. The fundamental realness of the experience of uncertainty is used by populist narratives, which mediate the projection of deterritorialized fear onto a presented enemy or threat—political opponents, migrants, Muslims, gender ideologists, etc.

By perceiving the other as a threat, a distance is created and functions towards the exclusion and extinction of the threat. This exclusionary dynamic is crucial for polarization. Fear is fixated on the other through a cognitive dissonance created by the stereotypes, for example, about migrants, Muslims, or terrorists, etc. Fear, in the behavioral manifestation of the fight response, creates a strong bond with anger. Anger is often associated or blended with other strong emotions, such as sadness. Anger itself, on the other hand, and according to the clinical literature, has an especially powerful interaction with shame. Typical triggers for anger include frustration and threats to autonomy, authority, and/or reputation. Any notion of disrespect and derision, any violation of norms or rules, or any experienced sense of injustice, could also trigger anger.[19] Resentment is also an affective response that emerges out of the perceived experience of injustice. In societies with high levels of inequality, resentment would be another expression of anger.[20] The strategy of populist polarization also uses the manifestation of anger through hate, which is closely related to the imagined enemy, the other.

For example, one of the current emergent forms of alt-right esthetics is a mix of shock-and-meme culture, meta-politics, and right-wing social values that are trying to appeal to a young, reactionary audience. Young people are keener on rage and radical politics, surfing more on the edge of chaos than desiring certainty. One of the leaders of the American alt-right movement explained this as an attack on middle-class values (more precisely: those of safety and certainty).

"American society today is so just fundamentally bourgeois … It's just so, pardon my French … it's so fucking middle-class in its values. There is no value higher than having a pension and dying in bed. I find

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[17] Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 43.

[18] Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2015).

[19] Michael Potegal, Gerhard Stemmler, and Charles Spielberger, eds., *International Handbook of Anger: Constituent and Concomitant Biological, Psychological, and Social Processes* (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2010).

[20]Jack Barbalet, "Class and Resentment," in *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure: A Macrosociological Approach* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 65; Anna Barford, "Emotional Responses to World Inequality," *Emotion, Space and Society* 22 (2017), 31.

that profoundly pathetic. So, yeah, I think we might need a little more chaos in our politics, we might need a bit of that fascist spirit in our politics."[21]

The problem with the "fight" modification of fear responses, expressed through the framework of right-wing ideology, is that the perceived threat is not the real one. The object of threat is shifted onto a projected subject. Therefore, it cannot resolve its subjects' anxiety. The effect of the fight response would not eliminate the causes of anxiety and instead would lead towards the nonfunctional and neurotic circulation of energy.

The other possible response to fear is the flight mode. A flight is a movement that mobilizes the body to escape, to find a safe place and protect itself from the threat. It is usually accompanied with the cognitive appraisal that the threat is bigger than we can handle or confront. The experience of vulnerability in the face of perceived danger is the most distinct feature of the flight mode. It is the result of feeling weak, small, not strong enough, and/or not good enough. For Ahmed, fear is related to vulnerability because the world/other are always a possible threat, and the embodied self is at risk of being wounded.[22] This modification of the fear response is strongly bound up with shame. Shame is one of the strongest relational feelings that has the capacity to profoundly paralyze and sabotage actual engagement. Therefore, the survival modification is to flee, to try to hide, to become invisible, or to blind the object of threat. This means deflection and desensitization. These modifications of our contact with the environment serve also to protect us and have the same survival function. Technology, as well as culture, offers endless opportunities for escapist experiences: endless scrolling, or binging on whatever (games, movies, series, music, shopping, food, sex, etc.). However, these modifications prevent the possibility for engagement, as well as the gratification of the need to feel safe. Each attempt at making contact will end in the same position of feeling wounded and scared. Overcoming this position will remain challenging as long as the flight response still provides temporary sedation for the pain. When neither desensitization nor deflection work, but the escape itself becomes equally painful and part of the suffering, the potential for action will become greater.

The Split and the Fantasy-Psychoanalytic View on Populism

To return to the paradox mentioned before, regarding the dynamic of the ego when faced with fear, I will analyze one of the core elements of the politics of the new right: the autocrat. The autocrat is the patriarch, the father. He is the symbolic father, as in Lacan, "the-name-of-the-father" that controls the desire and rules of communication.[23] The autocrat has hegemony over the discourse, as well as in signifying the threat, the other. The autocrat bears the symbol of the strong figure that promises safety, security, and protection. The super-ego dimension of the autocrat is actually a fantasy. Melanie Klein defines fantasy as a function of a child's internal world in which impulses, defenses, and object relations are represented.[24] Fantasy uses both internal and external worlds, which are then modified by affects and impulses and as such are projected towards objects, both real and imaginary. Fantasy serves as the symbolic terrain for processing experiences and developing modifications of reality. Along these lines, I would argue that the autocrat and the overall right-wing ideology are grounded in such a fantasy. The fantasy of a strong leader, an autocrat, activates when the feeling of being endangered, helpless, and/or hopeless occurs. It serves to resolve the unbearable anxiety built by the fear of death and loss. However, the Oedipal frame of the symbolic father has already

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[21] Jacob Siegel, "The Alt-Right's Jewish Godfather," Tablet, November 29, 2016, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/spencer-gottfried-alt-right.

[22] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 68.

[23] Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Subconscious," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).

[24] Melanie Klein, *Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 43.

been problematized and outgrown, both in theory and through therapy. This does not mean that it is obsolete, but that there are possibilities for other options for development.

Besides the existential role of the fantasy, its dysfunctional and destructive role could create a split in both the internal and external world. The split in this case, which is materialized through the support of populist regimes and authoritarian leaders, can be detected in a paradoxical situation whereby, in order to sustain the fantasy, a certain reality must be unrecognized. Therefore, the fantasy and split serves to manage the tension of reality, its relation to the imaginary, and its penetration into consciousness. Moreover, not just the personification of the symbolic father, but the overall ideological framework has been designed to sustain the split of the real and the imaginary. This same dynamic could be used to explain the defining features of right-wing ideology such as ignorance, limitations, and the insistence on exclusion, which are expressed in and through nationalism, xenophobia, and polarization. Likewise, illiberal notions could also be explained through the same dynamic. The narratives of the leader, the autocrat, and the categorization of both us and them have their phantasmatic notions and ideological dimensions that keep the split active, and this ostensibly functions to ensure survival or certain conservation.

Data from empirical research and surveys also confirms such a paradox. For example, in one Russian survey in 2014, "Sixty percent of its respondents agreed that Russia was moving toward a crisis, while 64 percent said that it was moving in the right direction."[25] The authors of the paper, commenting on the findings, suggest that the Russian people should somehow forget their own (individual and collective) problems and concerns for the sake of the great power of Russia—the motherland represented by its leader.[26] Also, the recent poll in North Macedonia presents young people as lacking agency and an impetus toward participation; 71% of young people describe themselves as socially inactive citizens, 85% of young people think that the country needs a leader with a firm hand, while only 3% of young people are fully satisfied with their place in society.[27] Therefore, the investment into the fantasy that projects the idea of a strong authoritarian leader as   representative of greatness, safety and belonging comes   at the expense of integrated, realistic and responsible approaches towards social and political reality.

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[25] *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*, Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker, eds. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).
[26] *Authoritarianism Goes Global*, 42.
[27] Martin Galevski "Participation of Youth in North Macedonia: Apathy, Optimism or Disappointment?," Study 2019, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, North Macedonia.

The Annihilation of the West:
Alexander Dugin's Politics of the Eternal Now

Zachary De Jong

In a time when the popularity and practice of various right-wing politics and populisms are on the rise across the globe, both East and West, the need to comprehensively understand how the new right functions internally is becoming increasingly important. The aim of this paper is to introduce and problematize the work and thought of Aleksandr Dugin, a controversial (and in many Western circles completely unknown) figure, who is too often dismissed and/or reduced to mere caricature. By taking Dugin seriously as a thinker in both philosophy and politics, we can gain insight not only into the intellectual apologetics of the far right, but also into the impetus towards right-wing movements in general. Dugin's appeal lies precisely in his condemnation of the current political, philosophical, and socio-economic situation of the West, in which unbridled capitalism and individual rights reign supreme. While, on the surface, his project may appear to offer a novel alternative to Western hegemonic discourse, upon closer inspection we find it to be steeped in regressive, traditionalist nostalgia. Here, the dividing line between left and right can easily become obscured. Moving beyond the failings of post-liberal ideology is not an end in itself, even if it appears as an attractive option to many, and has the ability to motivate and potentially cause political change. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend and differentiate Dugin's quasi-fascist discourse, elaborated throughout his 2009 book, *The Fourth Political Theory*, from genuinely radical critiques.

Dugin's *Fourth Political Theory* is fundamentally concerned with moving beyond what he calls the three failed political projects of modernity: communism, fascism, and liberalism. In particular, Dugin wishes to establish a theory capable of eclipsing what he views as the individualistic, atheistic, and progressive agenda at the core of post-liberal ideology. As he states: "The Fourth Political Theory is as an incorporeal idea opposed to corporeal matter; as a possibility entering into conflict with the actuality, as that which is yet to come into being, attacking that which is already in existence."[1] In other words, the point is to combat what exists within the post-liberal ideologies of the West, not simply with counter-hegemony but something qualitatively different, something not merely material but spiritual and ideational as well. Against modernity, and the Enlightenment project of individualism and progress, Dugin demands a return to tradition, myth, and a reconceptualization of collective subjectivity.[2] Thus, Aleksandr Dugin's political vision, while difficult to fully define under any given singular term, does embody many of the core tenets of illiberalism. For instance, as will be explored throughout this paper, Dugin firmly insists on the rejection of liberalism and Western values, which he sees as a form of forced homogenization, in favor of a strong nationalism, with a strong religious and spiritual bent. At every turn, Dugin rejects the liberal multiculturalism of the West, in favor of a form of what appears to be traditionalism. That being said, and as Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland have extensively shown, this label of a traditionalist does not fundamentally fit Dugin either, at least not in the sense of an integral traditionalist.[3] Regardless, a strong sense of tradition, myth, and nationalism are all present in Dugin's work, and are also present in the larger ideological scope of illiberalism.

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[1] Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (Moscow: Eurasian Movement, 2012), 14.
[2] Michael Millerman, "Alexander Dugin on Martin Heidegger (Interview)," Arktos, November 3, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/17674206/Alexander_Dugin_on_Martin_Heidegger_Interview_.
[3] Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, "Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? 'Neo-Eurasianism' and Perennial Philosophy," *Russian Review* 68, (October 2009): 662–678, https://www.academia.edu/191310/Is_Dugin_a_Traditionalist_Neo-Eurasianism_and_Perennial_Philosophy?email_work_card=view-paper.

