edited by

ZOLTÁN SIMON and TAMÁS DEZSŐ ZIEGLER

EUROPEAN

crises, fears, and debates

POLITICS

L'Harmattan

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European Politics. Crises, fears, and debates

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Zoltán Simon and Tamás Dezső Ziegler

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In memory of Gábor Szabó,
our colleague and friend

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Introduction: European politics nowadays

Zoltán Simon[1]

The European Union has been struggling with a multilevel poly-crisis for more than a decade, leading to a legitimacy crisis that weakens popular support for European integration. Political leaders try to compensate output legitimacy losses on the input legitimacy side, including through the politicisation of the Union. However, this runs counter to the trend of increasing political mistrust, discontent, indifference, and disconnect among citizens in national political systems across Europe. This trend is rooted in a set of intertwined transformations in contemporary European societies and politics. Domestic turbulences also have a negative impact on Europe's influence in the global arena of intensifying power competition. All these factors generate growing fears in citizens: fears of disintegration at the European level, fears of disorder and instability at the national level, fears of disorientation at the individual level, fears of becoming irrelevant at the global level, and fears of the future, which seems to be full of uncertainties and risks. These fears, if ignored or left unanswered, have a dangerous potential to evolve into a new political era of anxiety in Europe, with a presumably devastating effect in the continent.

Keywords: European politics, poly-crisis, legitimacy crisis, political malaise, politics of anxiety

The European Union is sailing in troubled waters. The whole ocean is restless, and things are made worse by waves provoked – often intentionally – by the manoeuvres of other large vessels. As a matter of fact, the EU boat is a strange one itself. It was initially built as a merchant ship, but has since been partially transformed into a liner. However, this transformation has never been fully completed, and no one really knows whether it ever will be. Many challenge this idea, while some are even wondering whether the boat's initial profile should rather be restored.

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[1] The views and comments presented in this book chapter are part of the author's individual research and publication activities, and do not represent in any way or to any extent the positions of the institution he is an official of.

Well, it is not the first time that crew and passengers have had to navigate in stormy weather. But lately they have been facing successive storms striking from different angles over an extended period of time. Moreover, due to the increased number and diversity of people on board, it is getting more and more difficult to agree together on necessary actions. We can also notice a growing unease among passengers, while some crew members have started promoting the benefits of good-old smaller vessels compared to ocean liners. However, in truth, these smaller ships of the company are not in a much better shape, either.

EUROPE IN CRISIS

This is the narrative this book looks into. It is not the first, and certainly not the last one to do so. *Paul Kubicek* introduces the third edition of his *European Politics* by noticing the substantive change in the tone and narrative of his text compared to its initial version published back in the mid-2000s, in a period of Euro-optimism of hopes for a new, united, and strong Europe (Kubicek 2021, xi). This was the same period when *Marc Leonard* explained *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century* (Leonard 2005). Today, the mood is very different indeed. As *Richard Youngs* says: "the core narrative in Europe has become one of popular frustration and anger" (Youngs 2018, x).

This negative perception of the present and the future of European integration, and of the European continent at large, is widespread. Some commentators trace it back to European *citizens*. However, interestingly enough, it is precisely in public opinion that it only seems to materialise in punctuated moments of revolt – such as the negative referenda on the Constitutional Treaty in France and in The Netherlands in 2005, the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom in 2016, or the 2019 European Parliament elections – instead of in a persistent negative attitude towards the European Union.

As a matter of fact, according to Eurobarometer surveys, 47 per cent of European citizens hold a positive image of the EU, while 39 per cent have a neutral, and only 14 per cent a negative opinion. Sixty-six per cent of them think that their country's membership is a good thing – against 24 per cent who are neutral, and 10 per cent who are against – an all-time high since this question was first asked in 2007 (European Union 2021, 12–15). They also seem to have more trust in the Union than in their national political institutions, be it the national government or parliament (European Commission 2020, 45). However, while 72 per cent of European citizens claim that they are "in favour of the EU", only 27 per cent of them support it "as it has been realised so far" (European Union 2021, 18). Moreover, 52 per cent consider that things are going in the wrong direction in the Union, against 32 per cent who have the opposite view (European Commission 2020, 77–78).

The picture is bleaker when we listen to *politicians'* discourse. Every single *State of the Union* address delivered by consecutive European Commission presidents in the past decade revolved around the crises the European Union has been facing (while the latest one, in 2021, was different in its spirit) – with a diverging tone of gravity, though, and typically in a more dramatic language at the beginning of their terms, and softer at the end.

The very first such speech, in 2010 by *José Manuel Barroso*, focused on the economic and financial crisis, which "has put our Union before one of its greatest challenges ever" (Barroso 2010). In the two years that followed, Barroso's assessment further sobered, referring to a general political *crisis of confidence* beyond the specific policy troubles:

> *The crisis is financial, economic and social. But it is also a crisis of confidence. A crisis of confidence in our leaders, in Europe itself, and in our capacity to find solutions ... The result is clear: concern in our societies. Fear among our citizens for the future. A growing danger of a retreat into national, not to say nationalist, feeling ... Today we can say that the sovereign debt crisis today is, above all, a crisis of political confidence. And our citizens, but also people in the outside world, are observing us and wondering – are we really a Union?* (Barroso 2011)

Jean-Claude Juncker followed suit. In 2015, he built his whole speech around various – refugee, financial and economic, and Ukraine – crises, as well as climate change as a global challenge (Juncker 2015). In the following year, he declared that "our European Union is, at least in part, in an existential crisis" (Juncker 2016). A couple of years later, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, another President, *Ursula von der Leyen*, highlighted the way the virus "exposes to us the fragility all around us" and "how fragile our community of values really is – and how quickly it can be called into question around the world and even here in our Union" (Von der Leyen 2020).