Towards an Understanding of the Problematic of *Dasein*

This radical move away from liberal ideology produces two primary tensions at the heart of Dugin's political theory: the relation of the one to the many, and the relation between destiny and free will. These two tensions are inextricably knotted around the common concepts of *Dasein*, and the people (*narod*), which are in turn inextricably tied to his conception of time, which leans heavily on the work of the 20th-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. A short but pronounced formula leads us directly into these tensions: "The 'Fourth Political Theory' trusts the fate of Being and entrusts fate to Being."[4] For Dugin, neither being nor fate are experienced in general. Rather, they are always grounded in concrete but contingent life-worlds into which subjects find themselves always already thrown. Living authentically in a world means living according to one's own fate, as being-towards-death. However, one's own fate is never simply one's own, but is directly overdetermined by their existence in a shared but distinct world of tradition and *logos*, in which Dasein is not simply experienced as an individual phenomenon but rather taken collectively: "Every society is [a] separate fact of … consciousness, expanded in … rational and temporal horizons. All are strictly superindividual and open….The fact that every people, every culture, every society ha[s] its own history, turns time in[to a] local phenomenon. Every society possesses its own temporality."[5] For Dugin, this temporality does not unfold in a progressive, unidirectional or monotonic way, but is brought about through a cyclical repetition, an eternal return. The past presents the present, as a sort of anamnesis, while the future is always present as the present's own decay, which is thus also the echo of the past. Or, in more simple terms, time does not merely unfold in one direction, as a straightforward and unchangeable path. Rather, the past is in the present, it grounds the present, and the future always signals both the death of the present, and what for Dugin would be the eternity of the past, which keeps repeating itself. Thus, time from this viewpoint is cyclical, and not unidirectional:

> The future is the tail of the present, its resonance. We live the future just now, and already now, when we play the note of the melody of life. The future is the process of the death of the present, the attention of the dissolution of melody in the main frame of harmony … The soul should recall the hidden past of its past existence in order to reconstruct the wholeness of the melody of destiny.[6]

Momentarily putting aside the question of the one and the multiple, we should note that, for Dugin, this cyclical nature of time does not imply that history is automatically destined to reach a particular end, or that it could not be otherwise—that time is always already accounted for. On the contrary, for Dugin, temporality is a procedure embodied by subjectivity, and thus requires a certain amount of free action. Authentic choice is the choice of repetition, of cleaving to a relative absolute, of choosing fate itself. Authentic choice is thus, in one way or another, a forced choice, but a choice nonetheless. Here, Dugin attempts to elide the tricky distinction between reason as *logos*, as an ultimately contingent circumstance, and Dasein, as the being-there proper to any *logos*. The main problem with this is that if we are to determine what is authentic—which always entails a certain degree of self-referencing—from what is inauthentic in the here and now, it becomes almost impossible to avoid either conflating what exists with what ought to exist, or fleeing the scene entirely, instead insisting that authenticity can only exist as that which is not yet present. In other words, either apotheosize the present, or demand the impossible in the form of a *deus ex machina*, or, in fact, do both. This temporal tension is foundational for Dugin's thought, both politically and philosophically, and is fleshed out in his conception of chaos.

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[4] Dugin, *Fourth Political Theory*, 49.
[5] Dugin, *Fourth Political Theory*, 73.
[6] Dugin, *Fourth Political Theory*, 69.

Chaos as the *Ur-Grund* of Any Given *Logos*

According to Dugin, as will be expounded upon below, underlying any given *logos* is an irreducible chaos, which includes in itself the potentiality for any and all *logoi*. Far from constituting the inverse of necessity, chaos is rather the point of dissemination of both chance and necessity themselves. Rather, chaos acts as the zero point above, before, and within every logical construction. According to Dugin, we have become divorced from the truth of *logos*, from its origins, and thus need to begin anew:

> Logos can be thought of as a fish swimming in the waters of Chaos. Without this water, discarded on the surface, a fish will die. That, in effect, is how the structures of Logos have "died." We are dealing only with its dissipative vestiges, the bones of the fish discarded on the shore, and it is no accident that many are speaking about the symbolism of the new waters of Aquarius, without which the old fish could not live.[7]

For Dugin, in order to escape the failings of logocentric thought, "we should make an appeal to the alternative inclusive instance that is Chaos."[8] What is authentic in *logos* is what eternally precedes, and unfolds in, the appearance of this or that *logos*. What is authentic is thus not only what appears, but also that which eternally in-appears:

> Precisely because it is absolutely eternal: time becomes antiquated very quickly, yesterday's time looks archaic … only eternity is always new. That is why the disclosure of Chaos does not mean going deep into history, into structures that seem overcome by historical time; no, it is an encounter with the eternally young. Chaos was not sometime before, back then. Chaos is here and now. Chaos is not that which was, as Logos propagandizes it. Chaos is that which is, and Chaos is that which will be.[9]

It is this brilliant sleight of hand, speciously mimicking a real substitution, which allows Dugin to do the exact opposite of what he professes. Arguing that truth is not deep in structure is meant to serve as a rejection of the idealization of the past, but the reason truth is not deep in structure is precisely because the past is eternally present. Dugin's idea of chaos is thus the metaphysical (philosophical) support for his quasi-traditionalist politics.[10] Everything revolves around choosing what must be, and what must be is precisely what is found in the foundational myths of being qua being, and being qua historical sequence.

Spirit as a Matter of Politics

For Dugin, one of the primary failures of modernity has been its disproportionate favoring of the material world over the spiritual. Western culture is said to promote a voluntaristic consumerism which focuses on the rights of individual bodies to rationally decide. Their reason derives solely from their own individual capacity, as "ends in themselves," to borrow Kantian language.[11] Thus, for Dugin, politics cannot be reduced to the material realm alone; without a spiritual element, both politics and subjectivity become devoid of any authenticity. Dugin, while in many regards sympathetic towards (or even enamored with) Vladimir Putin and his political dealings (as we will explore more momentarily), nonetheless critiques him on this very basis: "Putin's current platform is about integrating concrete things: the Customs Union, the economy, the EurAsEC [Eurasian Economic Community]. Turn on, turn off, press, release, give, take. That is, all actions are on the level of concrete, material realities. I think that it's necessary to move on to the

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[7] Alexander Dugin, *Political Platonism: The Philosophy of Politics* (Budapest: Akrtos, 2019), 128.

[8] Dugin, *Fourth Political Theory*, 238.

[9] Dugin, *Political Platonism*, 115.

[10] Shekhovtsov and Umland, "Is Dugin a Traditionalist?"

[11] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39.

politics of spirit."[12] Dugin, in the same vein, lays out what he views to be the proper method of critique apropos Putin: "As both the formal and informal pinnacle of the power pyramid, how could anything exist above Putin? Inherent in the very notion of sovereignty is that above him stands no other institution of authority. That is the point. So what exists above Putin, if everything (in Russia) exists below or beside him? The idea stands above."[13]

Authority is granted by the absolute. The absolute is not inherent in the ruler, but the realm of ideas, to which the ruler may or may not subject themself. What precisely are ideas? They are the constructions built out of an authentic relation to *logos*, and embodied by a people (*narod*) as Dasein. They are thus the ideal will of the people, insofar as this people is representative of a universally unique *logos*, which is gathered from the past and projected into the future. This seemingly oxymoronic universality is a calling card of disparate right-wing political movements. Each people is universal as it stands, but no global universality is possible. We are not simply all humans, but subjects of this or that *logos*, subjects of this or that anthropological origin, tradition, myth, etc. This universality demands a clearing away of actual historical events, in favor of a mythologized past. The universal, while embodied, is not just this embodiment, but the dialectic between incorporation and idea. It is precisely for this reason that authority cannot be said to be derived from nothing (*ex nihilo*), from s/he who possesses the power of exception. The void from which power derives its source is the power of the triple pairings: (1) chaos/*logos*, (2) *narod*/Dasein, and (3) *ethnos*/society. It is this threefold relationship which self-referentially creates a situation whereby a universal appears to be entirely unique to a people, as well as always eternal. The reason this is important is that what we could call Dugin's sprituralist politics is always grounded upon such notions. This uniqueness is especially important for understanding his opposition to the West. What is being exploited by Dugin is thus not simply primordial law, but primordial people, and primordial *ethnos* (as we will explore later on). Individuals must be rendered collective, in order for their history to be submitted to a single universal. It is worth noting here, however, that the will of a people (*narod*) is far from anarchistic—it does not imply the dissolution of state or other institutional mediation. This is because, in Dugin's view, there is always something more in the will of a people than the sum of the individuals' wills themselves. The state does not simply function as the necessary arm of the people, such that the people use the state for the sake of their own collective being (political, and especially geopolitical goals would be impossible without it). Rather, the state functions to structure what the will itself simultaneously creates and embodies—the mythological history which it invokes—by way of philosophical hierarchy. The tension here is between the unfolding of an eternal narrative based on an idea and the retroactive production of the same idea by a people. A people produces its own destiny by submitting to its past creations. Safe in the harbor of tautological erasure, Dugin is able to claim as unique and collective an atavistic and hierarchical structure which annihilates freedom in the name of authenticity. We can observe this rather clearly if we begin to look at the role of philosophy as a whole in Dugin's work.

History as the Correlate of Philosophy

For Dugin, philosophy is the cipher that unlocks the meaning of both history and politics: "The meaning of history is political-philosophical or philosophical-political. All history has these two sides. On the one hand it is the history of kingdoms, on the other it is the history of ideas. The history of kingdoms and the history of ideas are not separate; it is one and the same history."[14] All philosophy has a political dimension, but politics nonetheless remains a subservient subset of philosophy; there is no politics without philosophy: "As soon as philosophy appears, it necessarily … turns to politics; and all politics emerges from

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[12] Alexander Dugin, *Putin vs. Putin: Vladimir Putin Viewed from the Right* (Budapest: Arktos, 2014), 558.

[13] Dugin, *Putin vs Putin*, 545.

[14] Dugin, *Political Platonism*, 8.

philosophy."[15] Philosophy is thus not simply the driving force behind politics, it is the very stuff politics is made of. This creates a direct correlation between minded subjects and knowable phenomenal content, with the necessary twist that what is authentically knowable is what is knowable within a certain horizon, and given to a certain people. It follows naturally, then, that political identity is also a form of philosophical-theoretical identity, that a shift in thought is also a shift in subjective formation. What is at stake for Dugin is thus not merely ideological, but concerns both Being and beings themselves: "Politics grants us our political status, our name, our anthropological structure. Man's anthropological structure shifts when one political system changes to another. Consequently, the political man, the political anthropology, is given another shape after the conversion from the traditional society to the modern society," and from modern society onward.[16]

Society as *Ethnos*

Dugin views modern post-liberal society as inherently disenchanted, atomizing, hegemonic, and fundamentally racist. This is due to the fact that it refuses to accept the plurality of Daseins, instead ruthlessly exporting an atheist, capitalist, and individualistic worldview, judging all other cultures by their approximate relation to this ideal. Dugin, with Machiavellian tact, insists that the only way out of this racist structure is to break out of a unipolar world, which means excluding any conceptions of liberal inclusion. In other words, against the liberal idea of the acceptance of differences (that is, multiculturalism) as the universal paradigm of our age, he insists on difference itself as a hard dividing line between cultures. According to Andreas Umland and Anton Shekhovtsov, this viewpoint was formed through an evolutionary process whereby "Dugin [initially] held more or less biologically informed prejudices of the 'old rights' racism. As it evolved, however, [he] substituted biologistic fundamentalism with radical cultural particularism with regard to both ethnic groups and world civilizations. This new form of ascription perverts the liberal ideal of the right to be different."[17] Dugin thus manages to play the role of an enlightened philosopher, disavowing racism while surreptitiously promoting a new and more brutal form of exclusion. This new exclusion relies on the myth of a utopian past, extended into the future; an open repetitive eschatology of un-becoming that promotes traditional society as the only real society.[18] It is worth noting, however, that this exclusion is not based upon race, but rather identity—identity born out of the immanence of the *ethnos*.[19] "The ethnos is a simple society, organically (naturally) associated with a territory and bound together by common morality, customs, and symbolic systems."[20] There is no *ethnos* in general. It has no universal elements. It is entirely unique to a people. It is defined primarily by common language, custom, tradition, and a shared cultural heritage. This cultural heritage is structured around the acceptance and subjective incorporation of foundational myths, myths which can be accepted by anyone willing.

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[15] Dugin, *Political Platonism*, 5.

[16] Dugin, *Fourth Political Theory*, 96.

[17] Shekhovtsov and Umland, "Is Dugin a Traditionalist?" 666.

[18] Dugin, *Fourth Political Theory*, 43.

[19] A prime example: "When 'White nationalists' reaffirm Tradition and the ancient culture of the European peoples, they are right. But when they attack immigrants, Muslims or the nationalists of other countries based on historical conflicts; or when they defend the United States, Atlanticism, liberalism or modernity; or when they consider the White race (the one which produced modernity in its essential features) as being the highest and other races as inferior, I disagree with them completely." Alexander Dugin, *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism* (Budapest: Artoks, 2014), 128.

[20] Alexander Dugin, *Ethnosociology: The Foundations* (Budapest: Artoks, 2019), 9.

The Society of One and Ones

Returning to the question of the one and the multiple we can see that Dugin, following (likely unintentionally) the logic developed throughout French Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*, asserts that the "particular derives from the common" and not the other way around.[21] It is the whole, which retroactively interpellates people into persons. It is only by giving oneself up to the truth of shared destiny that individual truth becomes authentic. It is only by assuming a position amongst the *narod* that one is truly liberated from the false liberty of individual freedom: "The narod is a sort of council [*sobor*] of 'single ones,' where they can and can no longer remain single ones … The single one reaches being only in the narod and through the narod, since the narod is being, herebeing, Dasein."[22] Particular destiny is thus also collective destiny, particular subjectivity also collective subjectivity. In Dugin's view, this collectivity qua *narod* can be granted ontological legitimacy only if it submits itself to a transcendent One, the formless form of eternal being at the center of his imagined and well-ordered Republic (or Platonopolis, which is used throughout his lectures on Plato, as well as immediately before the below quote):

> The Republic is built around something greater than itself. An apophatic hole must gape at the center of the Republic. Only then will the Republic be holy … thus, the Republic should not be self-identical; it is always something non-identical to itself. This is not simply the Republic but the Republic of philosophers … As soon as it becomes simply a Republic and self identical [*sic*], it at once loses the wave of ontological resonance with the paradigm and turns from a copy into a caricature, cartoon, parody, anti-politeia.[23]

Thus, the Republic is open, not because it is given up to the infinity of unfolding multiplicities, but because behind or above these multiplicities there is an exceptional One, irreducible to the multiplicities therein. The *narod* submits to the primordial and exclusive one-all, which grounds the possibility of Dasein, thus creating the multiplicity of authentic persons:

> Dasein is primary in relation to both individual and society. Everything that is human originates from Dasein; accordingly, Dasein is pre-individual and pre-social, but at the same time Heidegger's existential analytic brings the most diverse aspects of human thought, action, culture, and habits—i.e., existence—into correlation with Dasein on the whole, so Dasein explains the individual that it includes wholly in itself … Everything that is human is traced to Dasein and finds its sanction … in it.[24]

It is crucial to note that, while this appears at first to point towards the construction of a radically inclusive society, based around a shared destiny, that this destiny can only properly be interpreted by philosophers themselves. Dugin thus not so subtly sneaks in a quasi-metaphysical technocracy, while simultaneously reducing the vast majority of individuals to mere automatons under the guise of collective solidarity and shared tradition.

Geopolitics and Hegemony

Changes in political systems, just like changes in subjectivity, are predicated on the transformative notion of radically eternal ideas, interpreted and put to work from the top down. The practice of political

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[21] Dugin, *Ethnosociology*, 4.
[22] Dugin, *Political Platonism,* 92.
[23] Dugin, *Political Platonism*, 28.
[24] Dugin, *Political Platonism, 98.*

engagement is always a calling forth, a bringing into being qua *poiesis*, as opposed to mere transformation qua *praxis*. Dugin's main political doctrines are multipolarity and neo-Eurasianism, which are both informed by his *Fourth Political Theory*. Shekhovtsov succinctly situates these ideas in their Russian context:

> This ideology portrays Russia as a central power of the Eurasian continent that is "organically" opposed to the Atlanticist world represented by the United States and its allies such as the United Kingdom. For neo-Eurasianism, Eurasia and the Atlanticist world are not simply geography-inspired concepts. In Dugin's view, Eurasia is associated with 'a plurality of value systems', 'tradition', 'the rights of nations', 'ethnicities as the primary value and the subjects of history', and 'social fairness and human solidarity.'[25]

In other words, Dugin, while acknowledging the heterogeneity of cultures and traditions overall, nonetheless proclaims a shared Eurasian heritage (as a series of equally unique parts) and calls for the unification of the Eurasian continent for the sake of combating the hegemony of the West (Atlantians), which views the world as unipolar.

Dugin's conception of counter-hegemony, like his politics in general, is defined by its privileging of ideas over matter. To engage in counter-hegemony only on the level of material circumstances is to deny Being itself, the "here-being" of Dasein. This counter-hegemony does not imply a modification of Western post-liberal ideology, but its annihilation.[26] It is not therefore a mere matter of changing the outlook on this or that principle, policy, or even worldview, but of changing the way that politics and society function and are interpreted as a whole.

Underlying this radical break is the call for a return of the centrality of not only spirituality as a source of ideas, but to religion as such. Religion is not just a cultural practice but the embodiment of an idea and a sine qua non of Eurasian integration. As Gordon R. Middleton states, "Dugin is emphatic that the primary means to achieve Eurasianism's goals are through spiritual, even theological, revival," an awakening that is both metaphysical and practical.[27] For Dugin, religious solidarity and geopolitics are intrinsically linked. Relying primarily on the foundations of the Orthodox Church,[28] he is able to appropriate an authority with much greater strength than his own word, which allows him access to a universality that is not confined to a specific geographical border, but which nonetheless allows for an inclusive exclusivity.[29] Take, for instance, Dugin's analysis of the primary role that Orthodox Christian religion would play in an ideal Serbia, which for Dugin is a country with strong ideological and geopolitical importance, and which he

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[25] Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 42.

[26] A prime example comes from his interview with Michael Millerman on Heidegger: "we have no chances to create Eurasia, on … the basis of [the] Fourth Political Theory, peacefully with the cold indifference of the liberal Americano-centric globalist West. The West will immediately intervene and it intervenes now. So war is imminent." Millerman, "Alexander Dugin on Martin Heidegger (Interview)," 7.

[27] Gordon R. Middleton, "Religion in Russian Geopolitical Strategy," Providence (March 2, 2018), https://providencemag.com/2018/03/religion-russian-geopolitical-strategy-alexander-dugin/.

[28] Although Dugin often invokes the authority of the Orthodox Church, he is far from pure in his religious leanings, often dabbling in various forms of paganism, and deriding any idea of monotheism.

[29] As Middleton points out, this conception of religious authority is important not only to Dugin, but Vladimir Putin as well, who used it to help justify the annexation of Crimea. Middleton, "Religion in Russian Geopolitical Strategy."

describes as both the "westernmost avant-garde of our Eurasianism" and "[Russia's] observation post in the Balkans":[30] [31]

> This is such a Eurasian Serbia, which does not at all renounce its Serbian Orthodox identity, but, on the contrary, strengthens it, but at the same time it opens up and departs from the failed grossly vulgar nationalism. But it does not dissolve in the liberal Western world, but becomes an important element of the Eurasian cultural polylogue. Of course, I think that, perhaps, not all Serbs will be interested and fascinated. But the Serbian intelligentsia, the spiritual elite, the thinkers of "Serbia Pavic," which will be composed of multipolarity, can.[32]

This short passage reflects the key tenets explored thus far and reveals the direct correlation between his philosophical and political views. Serbia is meant to exist as the unique embodiment of its own history, of its own new beginning, which is interpreted and guided by the intelligentsia (those who understand "ideas"); this history does not concretize itself into a national identity qua nation-state, but rather embodies its pre-structural and metaphysical origins, and channels them through religious means, thereby creating unique universalities which can be gathered together in solidarity against the unipolar West. In other words, for Dugin, the West is seen as attempting to reduce all other cultures to its own, so as to remove any real distinction between them. Against this form of global and homogenizing universality, Dugin, as we have shown, insists on the unique access to truth and destiny of a particular people based around particular ideas. In this sense, what is universal is only universal to a given people in a given context. For those who understand the importance of this uniqueness it is crucial that they oppose the West's unipolarity, which also means multiculturalism, liberalism, and globalism.

Dugin's Political and Philosophical Influence

It is worth noting here, however, that the ideological scope of Eurasianism is not limited to Eurasia itself but can be exported, and accepted by myriad nations, individuals, and cultures: "We must look for contacts with China, Iran, India, Latin America, with counter-hegemonic forces in African countries, Asian countries, Europe, Canada, Australia, and so on. Everyone who is dissatisfied is a potential member of the counter-hegemonic archipelago, from states to individuals."[33] What is primary in the realm of counter-hegemony is not simply shared heritage, but the rejection of the ideologies of the West, pure and simple. Dugin's *Fourth Political Theory* thus has the power to influence actors not only in Eurasia and Southeast Europe, but across the world.