Of course, it is not the prerogative of heads of the European Commission to worry about the present and the future of European integration. Political leaders of the Member States often do not paint a brighter picture, either – as in the 'Future of Europe' debates held in the European Parliament between January 2018 and April 2019, for instance, where they discussed a number of policy, political, and international challenges ahead (Drachenberg and Kotanidis 2019). As a matter of fact, leaders' statements not only mirror, but sometimes also fuel tensions. As President Barroso warned in 2012:

> *On too many occasions, we have seen a vicious spiral. First, very important decisions for our future are taken at European summits. But then, the next day, we see some of these very same people who took these decisions undermining them ... And then we get a problem of credibility. A problem of confidence ... We cannot belong to the same Union and behave as if we don't.* (Barroso 2012)

Still, political leaders cannot allow themselves to sink into pessimistic despair, as they need to maintain and show a certain degree of optimism and self-confidence. *Public intellectuals* do not have the same constraints, and are free to speak their mind. Their speculations over the future of Europe nurture a proliferation of books, journal articles, and newspaper op-eds today. Many of these present doomsday scenarios for the European Union.

The prominent Hungarian historian *Iván T. Berend* presents himself, born in 1930, as part of a generation whose personal experience was the most devastating war in history, with mass murder and untold suffering, the division of "two Europes" for half a century, and the threat of nuclear confrontation, which made in his eyes European integration "the most promising development that ever happened in millennial European history" (Berend 2017, 1). Nevertheless, "the whole concept of the European Community now came into question" and "for the first time in history … the question arises: can the European Union survive?" (Berend 2017, 3, 156; see also Webber 2017).

In his book *After Europe*, *Ivan Krastev* gives a pessimistic answer to this question by declaring himself as someone who believes that the disintegration train has left Brussels' station, and who fears this will doom the continent to disarray and global irrelevance (Krastev 2017, 10). Also, Youngs acknowledges the "uncomfortable possibility that the EU is in fact beyond any major degree of qualitative reform" (Youngs 2018, 5), adding that the cumulation of so many different elements of its ongoing crisis suggests that there is "something *structurally* amiss with European integration" (Youngs 2018, 15, emphasis in the original).

Jan Zielonka shares the same doubts by stating that "the EU cannot be consolidated: it ought to be reinvented" (Zielonka 2018, 113). However, he also makes a distinction between European integration, as a concept, and the European Union, as a polity, claiming that the EU may well be doomed, but Europe and European integration certainly are not (Zielonka 2014, xiv). Nevertheless, when he extends his scope to social and political dynamics across Europe at large, the picture is rather gloomy:

> *Today, the entirety of Europe is in a state of confusion … Europe's citizens feel insecure and angry. Their leaders look incompetent and dishonest. Their entrepreneurs seem frantic and distressed. Political violence is on the rise … There is no simple way back. Europe has failed to adjust to enormous geopolitical, economic and technological changes that have swept the continent over the past three decades … The escalation of emotions, myths, and ordinary lies left little space for reason, deliberation, and conciliation. Another 'valley of tears' is therefore ahead of Europeans.* (Zielonka 2018, x)

All these have also made *EU scholars* discover a long-ignored niche in the body of existing research and literature. Notably, while the process of European integration has been extensively analysed and explained, little

attention has been paid to the theory and practice of potential disintegration so far. A few recently published books – such as *Douglas Webber*'s (2019) *European Disintegration? The Politics of Crisis in the European Union*, or *Hans Vollaard*'s (2018) *European Disintegration. A Search for Explanations* – and journal articles make an attempt to fill this gap.

Finally, we cannot ignore the *global* dimension of the EU's crises. In 2012, when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Union, the Norwegian Nobel Committee praised its successful struggle for peace and reconciliation, and for democracy and human rights, which had helped transform most of Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace.[2] Nevertheless, another sentence in the same press release referred to the "currently undergoing grave economic difficulties and considerable social unrest" in the EU, which led this decision to be perceived by many as an act of encouragement, rather than an act of acknowledgement.

The European Union's global image and prestige have suffered an undeniable blow as a result of its poly-crisis in the past decade. *Richard Haass* gives a straightforward account of the mainstream American – and global – perception in this regard:

> *Still, there is a question of whether Europe's best days are behind it. The future of both NATO and the European Union (EU) is in some doubt. Support for both within many countries is diminished, and there is no consensus as to the desired structure and role of the EU. Centrist parties have lost supporters to more radical parties of both the left and the right. There are also renewed concerns over Russian intentions, and there is no broad agreement on how to deal with China. Economic growth has slowed, while economic inequality has in many countries increased. What was once the world's most successful region now finds itself facing a demanding future with less confidence and consensus. (Haas 2020, 67–69)*

THE EU'S LEGITIMACY CRISIS

Dealing with crisis is not new for the European Union and its institutions. However, this *poly-crisis* seems to be different, in both its nature and its consequences, due to its multidimensional character. EU experts do not even agree on which events should really be considered as its main sources and components. The typical list includes the financial and economic crisis, the refugee and migration crisis, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic. But Berend, for example, speaks of nine open or hidden crises: the euro-crisis, the Greek debt crisis, the Russian challenge to European security, Brexit, and the migration crisis as the open ones; while the "demographic time bomb",

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[2] See the press release made by the Norwegian Nobel Committee at https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/press-release

the EU's continued expansion and neighbourhood policy, the reversals in Eastern Europe's transformation, and the negative attributes of contemporary capitalism would be the more hidden ones (Berend 2017, 5).

Not only the sources but also the nature of this poly-crisis is multifaceted, making it a perfect storm in the eyes of many. Webber describes it as a combination of four traits: its above-mentioned multidimensional character, its longevity or duration, its unprecedented level of mass politicisation, and the high costs of inaction (Webber 2019, 9–13). As it seems to be constantly mutating, others call it a "wicked crisis", where any attempt to mitigate a given aspect generates new troubles elsewhere, leading to a reverse spillover effect (Dinan et al. 2017, 361). Moreover, what initially started as a financial and a migratory challenge, has in the meantime evolved into fully-fledged social, political, cultural, and even ideological turbulences (Zielonka 2018, 108).

However, if we wish to understand this protracted crisis and its consequences, we have to focus on its core: the *crisis of legitimacy*. Legitimacy has always been an issue in the process of European integration, for three main reasons: first, because of the *sui generis* nature of the concept, the process, and the polity; second, because of the derived competences of the EU, pending Member States' will to transfer certain parts of their sovereignty to the supranational level; and third, because of the Union being a regulatory state that shapes European societies through creating rules, and can only function and survive therefore if these rules are effectively implemented by national and subnational actors – which is far from being obvious.