Dugin's influence as a whole could, *prima facie*, be considered marginal, his theories too radical and disconnected from run-of-the-mill political-philosophical discourse to be adopted on any sort of large scale. That being said, besides having an either direct or indirect influence over Putin (it is often difficult to parse the lore from the truth) and thus over Russia's foreign policy in general, he was also one of the first Russian thinkers, during the Yeltsin era, to reach out and collaborate with his far-right counterparts in Western

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[30] For Dugin, both the Slavic language family and Orthodox Church are foundational for his neo-Eurasian vision and the construction of a Russian regional state. While Serbia is important for Dugin's neo-Eurasian project, it is hardly the only important country in the region. Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Montenegro are all considered to be not only of direct interest to Russia but to exist within the same pole, as part of the same "cultural polylogue." In a similar but distinct fashion, both Greece and Romania are also considered important zones of interest. See interview with Dugin on the subject: Milenko Nedelkovsky, Milenko 18 12 2005, YouTube, December 18, 2015, https://youtu.be/wNiQUW_WKvY?t=314.

[31] Alexander Dugin, "We Can Solve the Issue of the Territorial Integrity of Serbia," The Fourth Revolutionary War (blog), July 13, 2017, https://4threvolutionarywar.wordpress.com/2017/07/08/alexander-dugin-we-can-solve-the-issue-of-the-territorial-integrity-of-serbia/.

[32] Dugin, "We Can Solve the Issue of the Territorial Integrity of Serbia."

[33] Dugin, *Putin vs. Putin*, 617.

Europe.[34] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dugin participated in a wide range of far-right groups and think tanks, entering into dialog with various far-right thinkers. While the overall impact of these various interventions is hard to concretely determine, we should not be too hasty in deeming them negligible. As Marlène Laruelle writes concerning Dugin's influence, past and present:

> Even if Dugin's institutional presence, in Russia and abroad, is based on groupuscules, the influence of his personality and his works must not be underestimated. In spite of his rhetorical radicalism, which few people are prepared to follow in all its philosophical and political consequences, Dugin has become one of the most fashionable thinkers of the day. Using networks that are difficult to trace,[35] he is disseminating the myth of Russian great power, accompanied by imperialist, racialist, Aryanist and occultist beliefs that are expressed in a euphemistic way and whose scope remains unclear, but that cannot remain without consequences.[36]

It is also worth noting that Dugin's connections to the West are not limited to direct correspondents, political engagements, or attempts at swaying the ideological landscape. Dugin's very theoretical base is largely guided by Western thinkers: Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, and Julius Evola all feature extensively throughout his work. For this reason alone, it is crucial to take Dugin's analyses seriously, not simply because they deserve a significant amount of weight on their own (as a unique academic instantiation), but because it can help give us a map in order to detect and avoid similar warning signs.

Conclusion—Materialist Politics against Spirituality

As we have discussed throughout this chapter, Dugin relies heavily on the notions of spirituality, as well as religion. He insists on the primacy of the *idea*, as opposed to matter, or that the *idea* must stand above matter itself. The past he continuously hearkens back to is in fact a past that has never existed, a past which has had no real material existence outside of his own abstract philosophizing. Thus, while specific cultural and communal myths (in the context of Russia and Eurasia) play a fundamental role throughout Dugin's work, underlying this is an even more foundational myth that looms in the background, the myth of an eternal past which allows for the creation and defining of any given *ethnos*, society, or people, as we have discussed earlier. This more general myth, the founding myth that allows for other specific myths to be called upon, is present not only within Dugin's work, but throughout a wide range of various right-wing movements. Perhaps the clearest contemporary example of this can be seen in US President Donald Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again." This "Again" is clearly calling back to some supposed golden age, an age which in reality simply did not exist, but which nonetheless has the same political power as (if not more than) if it really did. Just like Dugin, Trump, although certainly not a Duginist, is relying on a narrative of a mythologized past, and using it to effect narratives, persuade voters, and bring about political change in the present. This is one of the core things we need to take away from Dugin. He is not simply an obscurantist, or a mystic, but also a tactician, and while this notion of an eternal past is certainly not new, nor unique to Dugin, it is nonetheless something to be taken very seriously. Its appeal is wide-reaching, especially in light of the current global economic and ecological crises.

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[34] Shekhovtsov, *Russia and Western the Far Right*, 42.

[35] As an example: Arktos, which in addition to publishing and promoting content from various extreme-right movements and authors also publishes many of Dugin's works in English, has significant ties to Hungary. In 2014, on the tail of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's re-election at the top of his nationalist Fidesz party ticket, and increased support for the far-right Jobbik party, they moved operations from India to Budapest. See Carol Schaeffer, "How Hungary Became a Haven for the Alt-Right," *The Atlantic*, May 28, 2007, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/how-hungary-became-a-haven-for-the-alt-right/527178/.

[36] Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 143.

Therefore, a crucial first step in combating Dugin's spiritual politics, which border on (if not outright promote) fascist tendencies, is the creation of a new material politics not based on nationality, race, or cultural destiny, but instead upon combating these abstract ideas. This also means moving towards a proper global universality (which does simply mean the universality of the West), and not, as Dugin would have it, a false universal which is restricted to a given people.

Times and Spaces of European Illiberalism:
Democracy and the Pandemic

Niccolò Milanese

Talking about illiberal democracy always carries with it the risk of unintended perlocutionary effects with political consequences. Of course, for many who use the term in the public sphere, this is precisely the point. From Fareed Zakaria introducing it in an influential essay in 1997 to advocate for a particular American foreign policy of democracy promotion prioritizing private property and the rule of law,[1] to Viktor Orbán in 2014 declaring the failures of liberal democracy and attempting to define the coming epoch as one of his particular brand of racist, chauvinistic, and nationalistic illiberal democracy, the term each time suggests both a historical periodization and a normative horizon and aims to change the discursive field of politics. "Illiberal democracy" is an unsettling term in this sense because it attempts to challenge dogmas about what democracy and liberalism are, and about the historical trajectory of modern societies. The risks of studying illiberal democracy as a phenomenon therefore include, on the one hand, normalizing it, and on the other hand, ignoring its effectiveness as political speech (and the reasons behind this) by declaring it by definition nonsensical or contradictory.

If political speech can unsettle the world, sometimes the world can also unsettle political speech. The covid-19 pandemic, which started in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 and by early 2020 was spreading rapidly in Europe, was a worldwide event with precisely such unsettling effects. Asking about illiberal democracy during and after the pandemic is surely something different than it was beforehand. The outbreak of the pandemic itself and the political reaction to it throughout the world pose new questions about liberalism, democracy, and political community—both about what these things meant prior to the pandemic and what they might become afterwards. Simply put, a period which saw, for example, majorities supporting unprecedented restrictions on personal and collective freedoms in places like France and Germany, whilst far-right-wing activists protest against these governmental restrictions on personal liberties, is a period in which what we thought we knew about illiberal democracy should be questioned. Likewise, a period when we see Western governments deliberately suspending large parts of the economy and introducing massive state support for jobless claims is a challenge to what many people saw as the prevailing "neoliberal" economic dogma (but such impressions underestimate considerably the massive transfer of wealth to the rich that these governmental programs enabled).[2] My argument in this essay is that the first months of the pandemic provide an experience against which some traits of various illiberal democratic trends in Europe can be uncovered. As politics adapted to the new social and political landscape created by covid, the outlines of the specific time and space of illiberalism can be traced. The picture of illiberal democracy that will emerge is, I argue, not one of a coherent ideology or dogma that acts on the world, but rather a set of symptoms arising from the inadequacy of current political institutions in a changing world that can be provoked, instrumentalized, and exploited by savvy political actors for illiberal ends. This can be done even by political actors who are avowedly liberal, and claim to be working *against* illiberalism: this essay will take the examples of the paradigmatic illiberal democrat Vikor Orban, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson, who takes that British icon of liberty Winston Churchill as his model, and the President of France Emmanuel Macron who presents himself and is widely feted as a leader of the free Western world. The conclusion that these improbable and perhaps unexpected examples drive towards is that the problem of illiberal democracy is in the interaction between structurally inadequate political

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[1] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (November–December 1997): 22–43.

[2] Anthony Barnett, "Out of the Belly of Hell: COVID-19 and the Humanisation of Globalisation," Open Democracy, May 21, 2020, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/out-belly-hell-shutdown-and-humanisation-globalisation/#storytwo.

institutions and ways of *doing* politics and building political capital with which we have come to be habituated.

The Revenge of Space over Time

Before turning to consider trends in illiberal democracy in Europe, it is useful to first make some general observations about the pandemic to sharpen our awareness of the changes it effects. The pandemic as a global event marks the biggest temporal-spatial interruption since the World Wars of the 20th century, changing both the field of international relations and the experience of space and time of individuals.

On an international relations level, the pandemic is an interruption in the continuity of spatial relations as it redefines alliances, travel permissions, and trading partners. It has been an economic interruption in disrupting supply chains, shutting down large parts of the world economy as populations went into lockdown, and in most European countries reversing recent policies of fiscal consolidation through massive state support of jobs. It is a break in the temporal synchronicity of the world as countries experience higher or lower contagion and death rates, adapting both their own domestic policies and being treated differentially by other countries accordingly: countries across the world followed what we could call "covid time." The spatial dimension was perhaps more important than previously: if capitalism has been understood as the "annihilation of space by time," then the pandemic is to some extent the revenge of space over time, as all kinds of social distancing was introduced to reduce the speed of contagion.[3]

On an individual level, the virus itself, its extraordinary contagiousness and speed of transmission across the planet, and its direct attack on the interface between our bodies and our environment as we breathe, forces a profound transformation of our phenomenological experience of space and time. Quite apart from the physical distancing, isolation, and masking that populations temporarily endured, our representation of our space has come under exacerbated tension. On the one hand, there is the intensification of our international connections, aware as we are that a flare-up in one part of the world, amongst *them*, *over there*, may quickly have its consequences for *us*, *here*; our ceaseless comparisons about the intimate details of everyday life in other countries (How often are they allowed outside? With whom? For how long do children go to school?, etc.). On the other hand, there is our preoccupation with our personal spaces, keeping our hands clean and disinfected, our alertness to the smallest signs of possible illness, our intensified relations with our most intimate personal connections, and a prolonged meditation on our own mortality. Uncertainty about what comes after the pandemic, or even if there is an after or if the virus will be with us indefinitely, changes our temporal orientation and capacity to project our lives in ways more profound than the interruption of our daily routines.