Legitimacy is a complex and complicated concept. *Max Weber*'s well-known classification distinguished between three types of legitimacy: the authority of the "eternal yesterday", or traditional domination; the charismatic domination of a leader; and the domination by virtue of legality based on rationally created rules (Weber 1946 [1919], 4). The first category cannot be applied to the Union due to its *sui generis* nature, nor can the second due to the lack of a locus of power in the EU's political system, leaving us with the third.

However, any effective legal legitimacy is conditioned on the *social legitimacy* of the given political system. This is composed of performance-based output legitimacy, i.e. the extent to which policy choices serve the public good in a productive way (policy performance); participation-oriented input legitimacy, i.e. the extent to which these choices reflect the preferences of citizens through their involvement (political responsiveness); and governance-oriented throughput legitimacy, i.e. the "procedural quality of policy-making processes, including the efficacy of the policy-making, the accountability of the actors, the transparency of their actions, and their openness and inclusiveness with regard to civil society" (Schmidt 2020, 8).

The fact that European integration has been constructed, right from its beginning, on an *output* legitimacy platform – combined with throughput

legitimacy, which its institutions are the most in control of – is a matter of mainstream scholarly consensus. As formulated by *Vivien A. Schmidt*: "The EU initially favored technocratic throughput over popular input to produce optimal output" (Schmidt 2020, 8). Zielonka translates this into a more political language by claiming that the EU's main rationale has always been efficiency, based on the modernist notion of competence and progress, rather than on the traditional notions of loyalty, trust, and affection (Zielonka 2018, 102–103).

The successive crises of the past decade have proven to be a heavy blow to the Union's output legitimacy. However, this is embedded in its longer-term legitimacy decline since the early 1990s. *Christian Schweiger* gives us the full story: under the traditional *permissive consensus*, citizens had a sufficient level of trust in the problem-solving capacity of EC institutions and policies. This form of legitimacy was rational and passive in nature, and largely neglected the channels of input legitimacy, producing "policies without politics" (see also Schmidt 2006).

Then, broadening EU competences and successive EU enlargements, with growing internal diversity, increased the complexity of the Union's governance system, making it more difficult to react to internal and external challenges. This has weakened the Union's problem-solving capacity, undermined its output legitimacy, and replaced the permissive consensus by *constrained dissensus*. The end result today is that Member States and EU institutions muddle through – rather than solve – problems, which undermines their popular credibility and strengthens euro-sceptic populism (Schweiger 2017, 189–191).

EU and Member State political leaders are fully aware that they need to consolidate and enhance the Union's social legitimacy if they wish to keep European integration alive. Therefore, they try to compensate output legitimacy losses by *input* legitimacy gains. Early moves in this direction were the 1999–2000 Convention that drafted the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the 2002–2003 Convention that produced the draft Constitutional Treaty.

Both took place with a robust participation of national parliamentarians from Member States, but without a formal involvement of civil society and citizens. The current Conference on the Future of Europe follows a partly different approach, as it is expected to deliver its conclusions with the direct participation of a selected group of citizens and civil society representatives. Whether this project may produce any genuine value added remains to be seen.

It was also in the same spirit that the first ever instrument of EU direct democracy, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was introduced in the Lisbon Treaty (2007/09). Beyond the fact that no such initiative is binding on the Commission, the ECI has proven to be a disappointment so far. According to Schweiger, it turned out to be of very limited value, as it has

not led to any substantial civil society input into policymaking processes, and has consequently failed to bridge the gap between EU institutions and civil society, which is also reflected in the general lack of interest in this instrument (Schweiger 2017, 205).

a. The politicisation dilemma

Another innovation in the Lisbon Treaty aimed at enhancing the Union's input legitimacy was the so-called *Spitzenkandidat* process, which was designed to provide European-level political competition with identifiable faces through the nomination by European-level political parties (Europarties) of lead candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*) for the post of the next President of the European Commission in the run up to European Parliament elections. This new instrument worked in 2014, but failed in 2019, leading to doubts as to whether it will ever be possible to restore it again.

The *Spitzenkandidat* initiative brings us to a specific segment of ideas for strengthening the EU's input legitimacy, notably the *politicisation* of European integration and its polity. *Edgar Grande* and *Swen Hutter* define this as the multidimensional phenomenon of increasingly salient and polarised public debate among an expanding range of actors over EU-related matters across European and national political arenas (Grande and Hutter 2016, 8–10). EU scholars usually see this as a reverse trend to integration by stealth, when national political elites perform policymaking in Brussels in a protected bubble remote from public deliberation and scrutiny (e.g. Coman et al. 2020, 16) – while legitimacy for any political system can only be constructed through discussion, deliberation, and contestation (Schmidt 2020, 29).

The idea of making the EU more political is not new, of course. It was in this spirit that the Maastricht Treaty (1992/93) acknowledged the importance of "political parties at European level" in the early 1990s, and the Amsterdam Treaty (1997/99) made it possible to finance them from the Union's budget. As a result of this, Europarties have gradually been institutionalised since 2004, followed by the setting up of European-level political foundations, or Eurofoundations, as from 2007.

In parallel, new dynamics in the multilevel politicisation of the Union also emerged. At the 'bottom', EU-related issues have become increasingly salient in national politics; on the bottom-up side, EU actors have become increasingly aware of, and concerned about, public perceptions of their decisions and actions; while at the top level, an intensifying politicisation of interactions between EU institutions can be observed, leading also to a more politicised communication by them (e.g. Schmidt 2020, 69–83).

One intention behind the idea of politicising European integration is the aim of creating a real European *demos*, sharing a European identity shaped in a common European public space with the active participation of European

citizens on the basis of their interest in European-level debates. Many think that any such interest can only be generated along genuine political conflicts, which make citizens participate in public deliberations. Today, the main conflicts in European-level political debates seem to revolve around the issues of sovereignty, identity, and solidarity (Grande and Hutter 2016, 12). These certainly hold a degree of emotional mobilisation capacity, but are not directly connected to European citizens' daily lives enough that they could have a real impact on their level of political engagement.

Not only is the degree of politicisation of EU-related matters being debated among EU scholars, but also whether the politicisation of European integration is a positive trend to encourage, or a negative trend to prevent. Some share the opinion of *Stefano Bartolini* that in the lack of solid political structures in place to avoid unmanageable tensions and conflicts, any politicisation of the Union may overwhelm its weak platform, presenting a major risk for European integration at large (Bartolini 2006; see also Magnette and Papadopoulos 2008). Others think that the politicisation of the EU is neither good, nor bad *per se*; or that this question has become redundant anyway, as the politicisation of European integration should be accepted as an irreversible *fait accompli*.

THE NATIONAL POLITICS LEVEL

The European Union's legitimacy crisis, and its politicisation, is strongly intertwined with national political dynamics at the level of its Member States. This brings us to a controversy: the voices calling for politicisation at the EU level are contradicted by voices calling for depoliticisation at the national level – often from the same mouths. This contributes to a view shared by many, including your author, that enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the EU cannot be achieved through the simple imitation of national political structures at the European level. EU crises are only one source of the *political malaise* across the continent, which is also rooted in social and political transformations and unease at the national level. We will look into these by focusing on a few subjectively selected pieces of the jigsaw, without the ambition of presenting the full picture.

a. Changing societies

When discussing the state of European societies, an inevitable subject that comes to the forefront is *demographic decline*. The renowned Italian demographer *Massimo Livi-Bacci* suggests that five demographic trends deserve particular attention in this regard: the decline of mortality and increasing life expectancy; the decline of fertility rates below the replacement

level; the rapid ageing of the population; the end of mass emigration from, and the beginning of immigration to Europe; accompanied by significant changes in social rules and behaviour in European societies (Livi-Bacci 2000 quoted in Berend 2010, 222).

These demographic dynamics generate profound political consequences. The prospects of a declining European population create economic pressure and fears, ageing societies threaten the viability of public health and social security systems, with special regard to pensions, and they also contribute to emerging intergenerational tensions.

Immigration has often been proposed as the only viable solution to these developments. However, the refugee and migration crisis of the 2010s made the in-built controversies of this vision obvious. As Berend explained it already more than a decade ago, well before this migratory wave:

> *Europe's population is decreasing and aging and the ratio of active to inactive people will be 50:50 in a few decades. Rapidly increasing immigration labor is replacing the inadequate domestic labor force. Immigrant minorities, mostly from non-European Muslim cultures, are rapidly increasing. Integration or assimilation is painfully slow, or non-existent. A part of the immigrant population, especially the illegal ones, form a new underclass. Anti-immigrant hostility and intolerance are fueling extreme right-wing political trends. The minority question became a source of explosive tension on the continent.* (Berend 2010, 286)

It might also be worth mentioning that if demographic decline is a source of unease in Western European societies, this is even more the case in Central and Eastern Europe, which is home to the fastest shrinking population in the world due to a combination of low birth rates, ageing population, and persistent emigration. According to Krastev and *Stephen Holmes*, this largely unspoken preoccupation with demographic collapse is the key factor behind the domestic demographic panic and the external immigration panic in these societies (Krastev and Holmes 2019, 36–38).

Another source of concerns in contemporary European public debates is *inequalities*. *Hartmut Kaelble* shows that while income inequalities decreased in Europe in most parts of the 20th century, this trend has reversed since the 1980s, with income differences intensifying again (Kaelble 2013, 157–165). Others are less convinced. In their view, social market economies manage to secure – in global comparison in particular – an advanced level of equality in European societies, where income inequalities have only slightly increased, if at all, over the past decades (e.g. Szewczyk 2021, 77–79).

Regarding wealth inequalities, Kaelble claims that while the reduction of disparities in this field was even more impressive, wealth concentration has experienced the same reverse trend since the 1980s in most European countries (Kaelble 2013, 165–168). *Thomas Piketty* comes to the same conclusion in his acclaimed *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, adding

that already very high international inequalities keep on increasing at the global level (Piketty 2013, 552–554). By the way, a strong polarisation also exists and persists in regional disparities within the EU. For many European citizens living in deprived areas, closing this gap remains wishful thinking and an unkept promise that seems to never materialise.

Inequalities have always been a major destabilising factor in all societies and political systems throughout history. Its consequences cannot be underestimated in contemporary wealthy European societies with a robust middle-class. As Piketty warns: the impoverishment of the middle-class would very likely trigger a violent political reaction (Piketty 2013, 556). One reason for this is that the loss of relative economic position – typically in the middle-class – usually translates into a feeling of loss of status, making many individuals perceive economic distress as a personal identity crisis (Fukuyama 2018, 89). While economic troubles are easier to solve through sound policies, identity-related anxieties are much more difficult to deal with.

b. Dealignment and realignment

Since the 1970s, European societies have also undergone a "great transformation" of their structures and value systems (Magone 2011, 76–136). This is often captured through the emergence of post-modern knowledge-based, secularised, post-material, and individualised societies, with all of these factors having a major political impact.

The rise of post-modern knowledge-based societies and the spreading of secularism bring us back to *Seymour Lipset*'s and *Stein Rokkan*'s theory of *social cleavages*. They identified four historic social cleavages that had structured European politics: the class (owner/worker, employer/employee), the rural–urban (primary/secondary sectors in economy), the church–state (religious/secular), and the center–periphery (dominant/dominated culture) cleavages, forming the basis of party systems and structuring politics in general. Beyond this, they also claimed that the party systems of the 1960s reflected, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 44), commonly referred to as the 'freezing hypothesis'.