Furthermore, the pandemic is a historic rarity, in that it has been characterized in public discussion by affecting, above all, one particular age group: the elderly. This age group has a demographic importance in Europe which has been a structural condition of politics and economics for some decades, and which has been reinforced to some extent by the pandemic: restrictions on liberties have frequently been justified by politicians in terms of saving the lives of grandparents, and the second-order effects on other parts of the population (in terms of mental health, education, job and life opportunities) have been much less central to public policy and to the way the policies have been publicly explained. Will intergenerational relations change, be put under tension, and be politicized to such an extent that self-perceptions of age and aging, or the personal experience of the passage of time, are themselves changed? Demographic change, its dangers

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[3] On the "annihilation of space by time" and broader theme of the social construction of space and time, see David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (September 1990): 418–434.

and how best to respond to it are essential themes of illiberal democracy in Europe, so these questions are of the utmost sensitivity.

All in all, then, it is fair to say that the pandemic has reshaped temporal and spatial relations and experiences across the planet. This is the changed landscape politics and political rhetoric of all kinds has had to adapt to, notwithstanding the role of politics in creating the conditions for the pandemic itself. The next task of this paper is to sketch some of the ways politics has adapted to the new conditions in three European cases over the first six months of the pandemic arriving: starting with the paradigm of illiberal democracy, Viktor Orban, and then moving to the United Kingdom under the government of Boris Johnson, and France under the presidency of Emmanuel Macron. The resemblances amongst these symptoms and strategies, as they interact with spatial and temporal conditions, will be brought out to attempt to draw a panorama of illiberal tendencies in Europe, and propose a European agenda for future research.

The Hungarian Peacock Dance of Illiberal Democracy

Viktor Orbán deliberately made headlines worldwide as the pandemic entered Europe by doing exactly what his critics feared he would do: declaring a state of emergency in which he could rule indefinitely by decree, and could exert even more control over the media. Marija Pejčinović Burić, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, wrote to the prime minister of Hungary to express her concern that "an indefinite and uncontrolled state of emergency cannot guarantee that the basic principles of democracy will be observed and that the emergency measures restricting fundamental human rights are strictly proportionate to the threat which they are supposed to counter."[4] Kim Lane Scheppele, an authoritative observer of Hungary's descent into illiberal democracy, wrote that "Orban's emergency gives him everything he ever dreamed of: [t]he absolute freedom to do what he wants."[5] Numerous commentators began to say that Hungary could no longer be classified as a democracy at all, and should be regarded as a dictatorship. Then Orbán appeared to do what his critics said he would not do, and on a visit to neighboring Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić in May announced he would be willing to give up the emergency powers, having successfully addressed the emergency. Here again on display was what Orbán himself has characterized as a "peacock dance" in his transformation of the Hungarian state: three steps forward, one step back, and then spread your feathers.[6]

Unsurprisingly for those who have followed Orbán's dance in government since 2010, the legislation that repealed the emergency act maintained many of the elements of the emergency, effectively permanently suspending constitutional control over the government.[7] Through ostentatious performance, Orbán was able to claim that he had demonstrated he is not a dictator but a democrat, while simultaneously undermining further the democratic character of Hungary.

The "permanent" covid-19 state of emergency followed on from the temporary state of emergency introduced in 2015 due to mass migration and was extended each time it came up for renewal through

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[4] Letter from Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić, for the attention of Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, March 24, 2020
 https://rm.coe.int/orban-pm-hungary-24-03-2020/16809d5f04.
[5] Kim Lane Scheppele, "Orban's emergency," Hungarian Spectrum (blog), March 21, 2020,
https://hungarianspectrum.org/2020/03/21/kim-lane-scheppele-orbans-emergency/.
[6] See the prematurely titled article: Zselyke Csay, "The End of Viktor Orban's Peacock Dance," *Foreign Policy*, September 14, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/14/the-end-of-viktor-orbans-peacock-dance-hungary-eu-article-7-epp-european-parliament/.
[7] "Nothing Is More Permanent Than a Temporary Solution—The State of Danger Will Come to an End in Hungary, but Its Impact Remains," Political Capital Policy Research & Consulting Institute, Flash Report, May 28, 2020, p. 2, https://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2540; Gábor Halmai, Gábor Mészáros, Kim Lane Scheppele: "*From Emergency to Disaster: How Hungary's Second Pandemic Emergency Will Further Destroy the Rule of Law,"* *VerfBlog,* May 5, 2020, https://verfassungsblog.de/from-emergency-to-disaster/.

March 2020. This state of emergency granted increased powers of enforcement to the authorities and stipulated new crimes, such as entering the country illegally and damaging the border fence, thereby requiring virtually all of those arriving in the country to attempt to claim asylum into de facto criminals.[8] Hungary constructed "transit zones" at the border by seizing all houses and other property within 60 meters of the border fence, and installing transport containers to hold migrants. These provisions all brought widespread condemnation from human rights organizations and others, and multiple legal cases brought both by individuals and by the European Commission.[9]

Just shortly after Orbán announced that he would hand back his covid emergency powers in May 2020, the Hungarian state also announced it would comply with a ruling of the European Court of Justice that detaining migrants in the transit zones is illegal, and shut down these zones in neighboring Serbia.[10] This could be seen as the European courts enforcing European law to respect human rights and the Hungarian state stepping down, but such an atemporal analysis would surely miss the politics of what happened, and the politics is essential: from 2015 until 2020, Orbán was a leading actor in shifting public attitudes across Europe concerning migration, positioning Hungary as the "defender of Europe," preventing the European Union from coming up with any coordinated policy of reception of asylum seekers, and thereby contributing to its "de-territorialization" of the management of migration flows by making deals with bordering countries to keep asylum seekers away from the EU's internal territory.[11] Orbán's success in making migration into a problem for the European Union, and reinforcing the symbolic and material importance of territorial boundaries and borders both to individual countries and to the European Union as a whole, meant that by 2020 Orbán could close the transit zones with only a minimal political cost, having already achieved much of what he wanted. Legal proceedings are slow, whereas politics is increasingly fast and focused on the short term: by the time the international legal proceedings caught up with the national legislation and practices on the ground, the political reality had already dramatically shifted.

While Orbán was uncooperative with other European countries in dealing with increased migration numbers, refusing to work towards a common solution based on the right to asylum and refusing to participate in a European Commission relocation scheme, when it came to helping others beyond Hungary's borders in the context of covid, Orbán was apparently much more generous. In June of 2020, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR, an establishment think tank) created a problematically-titled "solidarity tracker" during the pandemic to respond to critiques that the European countries in general and European Union in particular had not shown sufficient solidarity between richer and poorer countries (and to respond to the success of the "mask diplomacy" of countries such as China and Russia, which were widely celebrated when in reality the European countries were sharing much more in real terms).[12] This tracker notes each act of a country donating masks, or medical equipment, or providing other such assistance. Slightly embarrassingly for the ECFR, which has been a staunch critic of Orbán, Hungary scored very highly in the league table of "solidarity acts," coming in third after the much richer countries Germany and France. As the ECFR has pointed out, these acts of solidarity by Hungary were very much "instrumental" and political (although the ECFR analysis thereby suggests that the acts of solidarity of Germany and France were driven by altruism alone, which is surely mistaken given their deep interest in Eurozone stability amongst many other things).[13] Hungary concentrated its support in its immediate

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[8] Kim Lane Schepple, "Orbán's Police State," *Politico*, September 15, 2015, https://www.politico.eu/article/orbans-police-state-hungary-serbia-border-migration-refugees/.

[9] See, inter alia, Judgement of the Court of the European Union 17th December 2020 European Commission *v*. Hungary Case C-808/18.

[10] Tamás Hoffmann, "Illegal Legality and the Façade of Good Faith: Migration and Law in Populist Hungary," *Review of Central and East European Law 47, no.* 1 (2022): 139–165.

[11] See front page interview "Viktor Orban: Defender of Europe" (English trans.), *Die Weltwoche* (Zurich), November 12, 2015, https://hungarytoday.hu/viktor-orban-defender-europe-swiss-weeklys-interview-hungarian-leader-full-50008/.

[12] See European Council on Foreign Relations website, "Solidarity Tracker," https://www.ecfr.eu/solidaritytracker.

[13] Zsuzsana Vegh, "Instrumental Solidarity: Hungary's Management of the Coronacrisis," July 1, 2020, European Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_instrumental_solidarity_hungarys_management_of_the_coronavirus_c.

neighborhood, driven on the one hand by a need to secure agreements with neighboring Austria and Slovenia where many Hungarians go to work, and on the other hand driven by support for the ethnic Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries and the Balkans. As such, these acts are in continuity with Viktor Orbán's longstanding international balancing act, in which he has sought to create a regional illiberal bloc inside the European Union, all the while echoing (but not enacting) irredentist Hungarian nationalism. This strategic spatial tension has to be constantly managed and reassessed, but it would be shortsighted to see it only as a weakness: illiberal democrats in general benefit from polities which are *in a phase* of disintegration or destabilization, but it is much less sure they would benefit if the disintegration were completed. Ritualized conflict with Romania over the status of ethnic Hungarians is, within some careful limits, of benefit to populist politicians in both countries.[14]

Viktor Orbán's geopolitics can therefore be described as promoting unity through disintegration, an unexpected spin on the European Union's motto of "united in diversity." Indeed, in general it would be quite mistaken to see Orbán as aiming at the breakup of the European Union: the European Union is, rather, the stage on which Orbán is able to perform his illiberal politics, which would not be possible if the European Union had not reconfigured the nature of territorial relations. We will return to this issue in the final stages of this paper.

The Spring of 2020 was due to be a highly significant historical moment for Hungary: the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon on June 4, which reduced Hungarian territory by two-thirds and continues to be regarded by most Hungarians as a catastrophe. Opposite the Hungarian Parliament a memorial walkway was constructed with the names of the places that were previously part of the Kingdom of Hungary, leading to an eternal flame. June 4 was supposed to see Viktor Orbán inaugurate the monument, but these commemorative events were postponed because of the pandemic until August 20, the mythical founding date of the Kingdom of Hungary.[15] Thus, fittingly, the government used the pandemic to move the commemoration from marking a *historical defeat* to a mythical *beginning*. In this peacock dance, time and space are virtually redeemed through an illiberal performance, and what appear as retreats and endings are transformed into apparent victories and beginnings. The success of this illiberal performance is partly determined by how many other political actors are pulled into its rhythm. The pandemic was used by the Orbán regime in each of three key policy areas (constitutional reform, migration, and regional relations), accompanied by an underlying politics of memory and strategic tension with the European Union as a counterpoint, to advance its illiberal hollowing-out of Hungarian democracy.