However, traditional social cleavages started waning and frozen party systems started de-freezing in the early 1970s. Arguably, the most important change has been the transition into *service societies* with an emerging tertiary (services) sector at the expense of the primary (agriculture) and secondary (industry) sectors in economy. All parts of Europe went through this transition in the past decades. The country-by-country data compiled by *Steffen Mau* and *Roland Verwiebe* make this trend very clear: in the EU-15 Member States, employment decreased from 16.2 to 3.4 per cent in agriculture, and from 37.4 to 23.2 per cent in industry, while it increased from 54 to 73.5 per cent in – private and public – services between 1970 and 2008 (Mau and Verwiebe 2010, 153–154).

We find similar data in Central and Eastern Europe: in Hungary, for example, in the last quarter of 2020, 4.7 per cent of the working population was employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing; 21.3 per cent in manufacturing; 8.3 per cent in construction; 0.2 per cent in mining and quarrying; while the remaining 74 per cent was economically active in a variety of private and public services.[3] This general trend of occupational change has generated a significant political transformation across Europe through the weakening of the class and rural–urban cleavages and the shaking of previous relatively homogeneous constituencies for Socialist, Social Democratic, Radical Left, and Agrarian parties in particular.

Trends have been less linear regarding religiosity and the church–state cleavage. After a long period of decline, a resurgence in religiosity could be observed in the late 20th and the early 21st century, mainly in post-communist countries. However, in his latest review, *Ronald F. Inglehart* reports again about the decline of traditional religions, including in the European continent (Inglehart 2020). In Kubicek's reading, though many Europeans do remain religious, fewer and fewer people attend religious services, and the vast majority of citizens share the principle of secularism, making it "a cultural feature of contemporary Europe" (Kubicek 2021, 157) and diminishing constituency cohesion for Christian Democratic parties in particular.

These developments raise the question of whether we can only talk about *dealignment*, or also about *realignment* in contemporary European politics. The first is usually defined as voters becoming detached from political parties and partisan identities – and often from politics in general, we should add; while the second means that voters swap their stable allegiance to one party for an equally stable allegiance to another party (Hopkin 2006, 87).

Realignment is not a new phenomenon in European politics. Its best-known recent examples are the emergence of the Greens' political family and New Left parties along the post-materialist transition in European societies. Some scholars do see new cleavages rising in European political systems, replacing those presented by Lipset and Rokkan. Most often they refer to the materialist vs post-materialist, the winners vs losers of globalisation/Europeanisation, the cosmopolitan vs nationalist – or, in the concept of *David Goodhart*: the Anywheres vs Somewheres[4] – and the pro-European vs Eurosceptic conflicts as potential new dividing lines structuring political debates and competition.

However, the increasing diversification of, and *individualisation* in European societies make the rise of any new social cleavage much more difficult than ever before. This individualisation is rooted in a number of

[3] Eurostat data, see at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsq_eisn2/default/table?lang=en (last accessed on 8 September 2021)

[4] Goodhart describes the "people from Anywhere" as globalists possessing easily convertible knowledge and skills, which makes them competitive and mobile worldwide; while the "people from Somewhere" are localists with stronger community ties and more conservative social values (Goodhart 2017).

interrelated social trends from family change, with a growing proportion of single-person households, to a higher level of education. In any case, in terms of political consequences, it leads to increasingly independent-minded citizens and voters at the individual level, and to decreasing party/political identification, falling party membership and loyalty, evaporating political activism, dropping electoral turnout, and rising electoral volatility at the collective level. This way, it feeds into the conclusion that today's European politics are characterised more by a dealignment than a realignment of citizens, who tend to turn away, or even against, politics, or simply get politically confused and disoriented.

c. Political arenas

Confusion and disorientation nurture frustration and anger, leading to anti-politics feelings with calls for technocratic solutions on the policy side, and anti-elite and anti-systemic populism on the politics side. This trend of the *depoliticisation* of politics, another symptom of a troubled European public sphere, can be well illustrated through the transformation of *political parties*.

I focus on them for three main reasons: first, because this is a book about society and politics, and political parties remain the main conveyors of interests and value choices from the societal to the political realm; second, because they remain essential components of democratic political systems – even if opinion polls regularly place them as the least trusted political institutions in contemporary European polities; and finally, because political parties are core actors at elections, in parliaments, and in governments, where turbulences can often be traced back to them or explained along similar patterns they are confronted with.

The fact that mainstream political parties are facing increasing challenges across Europe has become a commonplace in contemporary political science. This is often attributed to two parallel reasons. One is the transformation of political parties themselves. Typical mass parties in the late 19th and the early 20th century were not only political organisations but all-encompassing social networks, which provided a broad spectrum of services – from social security through cultural events to leisure and sport activities – to their members in order to encapsulate their constituency and voters.

However, the profound change in political strategies in the second part of the 20th century, combined with waning social cleavages, converted mainstream parties into catch-all electoral machines, which turned their focus from constituency representation to vote maximisation. If you wish to obtain as many votes as possible with the aim of forming a government, you may not want to alienate any large group of voters. Of course, the price you pay for watered-down positions and messages is a weakening party identity and dropping party membership. Citizens will start feeling and saying that

"these are all the same", making them disinterested in, or even hostile to politics and political organisations.

Falling membership fees also generate financial pressure on political parties. In most European countries, the only viable solution to compensate them in the long run seems to be through state funding, which, in turn, creates converging interests among party leaderships at the expense of their ties with party members. *Richard Katz* and *Peter Mair* call this a system of cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995), transforming political parties into state agents as public service agencies (Mair 2013, 83–89).

Party leaders, in particular those with solid media capital, may even come to the conclusion that party members are a useless disruptive factor in their political activities and are therefore to be avoided, resulting in taxi or couch parties (also called voicemail or virtual parties) – referring to a membership so small that they can fit into a taxi or on a couch – selling a broad range of political messages and promises (products), mainly through mass media, to citizens as political consumers (supermarket parties; see also Gallagher et al. 2011, 349–358; Magone 2011, 346–355). In Mair's well-formulated conclusion: "political competition has come to be characterised by the contestation of socially inclusive appeals in search of support from socially amorphous electorates" (Mair 2009, 220; also Mair 2013, 57).

While the waning of social cleavages and coherent social constituencies, and the catch-all strategies embraced by mainstream political parties, undermine political-ideological differences in the political competition and public debates, this trend is reinforced by external pressures and constraints imposed by globalisation and European integration. These further narrow the spectrum of policy options and choices for leaders and parties in national political arenas. As Schmidt says:

> *In fact, the very existence of the EU as a system of supranational governance above the nation-state alters the democratic properties of national institutions, along with their claims to legitimacy … mainstream parties have had increasing difficulty in mediating between their responsibilities to govern (by the EU rules) and their need to be responsive to their electorates. National citizens often no longer feel that their political input matters. The resulting malaise has in turn fueled the rise of anti-systemic parties given to populist extremism and Euroskepticism … As a result, the national-level "politics without policy" that I had metaphorically identified in 2006 has only worsened. We now increasingly see "politics against policy" in contentious areas such as the euro, or even "politics against polity" as in the case of Brexit.* (Schmidt 2020, 14, emphasis in the original)

Should we accept this analysis, it does not come as a surprise that the recent and ongoing crises have further intensified these trends (Dinan et al. 2017, 369). They have also showcased the persisting differences between political systems and cultures in Western and in – even more volatile – Central and

Eastern Europe. The reasons for the slow and limited convergence, and in some cases new divergences, are manifold. One interesting analysis is delivered by Krastev and Holmes, who refer to the nauseating experience of the "Imitation Imperative" in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989, which turned into a drama in the past decade when these societies were told that the model they had imitated was about to capsize and sink, with "no signs today that East and West Europeans see themselves as … a single people with a shared identity" (Krastev and Holmes 2019, 30).[5]

d. Media and politics

All these political dynamics are embedded in an increasingly mediatised world. If political parties remain the main transmitters of social interests and value choices to political decision-makers, media is the main conveyor of political information and the voices of politicians to citizens, and have grown into an independent fourth estate in contemporary democracies. This *mediatisation* of society and politics leads to audience democracies (Manin 1997, 218–235), with citizens as political subjects who are to be entertained rather than involved and with spin doctors steering political processes.

The privatisation of media outlets across Europe since the 1980s feeds into the same tendencies. The profit-oriented logic nurtures a general trend of *tabloidisation*, which also pushes broadsheet newspapers and public television and radio broadcasters to present filtered political news in flashy ways. As a result of this, "also the quality European press has become increasingly opinionated, partisan, and sensational" (Zielonka 2018, 41).

The same entertainment logic contributes to another dynamic, the *personalisation* of politics – along with the presidentialisation of political institutions. This shift in the public attention from substance (political programmes) to personalities (political leaders) frames the political competition as a "gladiatorial contest" (Bale 2013, 241), prime examples being televised candidate debates.

Moreover, this is not limited to electoral campaigns any more, but has become a permanent feature of national political arenas. The constant speculation about the winner of the day and the consequent proliferation of

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[5] Regarding specific developments in Central and Eastern European politics, recently published works include: Ágh, Attila: *Declining Democracy in East-Central Europe. The Divide in the EU and Emerging Hard Populism*. Cheltenham, Northampton MA: Edward Elgar, 2019; Csergő, Zsuzsa, Daina S. Eglitis, and Paula M. Pickering eds.: *Central and East European Politics. Changes and Challenges*. 5th ed. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021; Fagan, Adam, and Petr Kopecký eds.: *The Routledge Handbook of East European Politics*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2020; White, Stephen, Paul G. Lewis, and Judy Batt eds.: *Developments in Central and East European Politics*. 5th ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

opinion polls force politicians to defeat their opponents (and reassure their supporters) month by month, and week by week. This continuous political horse-racing further narrows the perspective of political and policy decisions, favouring short-term public opinion gains over longer-term social benefits, often at the expense of necessary reforms.

The very same entertainment logic is behind the emergence of 'celebrity politics' with celebrity politicians and politicised celebrities (see e.g. Wheeler 2013). Political actors complain about their privacy being invaded by paparazzi journalism. However, in reality, this is a two-way road. As newspapers are often more interested in politicians' private life than in their political views, politicians, being aware of this, also facilitate, or even encourage the mediatisation of intimacy. All this requires considerable investment in their communication teams and media relations, resulting in a symbiosis between political and media actors due to their mutual dependencies and partially overlapping interests.

The Internet and the *social media* revolution are transforming European politics even more than traditional media did. They reinforce individualisation, but also generate new, though virtual, connections and communities. The initial enthusiasm about the positive political impact of social media – associated with the Arab Spring in particular at an early stage – is over by now. Not only due to the robust digital divide within and between countries, but also to the high risks of potential manipulations of these platforms. The indigestible quantity of information that citizens are flooded with on a daily basis, combined with their deepening distrust of authorities in the large sense of the term, make many of them feel lost and disoriented, and vulnerable to deception.

This vulnerability is also exploited by the rising "facts industry" (Zielonka 2018, 27). In some cases, the data gathered and processed by these actors help citizens grasp the reality, while they often mislead them. There is a high potential for purpose-driven manipulation through the dissemination of bias or false information, also called *fake news*. The damage is often magnified by the retreat of many citizens into echo chambers. As described by *Julian Baggini*:

> *By retreating into bubbles of the like-minded, people can strip out a lot of inconvenient complexities a wider perspective would give, leading to a simpler but therefore also distorted network of belief. Falsehood masquerades as truth by retreating into incomplete networks of belief where convenient facts are overstated and inconvenient ones ignored or just simply denied.* (Baggini 2017, 102)

Against this backdrop, future prospects are worrisome indeed. As *Jamie Susskind* says in his *Future Politics*: people's choices and actions are based on their external perceptions, which are always limited and can be influenced through the filtering of information they have access to. In the 20th century, this filtering was mostly done by mass media. Today, the emergence of the Internet,

social media, and digital news platforms enables people to be information producers, critics, and consumers in parallel. In the future, filtering will be performed and perceptions be determined more and more by digital systems. As "we only experience a tiny fraction of the world, *which* fraction we are presented with will make a big difference. It will determine what we know, what we feel, what we want, and therefore what we do. To control these is the essence of politics" (Susskind 2018, 146, emphasis in the original).