Superman at Longitude 0° 0' 0"

Just a couple of days after the United Kingdom formally left the European Union on January 31, 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave an important set-piece speech about Britain's place and role in the world, to give some content to the governmental slogan of a "Global Britain." Speaking in Greenwich,

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[14] See for example Lili Bayer, "Viktor Orbán Courts Voters beyond 'Fortress Hungary'," *Politico*, August 22, 2017, https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-courts-voters-in-transylvania-romania-hungarian-election-2018/; or more recently, "Romania's Ioannis Blasts Orban's Remarks on Race, Demands Statement from Ethnic Hungarian Party" Radio Free Europe, July 29, 2022, https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-blasts-orban-race-remarks-/31965398.html.
[15] See Valerie Hopkins, "Viktor Orban Keeps Trianon Treaty Bitterness Alive, 100 Years on," *Financial Times*, June 5, 2020, https://www.ft.com/join/licence/217803dc-4c20-4027-9fdd-74fad7760d3c/details?ft-content-uuid=6b785393-bdf8-4974-a17c-4017445fca1b; Orban's address at the inauguration of the Memorial of National Cohesion on the August 20, 2020 is a charged laudation of the "fight for sovereignty and freedom every single minute" of the Hungarian nation and expresses "heartfelt gratitude and highest appreciation to our severed national communities for having stood their ground for one hundred years, and for their loyalty to the Hungarian nation and their native land," see "Address by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the Inauguration of the Memorial to National Cohesion," About Hungary (blog), August 20, 2020, https://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/address-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-inauguration-of-the-memorial-to-national-cohesion.

referencing a golden age of naval supremacy that led to the British Empire and the technology that made GMT the reference point of global time, Johnson uttered these revealing words:

> we are starting to hear some bizarre autarkic rhetoric, when barriers are going up, and when there is a risk that new diseases such as coronavirus will trigger a panic and a desire for market segregation that go beyond what is medically rational to the point of doing real and unnecessary economic damage, then at that moment humanity needs some government somewhere that is willing at least to make the case powerfully for freedom of exchange, some country ready to take off its Clark Kent spectacles and leap into the phone booth and emerge with its cloak flowing as the supercharged champion, of the right of the populations of the earth to buy and sell freely among each other.[16]

Though not singled out by name, Johnson's speech came just a couple of days after the Italian government had declared a state of emergency, the first European state to be affected severely by the pandemic. Closer to home, in the authoritative British medical journal *The Lancet*, in a warning entitled "A Novel Coronavirus Outbreak of Global Health Concern," concluded that "every effort should be given to understand and control the disease, and the time to act is now."[17] Whereas other European countries such as Germany started in these days to increase the number of tests available to be able precisely to understand and control the disease, the United Kingdom made the inexplicable decision on March 12 to stop testing in the community and limit tests only to patients in hospitals—while there was unused testing capacity across the public sector, universities, and the private sector.[18] The United Kingdom introduced strict restrictions on movement and social contact only on March 23, nearly a week later than neighboring France, for example. [19] A combination of international political pressure and civil-society mobilization inside the United Kingdom, with businesses introducing their own lockdowns, was required to change the government's policy.[20] In June 2020, leading scientists have said that if the UK had introduced restrictions a week earlier, the overall death toll from covid up to that point could have been halved.[21] During all of this period, Johnson himself continued to cheerfully make public appearances, shake hands with people he met and so on, unprotected. He himself came down with a severe case of covid and was hospitalized in the first days of April. When the UK did finally increase its testing capacity, it did so through the creation of "mega-labs" set up by private contractors, in a system designed by the consultancy firm Deloitte, rather than using existing capacity. This parallel health system dominated by private interests and without experience had countless problems and delays. This has been described as part of the "Pro-Privatization Shock Therapy of the UK's Covid Response."[22]

To what extent did the prioritization of free trade in the government's plans trump caution when it came to a novel health risk? Many politicians across the world, including many who could not reasonably be classified as "illiberal democrats," misjudged the risks of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus itself, which causes covid-19), and countries adopted various strategies to address the risk based on their own expert guidance,

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[16] Prime Minister's Office, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Speech in Greenwich, February 3, 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-in-greenwich-3-february-2020.

[17] Chen Wang, Peter W. Horby, Frederick G. Hayden, and George F. Gao, "A Novel Coronavirus Outbreak of Global Health Concern," *Lancet* Vol. 395 (February 15, 2020): 497–514, https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(20)30185-9.pdf.

[18] See the letter of Greg Clark, Chair of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, to the Prime Minister of May 18, titled "Covid-19 Pandemic: Some Lessons Learned So Far," based on the hearings conducted by the Committee, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmsctech/correspondence/200518-Chair-to-Prime-Minister-re-COVID-19-pandemic-some-lessons-learned-so-far.pdf.

[19] Momtaz, "France Was Ready to Shut the Border Had Britain Not Toughened Coronavirus Measures," *Politico*, March 22, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/22/france-border-coronavirus-uk-141402.

[20] Momtaz, "France Was Ready to Shut the Border."

[21] Rowena Mason, "UK Failure to Lock Down Earlier Cost Many Lives, Top Scientist Says," *Guardian*, June 7, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/07/uk-failure-to-lock-down-earlier-cost-many-uk-lives-top-scientist-says.

[22] Rachel Shabi, "The Pro-Privatization Shock Theory of the UK's Covid Response', *New York Review of Books*, July 8, 2020 https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/07/08/the-pro-privatization-shock-therapy-of-the-uks-covid-response/.

with varying degrees of success. It seems fair to say that countries with a more recent experience of epidemics and those closer to the outbreak, such as Taiwan, which introduced measures on the same day the WHO announced the potential of a pandemic (December 31, 2019), and avoided lockdowns, dealt with the pandemic much better than countries which had no experience of similar epidemics in living memory. In the case of the UK government led by Johnson, some tendencies often associated with illiberal democracy are surely relevant, most notably a disregard for truth. After all, Johnson himself has a long-established cavalier attitude to the truth, which saw him fired as a journalist as a young man for inventing quotes; a further journalistic career notable for highly misleading or false claims, notably about the European Union; and then endorsing false claims as the figurehead of the infamous "Leave" campaign during the UK referendum on membership of the EU in 2016. The same referendum saw Michael Gove, a long-time associate of Johnson's and subsequently minister for the Cabinet Office in his government, declare that "the public has had enough of experts."[23]

Johnson and his colleagues in government in September 2019 exhibited more signs of illiberal democracy when he attempted to suspend the UK Houses of Parliament at a crucial time in the debate over the nature of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This "prorogation" of Parliament was declared by the Supreme Court to be "unlawful because it had the effect of frustrating or preventing the ability of Parliament to carry out its constitutional functions without reasonable justification," but still managed to divert public debate from the pressing matter of Brexit and position Johnson as a popular leader attempting to break through legal and political hurdles. (A powerful image from the December 2019 election campaign showed Johnson in a bulldozer carrying the slogan "Get Brexit done" and bursting through a wall with "gridlock" written on it).[24]

Britain has been viewed throughout its recent history as a paradigm of liberal democracy. What then to make of these signs of illiberalism? Are they mischaracterized? Moreover, is not illiberalism also to be defined by its opposition to free trade? I argue that we should be attentive to the symptoms and not foreclose the diagnosis too quickly. Like every ideology, the historical dimension is essential here. Like every illiberal democratic rhetoric, accompanying the tendencies of illiberal democracy in Britain, and masking or legitimating them, is specific account of national history, and thereby also identity. In the British case, the British naval empire is seen as creating global trade, forcing open markets where governments had put in place protectionist measures, sometimes with actions verging on illegality. This is the discourse of Britain and the British as "swashbuckling" and "buccaneers," two characteristics the former prime minister David Cameron used to describe his countrymen, and Boris Johnson has most successfully embodied.[25] Over decades of campaigning by Euroskeptics in the United Kingdom, the European Union was cast as the opposite of these British interests and attitudes, depicted as a cartel-like club even as it established the largest integrated market on the planet, and in the 2016 referendum on membership and in subsequent years during the negotiations over Britain's exit, all of these characterizations were deeply reinforced, with the added tenor of warlike rhetoric. (For example, Johnson characterized the efforts to ask for an extension in negotiations with the EU as the "surrender bill.)[26] This narrative is exactly what Boris Johnson was aiming to reinforce with the Greenwich speech in February 2020.

A lack of respect for the truth, undermining of expertise, attempts to restrict or discredit democratic debate and due process, a secretive mode of governing, and a public positioning as "buccaneering" all made it less likely that the UK government would make the best scientifically-informed decisions concerning the

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[23] Interview with Faisal Islam on Sky News, June 3, 2016.

[24] UK Supreme Court judgement 24 September p. 18 [2019] UKSC 41 On appeals from: [2019] EWHC 2381 (QB) and [2019] CSIH 49 R (on the application of Miller) (Appellant) *v.* The Prime Minister (Respondent) Cherry and others (Respondents) *v.* Advocate General for Scotland (Appellant) (Scotland), https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2019-0192-judgment.pdf.

[25] Cameron even endorsed Boris Johnson as a future prime minister in these terms, calling him "swashbukling, charismatic, irresistible" in 2019; see Andrew Sparrow, "Boris Johnson for PM? The Sky's the Limit, Says David Cameron," *Guardian*, November 6, 2009.

[26] On this history of national identity, see Fintan O'Toole, *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (London: Apollo Books, 2019).

pandemic. A government with illiberal democratic tendencies parading as cavaliers disregarding restrictions and warnings thereby plausibly led to greater restrictions over a longer time period on liberty for the UK population, and greater harm to public health.

If the government of Boris Johnson was forced by the impact of the virus to change course and adopt lockdown measures and social distancing, it quickly adapted its strategy to take advantage of the situation to discredit parliamentary democracy further. As Johnson announced lockdown measures on March 23, the UK Parliament made special arrangements to be able to meet virtually, fitting the chamber of the House of Commons with television screens to allow members to participate virtually. Such measures were in line with other provisions made in parliaments in Europe, including the European Parliament. As the UK government loosened some elements of the restrictions on personal movement from May 13, the Leader of the House of Commons (a member of the government, and a leading "Brexiteer"), Jacob Rees-Mogg announced that members of Parliament should lead by example and return physically to work, despite government guidance that home work should be privileged wherever possible.[27] The speaker of the House of Commons (responsible for procedure, and a member of the opposition) insisted that if that were to happen, social distancing between members would need to be respected.[28] On June 2, the members of Parliament returned to the House to vote on resuming fully physical proceedings. Due to the specific ways votes are cast in the House of Commons, by parliamentarians walking through different corridors to indicate their vote, this vote turned into a spectacle that cast ridicule on the Parliament: due to the social-distancing restrictions, the line to vote stretched for over a kilometer, and the vote took around three times longer to be completed than usual. Asked about this problem, Rees-Mogg smugly commented that perhaps the solution is for Parliament to vote less often, reinforcing a perception of a government deliberately intimidating and discrediting parliamentary democracy. What is more, not only were members of the House who were physically more vulnerable to the virus effectively precluded from participating, members representing constituencies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland were at risk of contravening the law in the devolved territories of the United Kingdom, where strict lockdown was still in place, by traveling to the Parliament.[29]

The British case shows how a government with a particularly dogmatic and blinkered historical vision of Britain as a global actor for free trade, combined with a disdain for parliamentary democracy and a mistrust of expertise and scientific debate, was initially wrong-footed by the severity of the pandemic, but rapidly turned the situation to its advantage by promoting the further dilapidation of the state healthcare system and the construction of a privately-run parallel system, and weaponized the scientifically-based health guidance against Parliament to discredit it. Characteristically, British illiberalism performed each of these acts while proclaiming that it was defending the National Health Service (the members of the government devoutly participated in the weekly "clap for our carers" activity, for example), and upholding the best British parliamentary traditions of steadfast and phlegmatic public service, a narrative which has subsequently been widely shown to be false through the revelations of illegal parties in number 10 Downing Street during the health restrictions, which led to the resignation of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister. A close attention to the sequence of political events over the first six months of the pandemic in the United Kingdom has shown that the interaction between political institutions that were inadequate to address the global crisis and a repertoire of actions to build political capital led in socio-historically situated and specific ways to illiberal democratic symptoms.