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Finally, we cannot ignore that European politics are embedded in global political dynamics, shaping the external relations of the EU and its Member States with the rest of the world. Today, as Youngs rightly points out, these relations are increasingly squeezed between domestic European crises and a reshaped global order in the making (Youngs 2014, 2). As a result, "the narrative switched from one of the EU gradually taking the shape of an emergent superpower to one of minimising the fall-out from these twin challenges" (Youngs 2021, 12).

The changing place of Europe in the world and the nature of the European Union as an international actor have been extensively discussed in the relevant literature, which I have no intention to repeat here. A point of scholarly consensus is that one cornerstone of the EU's international influence is its *power of attraction* – though some commentators raise doubts as to whether the EU model is really replicable in other parts of the world, or the Union is facing its "Galapagos Syndrome moment", meaning that "Europe's postmodern order has become so advanced and particular to its environment that it is impossible for others to follow" (Krastev 2017, 9). In any case, this power of attraction has suffered a heavy blow as a result of the European poly-crisis in the past decade.

The Union's behaviour as an international actor is also rooted in its internal dilemmas regarding its *raison d'être* and self-perception. While European integration was born from the desire for sustainable peace, the challenge of rebuilding Western Europe, and of reintegrating (West) Germany into the European and international order, a key reason for the EU's existence in the globalised world today – beyond the domestication of European power relations, economic development, and the welfare of European citizens – is its size, which makes it comparable to such global powers as the United States, China, Russia, or India.

However, this size only matters if the Union is able to speak with a *single voice* in the world when needed. Achieving this is no easy task against the backdrop of centrifugal forces among its Member States, external policies, institutions, political families, and citizens themselves. But even if the single voice was achieved, there is the unsolved strategic dilemma: should the

European Union prioritise and pursue global or regional foreign policy objectives in the coming period? The answer to this question shall define its external action towards its neighbours and global powers.

Nevertheless, even if this was sorted out, it remains unclear how the EU wants to achieve its external objectives: through its traditional role as a champion of effective multilateralism; or by investing more in its *strategic autonomy* and bilateral relations with third countries through relational and structural foreign policies (see Keukeleire and Delreux 2014, 27–30), including hard and soft power means; or via a new combination of both? And even if there was a clear answer to this, an important challenge remains the scope and efficiency of external policy instruments at its disposal, which remain limited for the time being.

Without solving these dilemmas, the Union will continue to be perceived as an economic giant – as the world's wealthiest single market, leading trader, biggest development assistance and humanitarian aid donor (together with its Member States), and a key normative power shaping international norms and institutions – without a matching political influence in the global arena. Or, as Kissinger has warned Europeans:

> *Will the emerging Europe become an active participant in the construction of a new international order, or will it consume itself in its own internal issues? … Europe, which had a near monopoly in the design of global order less than a century ago, is in danger of cutting itself off from the contemporary quest for world order by identifying its internal construction with its ultimate geopolitical purpose … Europe turns inwards just as the quest for a world order it significantly designed faces a fraught juncture whose outcome could engulf any region that fails to help shape it. Europe thus finds itself suspended between a past it seeks to overcome and a future it has not yet defined.* (Kissinger 2014, 95)

THE AIM OF THE BOOK

This book revolves around these and some other challenges and dilemmas in contemporary European politics. It is about politics, but without the intention of making politics. It is subjectively selective in the choice of the topics it looks into. It is a book aimed at asking questions, without always giving answers. It was written for use at universities by students and instructors, but also in the hope of making a modest contribution to shaping awareness in a broader public.

Its authors are well aware that Europe and the European Union are not interchangeable equivalent concepts and terms. While their starting point is European integration, they extend their analytical scope to European politics – including both the European and the national, and sometimes the subnational level – at large. On the other hand, when they refer to European

politics, they reduce the scope of their attention to political developments in the Union and its Member States – without forgetting or denying that a number of non-EU countries are an integral part of our European continent.

This is a book about troubled and troubling transformations in contemporary European societies and politics, which often generate *fears* among European citizens. Fears of disintegration at the European level, fears of disorder and instability at the national level, fears of disorientation at the individual level, fears of becoming irrelevant at the global level, and fears of the future, which seems to be full of uncertainties and risks. If you talk to parents today, you realise that many of them not only think that their children will have a more difficult life than their own generation, but they also find it increasingly challenging to foresee what kind of knowledge and skills will prove to be useful for them in their adult life in just a couple of decades in our rapidly changing world.

All in all, European societies and politics are full of fears today. Fears of the known, the known unknown, and also the unknown unknown. Hope and fear being the key drivers of political participation and action, rising fears shape political choices in contemporary Europe. However, as Krastev reminds us: there is a difference between fear and anxiety. While fear is a reaction to a specific and observable danger, anxiety is a diffuse, unfocused, and objectless (negative) belief about one's future (Krastev 2020, 37).

The authors of this book make an attempt to shed light on some key challenges and explain alternative responses given to them in areas that we believe are major sources of fears for European citizens nowadays. We do this in the hope that it is still possible to prevent our continent from backsliding (again) into a new and presumably devastating era of *politics of anxiety*. If reading the following chapters will help you cast out even a single demon of political anxiety of yours, it already was worth it. The future may not be as doomed as it looks at first glance.

Key concepts and terms

Dealignment/realignment
Demographic decline
Inequalities
Legitimacy (input, output, throughput)
Mediatisation
Politicisation/de-politicisation
Politics of fear/anxiety
Poly-crisis
Power of attraction
Social cleavages

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Integration and disintegration

Tamás Dezső Ziegler[1]

European integration has been a well-researched process in European studies, with several competing theoretical schools reflecting on the intense cooperation and interdependence among countries in the European continent. On the other hand, researching European disintegration is a relatively underdeveloped new area, with only a handful of scholars dealing with this topic altogether. This chapter aims to give an overview of these two fields, and also to raise awareness about some of the most important challenges to integration in Europe. Furthermore, it offers a more complex interpretation of European integration and disintegration, highlighting that these two can both happen at the same time in parallel within the same political system, such as the European Union.

Keywords: integration, disintegration, divergence, convergence, regional cooperation

INTRODUCTION: INTEGRATING WHAT, HOW, AND WHAT FOR?