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[27] Rajeev Syal, "Speaker Warns He Will Suspend Commons if Distancing Rules Broken," *Guardian*, May 13, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/13/jacob-rees-mogg-tells-mps-to-set-example-and-return-to-commons-coronavirus.
[28] Syal, "Speaker Warns He Will Suspend Commons."
[29] Stephen Castle, "They're Calling It the 'Conga-Line Parliament,' " *New York Times*, June 2, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/world/europe/uk-parliament-voting.html.

Specters of Futures Past: France between President Macron and the Rassemblement National

An important symptom of illiberalism is an obsessive focus on individual leaders. If French President Emmanuel Macron would be regarded by many mainstream observers, and indeed present himself, as the antithesis of illiberal democracy, the overall political situation in France and the political dialectics that Macron enters into suggest that illiberal democracy may be less usefully seen as a phenomenon of individual leaders, and more a general phenomenon emerging in different European democracies in similar ways. The disorienting implication is that Macron can be in some ways considered an illiberal democrat despite himself.

The pandemic offered a rather spectacular occasion for these tensions over the nature and health of democracy to be examined, as the timing of the arrival of the pandemic in France coincided with the planned municipal elections, forcing the political elites to decide if the first round of the elections, planned for March 15, should still be held on that date. Intense discussions took place between politicians and scientists in the week before the elections, and by many accounts President Macron himself was amenable to delaying the elections. Moving the date of the elections at short notice would have posed both logistical and legal problems, with the electoral code requiring that the elections take place in March and prohibiting elections from being postponed once their scheduled date was less than three months away. If Article 16 of the Constitution could have been used to address the legal issues, by giving the president exceptional powers in case of national emergency, the only precedent for this during in the 5th Republic was under Charles de Gaulle during the Algiers coup of 1961. The president of the opposition Republican Party, Christian Jacob, said that "if the elections are delayed, it is a coup d'état, a coup of institutional force, the utilization of the health crisis to avoid an electoral defeat."[30] A broad consensus amongst the leading political parties, in the Association of Mayors, and within the government itself, was that the elections should take place on schedule. President Macron, already facing heightened criticism with regards to his democratic credentials due to his attempts at forcing through a pension reform and during the ongoing *gilets jaunes* (yellow jackets) protests, found he could not risk exercising authority he might find he no longer had. On Thursday, March 12, he made a solemn address to the nation in which he announced the closure of all schools, universities, and daycare centers to begin the following Monday, but cited scientific advice that going to vote on March 15 was safe, even for the most vulnerable.[31] On March 14, as the number of confirmed cases doubled in 72 hours to 4,500, Prime Minister Édouard Philippe announced the closure of all non-essential public places, but encouraged everyone to vote the next day.[32] The first round of the elections thus took place on the date planned, with a record low voter turnout: only 44.7% of eligible voters took part, a drop of 18.9 percentage points compared with 2014. On March 16, Macron made a further address in which he repeated several times that "France is at war," strictly limiting all movements, banning family gatherings, requiring all companies that could facilitate working from home to do so, closing the borders to all but essential travel, and so on.[33] He also announced that the second round of elections, normally due to be held on March 22,

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[30] Ouest-France with Agence France-Presse, "Municipales: L'opposition monte au créneau contre un éventuel report à cause du coronavirus," *Ouest-France*, March 12, 2020: https://www.ouest-france.fr/elections/municipales/municipales-l-opposition-monte-au-creneau-contre-un-eventuel-report-cause-du-coronavirus-6777304.

[31] Emmanuel Macron, Adresse aux Français, March 12, 2020, Palais de l'Élysée, https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/03/12/adresse-aux-francais.

[32] "Déclaration de M. Edouard Philippe, Premier ministre, sure les nouvelle mesures face à l'épidémie de SARS-CoV-2 (fermeture de tout [*sic*] les lieux recevant du plublic non indispensable à la vie du pays, restaurants, cafés, cinémas …)," République Française, Vie Publique, March 14, 2020, https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/273917-edouard-philippe-14032020-coronavirus-fermeture-bars-restaurants.

[33] Emmanuel Macron, Adresse au Français, Palais de l'Élysée, March 16, 2020, https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/03/16/adresse-aux-francais-covid19.

would be delayed, a measure confirmed by the urgent Law of March 23 with relation to covid-19.[34] The second round was eventually held on the June 28, over a month after the end of the first confinement of the population in mainland France, but had an even lower turnout of only 41.7%, over 20 percentage points lower than in 2014.

The entire sequence poses important questions about the equal right to vote, and the balance between respecting an electoral timetable and the safety of the population. If the political elite justified maintaining the first round of the elections in the name of democracy, according to one opinion poll around 39% of those who did not go to the polls did not want to go to an polling station for fear of coronavirus.[35] On the day of the vote itself, healthcare professionals including, notably, President of the Medical Commission of the Paris Hospitals Rémi Salomon, urged the population not to go to vote, whatever precautions the government had put in place (the government advised citizens to take their own pen, and to leave the curtains of voting booths open, for example). After months of intense public discussion about the risks of the virus and restrictive public policies, it is no surprise that during the second round even fewer people went out to vote. The French constitutional system and the French electoral system both proved ill-adapted to the emergency state of affairs, such that promoting an elementary practice of democracy immediately came into conflict with the priority of protecting public health, resulting in a situation where parts of the population felt they could not risk exercising their right to vote. If the Covid-19 pandemic is a unique event that will not be repeated as such, there seems little reason to doubt that further emergency situations will arise in the near future, and the question of how best fair elections can be maintained is one of the most basic of liberal representative democracy.

If unequal access to the vote is one aspect of the illiberal phenomenon that emerged in France over these months, deeper and less circumstantial changes in the political makeup of the country also became visible during the election cycle. The results of the elections show that the two parties most visibly in the spotlight of French national politics, President Macron's République en Marche party and Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (or National Rally), both did very badly compared with expectations, while parties that had been struggling to gain national media attention, such as the Greens and the Socialist Party, did better than expected, as did non-affiliated civic lists of candidates. Even if there is always some discrepancy between local elections and national or European elections, there is a strong argument that in addition to decreasing voter turnout, the pandemic focused the minds of those citizens who did vote on local issues rather than the national agenda, on issues related to the quality of food production and decent housing (on both of which the French Greens have credibility with the public), as well as on the perceived competence and track records of individual candidates. Thus we can hypothesize that in the context of the pandemic a degree of re-spatialization of the concerns and priorities of French voters took place.

Health fears cannot explain the totality of the low turnout in the municipal elections: the crisis of confidence and interest in formal politics in France was already documented in advance of the pandemic, and arguably worsened during it. During the period of confinement, President Macron's approval ratings remained well below the 50% mark, and trust in the government was low in comparison with other European governments.[36] Perhaps more surprisingly, the popularity of Marine Le Pen, the most visible political rival of Macron, also fell. The pandemic thrust to the forefront of public discussion a series of issues which would appear to be an ideal playing field for the National Rally: the disorganization and lack of preparedness of the French government (particularly when it came to having adequate numbers of masks), the closure of borders, the control of all movement of people across borders, the perverse effects of

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[34] Part I of Article 19 of Law n° 2020-290 of March 23, 2020: "d'urgence pour faire face à l'épidémie de Covid-19," https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000041746313&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id.

[35] France Info, "Municipales: 4 abstentionnistes sur 10 ne se sont pas rendus aux urnes à cause du coronavirus," March 15, 2020, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/sante/maladie/coronavirus/municipales-4-abstentionnistes-sur-10-ne-se-sont-pas-rendus-aux-urnes-a-cause-du-coronavirus-sondage_3867965.html.

[36] Arnaud Focraud, "SONDAGES: La popularité moyenne de Macron repasse sous la barre des 40%," *Le Journal du Dimanche*, June 3, 2020, https://www.lejdd.fr/Politique/sondages-la-popularite-moyenne-de-macron-repasse-sous-la-barre-des-40-en-mai-3972481.

globalization, and the difficulties of the European Union in coordinating its response. The National Rally (and the "Front National," or National Front, as it was previously called) has, since its beginnings, sounded the alarm about a looming catastrophe facing the French people, who have become more and more receptive to this rhetoric.[37] Yet despite adopting much more measured public rhetoric than usual during the pandemic, Le Pen struggled to appear credible. Voting for someone predicting a catastrophe is one thing; listening to them and voting for them when a catastrophe is actually occurring is apparently another.

The one big prize that the National Rally did manage to take home from the municipal elections was the Perpignan mayor's office, which was won by Louis Aliot, a former partner and head of cabinet of Le Pen's, without advertising his party affiliation or support of the National Rally at all. Aliot ran a campaign on local security and economic issues, was much less vocal on migration or critical of the EU than is typically the case for a National Rally candidate, and managed to enlarge his support from the wealthier suburbs of the city, even winning the endorsements of two former candidates from the center-left La République en Marche (republic on the move).[38] Although partly determined by local factors specific to Perpignan, including dissatisfaction with the outgoing mayor and particularly high rates of fear of crime and poverty, this episode suggests two things of importance for the future shape of French politics.

Firstly, Aliot's success could contribute to the reinforcement of the temporal strategy Le Pen has been using during the pandemic of criticizing the government for not acting sufficiently swiftly or competently, without appearing too radical or to be endangering national unity, with a view to benefiting at a later date from the social suffering brought about by a dramatic recession. One of Le Pen's advisors has predicted that the crisis will be like that of the First World War, from which Europe will emerge with a ruined economy: the takeaway message has not been for Le Pen to try to be popular *during* the crisis, but to position herself to become popular *after* the health crisis, in the run-up to the next presidential elections in 2022, for which she was already a declared candidate.[39] Although this strategy was not ultimately sufficient for Le Pen to win the Presidency in 2022, it arguably was the key strategy to the huge success of the National Front in the Parliamentary elections following the Presidential elections, going from 7 seats to 89 seats.

Secondly, although the support of two En Marche candidates for the National Rally mayoral candidate in Perpignan is an exception to the "republican front" rule of not collaborating with the National Rally, which still is the reflexive position of almost all mainstream politicians in France, it is perhaps a sign of something else: it is widely known that Macron and his team preferred for the 2022 presidential elections to be a rematch of the 2017 presidential elections, which saw Macron face Le Pen in the second round, over any other matchup. National politics in France and the announcements of the government often give the impression that the Macron *vs*. Le Pen (En Marche *vs*. National Rally) split constitutes the crucial political wedge in the country, even though the National Rally held at that time a very small number of seats in the National Assembly. The danger of driving this wedge deeper (as was also the case in the run-up to the European Parliament elections, when much was made by Macron of the risk of far-right nationalism) is that of normalizing the National Rally even further despite attempting to generate political support from its presumed unpalatability. From this position, it is only one small step to take to reason that voting for the National Rally should not actually be considered taboo, which is precisely one of the justifications that En

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[37] An international opinion poll conducted in October 2019 found that French and Italians were the most likely to believe that civilization is faced with imminent collapse. See Jean-Laurent Cassely and Jérôme Fourquet, "La France: Patrie de la collapsologie?," Fondation Jean Jaurès, February 10, 2020, https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/la-france-patrie-de-la-collapsologie.

[38] Anthony Cortes, "À Perpignon, Louis Aliot offre une victoire symbolique au RN," Marianne, June 28, 2020, https://www.marianne.net/politique/perpignan-louis-aliot-offre-une-victoire-symbolique-au-rn.

[39] Luke Cooper and Guy Aitchison, "The Dangers Ahead: Covid-19 Authoritarianism and Democracy," London School of Economics, Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, June 2020, 14–15, http://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/ccs-research-unit/OSF/dangers-ahead.pdf.

Marche supporters of Aliot gave as an explanation for their vote.[40] In the second round of the French Parliamentary elections in 2022, this is again exactly what happened, with defeated En Marche sometimes candidates explicitly or implicitly calling for votes for the National Rally when it was facing a candidate from the left, and defeated candidates from the left sometimes giving support to the National Rally candidate when it was facing a candidate from the En Marche or the centrist right party.[41]

Being faced with a choice between either En Marche or the National Rally remains unpalatable to the vast majority of French voters, and yet its constant reinforcement given the centrality of the presidential elections to French democratic life in the Fifth Republic and the personalization of politics this brings was already sucking the interest from formal politics for much of the French population in advance of the pandemic.[42] The pandemic itself, in its interruption of French democratic cycles, on the one hand, opened up the space for some newer and more marginal political actors to enter the scene, but on the whole, it seems to have promoted wider disenchantment and disengagement, in particular during the first period of the pandemic when France's level of preparedness for the pandemic compared poorly with that of its eternal rival Germany. While the novel *La Peste* (*The Plague*), by Albert Camus, became a favorite cultural reference and book recommendation at the beginning of the pandemic (Camus' tale tellingly takes place in Algeria, away from the French mainland), by the middle of the first confinement period, journalists and intellectuals cited with ever greater frequency *L'Étrange Défaite* (*Strange Defeat*) by Marc Bloch, which tells of the surprise and despondency of the French Army in 1940 upon discovering the superiority of the invading German Army.[43]

For historians of the future, the European theater of politics may be the most important of French politics during the pandemic. President Macron spent a significant amount of diplomatic capital on persuading German Chancellor Angela Merkel to change her longstanding position on fiscal integration of the Eurozone, by creating mutualized European debt to fuel a post-covid recovery. This major achievement by Macron, who has consistently put European reform at the core of his political agenda and was, until the pandemic, largely rebuffed by a reticent German chancellery, foretells another possible future of French politics, in which its European Union-level elements become more closely linked to domestic politics. This would also start to address one of the systemic causes of illiberal democracy on the continent: a lack of fully-developed European economic governance, which facilitates, on the one hand, the exploitation of parts of the populations of weaker countries by parts of the populations of richer countries (notably with low wages, through posting of workers and through agency work) and, on the other hand, due to its lack of transparency, allows all kinds of conspiracy theories to develop.

The European Union as Horizon and as Chasm

In each of the case studies considered above, from the UK, Hungary, and France, the national political actors are not the only actors in play, and notably the European Union is a constant presence and frame of reference, even for the UK which has left the bloc. This relationship is essential to understanding and analyzing illiberalism in Europe, particularly in a pandemic in which public expectations of the European

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[40] See, for example, "Municipales: À Perpignan, une candidate LREM affiche son soutien au RN," *Le Point*, May 30, 2020, https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/municipales-a-perpignan-une-candidate-lrem-affiche-son-soutien-au-rn-30-05-2020-2377592_20.php#.

[41] See the analysis of Liberation, 'Legislatives: face au rassemblement national, l'erosion du front republican' 15 June 2022 https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/legislatives-face-au-rassemblement-national-lerosion-du-front-republicain-20220615_EFVNOT4QKVDO3FVQRVXSCLM5YE/

[42] "L'hypothèse d'un duel Macron–Le Pen en 2022 rejeté par 80% des Français," February 12, 2020, https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20200212.OBS24779/le-duel-macron-le-pen-en-2022-rejete-par-80-des-francais.html.

[43] Pierre Haski, "L'étrange défaite de l'Occident face au coronavirus" May 17, 2020, *L'Obs* https://www.nouvelobs.com/chroniques/20200517.OBS28964/l-etrange-defaite-de-l-occident-face-au-coronavirus.html.

Union were very high and which, for many (particularly in the south of Europe), these hopes were quickly disappointed. [44]

Analysis on the future of illiberal democracy will have to take account more systematically of the interaction between Europeanization and illiberal tendencies, fully acknowledging that what was promoted as a democratizing project can have perverse effects. This interaction is important not only for understanding the dynamics of newer countries that have joined the European Union (and are still regarded as the paradigmatic examples of illiberal democracy, such as Hungary and Poland), but also in founding member states such as France. Urban geographers such as Neil Brenner have developed theories of globalization as a kind of reterritorialization when it comes to urban centers, but this line of thinking should also be applied to the European Union as a whole.[45] Whatever else it is, the European Union is an actor in the reorganization and rescaling of political time and space, and perhaps one of the most important in the world. Beginning with its preamble, the Treaty on European Union immediately introduces a political teleology with spatial components: the various kings, queens, presidents, and other sovereigns of the member states are "resolved to mark a new stage in the process of European integration … recalling the historic importance of the ending of division of the European continent and the need to create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe."[46] The language of the European Union, and of Europeanization more generally (which includes various intergovernmental agreements and the structures of the Council of Europe, as well as the formal European Union), constantly draws on the language of space and time to affect reorganization and reconceptualization: from the "four freedoms" (of capital, of services, of goods, of persons) in the single market to the cohesion funds that support development, and from the European education area to the "European semester," which is the procedure of national budgets being validated by the European Commission. Arguably, the concept of Europe itself carries a geographical uncertainty and an unfinished history, which constantly risks destabilizing itself—another unsettling geopolitical term, more profoundly attached to the continent as a place than to democracy or liberalism as ideals.

The pandemic marks a further stage in the blurring of the distinction, sacrosanct to lawyers and Commission officials, between the European Union and its member states. If the European Union was unequipped for dealing with a pandemic, lacking competence in relevant areas of health policy, for example, it was nonetheless the first port of call for the first European country seriously affected by the pandemic—Italy— and was also quickly blamed where this support was found to be lacking from other member states and the European Union as a whole. The European institutions have attempted to retake control of the political narrative by doing what the European Union has always done: setting itself as the normative horizon of history. The Commission's recovery program is entitled "Next Generation EU." In this narrative, schematically the European Union belongs to tomorrow; the nation states belong to yesterday. But unlike in the first stages of European postwar integration, this temporal sequencing risks overlooking the European Union's own failures today, casting them only as incompleteness rather than opening up a political space in which conflicts can be publicly addressed.

A poignant example from the pandemic would be the precarity of seasonal agricultural workers, flown in from lower-cost Eastern European countries to countries such as Germany and Austria during the crisis to guarantee food supplies in these countries, without adequate health and safety protection, without the freedom to leave their employment (and in some cases even having their passports taken away).[47] If these flights took place through bilateral agreements between Germany and Romania, for example, in a context

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[44] See as an example of typical policy brief report from Spring 2020: Luigi Scazzieri "Trouble for the EU is Brewing in Coronavirus-Hit Italy," April 2, 2020, Centre for European Reform, https://www.cer.eu/insights/trouble-eu-brewing-coronavirus-hit-italy.

[45] See for example Neil Brenner, "Globalisation as Reterritorialisation: The Re-Scaling of Urban Governance in the European Union," *Urban Studies* 36, no. 3 (March 1999), 431–451, https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098993466.

[46] Treaty on European Union, Preamble.

[47] See "Open letter on urgent and necessary measures for rural workers in the context of COVID-19,' European Coordination Via Campesina, April 30, 2020, https://www.eurovia.org/open-letter-on-urgent-and-necessary-measures-for-rural-workers-in-the-context-of-covid-19/.

where member states had unilaterally closed their borders, the wider European transformation of the agricultural economy that the European Union has facilitated cannot be ignored. The interaction of European transformation of the time and space of the agricultural economy with the emergency time and space of the pandemic created deeply illiberal zones for these seasonal workers, and it is not clear what political geography these illiberal zones fall into: whose responsibility are they? Who speaks for the workers in these situations? What political agency do they have? This is the kind of apparently anomalous situation that reveals the reality of the European economy, as it is experienced daily by millions of Europeans. The overall lesson is, perhaps, that without addressing the injustices that emerge daily through the interaction of Europeanization and national politics and opening up a new space for political dialectic to develop, Europe risks remaining a fertile ground for illiberal democracy in the future, as the lived experience of changes in political and economic time and space mix further with resentment.

Our sense in editing this book is that the years since 2014 have shown that, however unpalatable, incoherent, and internally contradictory illiberal democracy may be, it is a political choice that is available at the ballot box in many countries. As critical scholars committed to democracy we have an obligation to understand its socio-historical construction, its emotional appeal, and its rhetorical force, to more effectively combat it. Ultimately, we believe that the difficulty many have had of admitting the political efficacy of illiberal democracy as a term is due to an underlying crisis within liberalism itself: this is the fissured terrain that the phenomenon exploits. Examining illiberalism, liberalism, or democracy as static concepts is just as barren an approach as examining them in one country in isolation from their interactions with others. It is above all to the dynamic, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach to the study of liberalism and its alternatives that this collection aims to contribute.

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