The *integration* of European countries has been one of the most researched, documented, and debated subjects in European studies. This topic is also related to the question of whether a European *demos* (a European people) exists, or could exist in the future (Weiler 1995). Regarding integration, several schools compete with each other and give different explanations for this phenomenon. However, unlike concerning the methods and techniques of integration, much less is written about what we understand by integration.

Most of the articles and books published do not invest in explaining what they mean by integration, and which aspects of integration they wish to analyse. To give an example, legal integration is not the same as political or economic integration. Consequently, in order to give the reader a relatively solid background about this process, we need to start with explaining three things: a) what the different forms of integration(s) are; b) what the theoretical

[1] The author thanks Thomas Buijnink and Julián Romero for their help in creating the final format of this chapter.

background of the integration of European countries is; and c) what we can learn from the different theories about disintegration in the EU.

When talking about the different forms of integration, we can distinguish several fields on which European integration has an effect: this is why European integration is called a multidimensional process (Eppler et al. 2016, 3).[2] In a general sense, integration could refer "to an increase – and disintegration to a reduction – in the centralization level, policy scope, and membership of the EU" (Schimmelfennig 2018, 1156), which has an impact in different areas.

First of all, the common market started as a market integration project. If we read the Spaak Report from 1956, as one of the fundamental documents of European integration, we find that there was a strong and urgent need to create a customs union, eliminate quotas in trade, grant free movement to service providers, support agriculture and trade in agricultural products, create a competition policy that regulates business practices, and allow the free movement of workers (Spaak 1956).

Secondly, beyond market integration, economic and monetary integration also developed extensively. This led to the creation of the monetary union, a common EU budget, a common currency (the Euro), and the European Central Bank. It also resulted in convergence criteria within the EU, aimed at limiting inflation, Member States' budget deficit, as well as Member States' debt-to-GDP ratio, and government bonds' long-term interest rates.

Thirdly, another common aspect of integration is the political integration of European countries. Through the gradual expansion of their competences, the EEC/EC and later the EU, and their institutions enjoyed more and more power to decide. The decision-making procedures have also changed: Member States have fewer rights to veto decisions, and majority voting has become the standard rule, though with significant exceptions.

Many areas became regulated by the Member States collectively, which also has a political aspect: creating a harmonised common foreign policy, granting free movement to EU citizens, regulating short-term third country visas and asylum, certain aspects of human rights and the rule of law, establishing consumer law regulations, or creating EU competence to support higher education systems in Europe – all can be interpreted as joint political actions and parts of sovereignty transfers by the Member States. This phenomenon is called 'sovereignty pooling': countries give competences to the EU, or other international organisations, to make effective decisions (Keohane 2002). Nevertheless, in sensitive areas, this transformation can generate debates, or even tensions, among EU members.[3]

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[2] Beyond the EEC/EC and the EU, we can see integrative tendencies in other frameworks as well: we can think of EFTA countries, the European Economic Area, or trade and economic cooperation with countries like Turkey. The EU even created a customs union with the latter country in 1995.

[3] In different forms, political integration also exists outside the EU: for instance, the Council of Europe, including the European Court of Human Rights, or the Organization for Security

Fourthly, all these integrations are strengthened by developing common social values, which become more and more similar in Member States' societies. For example, respect for democracy or tolerance are relatively broadly shared values across Europe. One reason for this is that good practices are available and widely shared on the continent.

Of course, integration of social values can also have negative effects: one only has to think about the cooperation among far-right forces, or the spread of xenophobia from one country to another. Similarly, a negative consequence of integration can be the creation of transnational organised crime groups, which also share knowledge and practices among themselves. At this point, we have to stress that integration is not the same as creating a completely unified continent, but it is more about certain common values shared by many – or most – of the countries in Europe.

Based on the integration of, and interdependencies among European nations, a new vocabulary of integration has also been created. This change could be interpreted as some kind of a 'linguistic integration'. If Member States share power to regulate something in a less stringent way, we talk about 'harmonisation'. If the EU adopts strict rules, which must be applied all over the Union, we talk about 'unification'. Under 'convergence' we mean that countries start to regulate certain issues in a similar way, while under 'divergence' we mean that they start to regulate issues differently, even if there was unity in their practices before. The terms 'convergence' and 'divergence' are mostly applied in the fields of law or economics. Furthermore, when we use the phrase 'differentiated (two/multispeed) integration', we mostly understand this to refer to certain countries integrating in a closer way, while others do so in a looser way.

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF INTEGRATION

Science also tried to model the integration of European countries.[4] In academia, divergent approaches towards integration started to compete with each other, all of which highlighted different aspects of integration. One reason for this theoretical diversity is that behind each theory we find diverging worldviews about human nature, the role of individuals in society, and how societies and their members and governments interact with each other.

For a long time, maybe even still today, *neofunctionalism* (represented by *Ernst B. Haas*, for example) was the dominant theory. According to this, if

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and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) serve as organisations in which member states give power to these organisations to overview the situation of human rights or economic development in their countries.

[4] European studies could also be interpreted as scientific integration: scholars create a common language and platform to interact about European cooperation.

European countries cooperate in certain fields, then this cooperation will lead to cooperation in other fields as well – Haas called these 'spillovers'. As he put it:

> *Social actors, in seeking to realize their value-derived interests, will choose whatever means are made available by the prevailing democratic order. If thwarted they will rethink their values, redefine their interests, and choose new means to realize them. The alleged primordial force of nationalism will be trumped by the utilitarian-instrumental human desire to better oneself in life, materially and in terms of status, as well as normative satisfaction.* (Haas 2004, 14)

There are two types of spillovers: the first, functional spillover, happens when

> *cooperation in certain sectors of the economy (or society) creates technocratic pressure for cooperation in adjoining sectors, thereby propelling integration forward …The second type, political spillover, occurs when ongoing cooperation in certain areas empowers supranational officials to act as informal political entrepreneurs in other areas. In order to manage complex technocratic issues more effectively, rational governments must delegate discretion to experts, judges and bureaucrats, thereby creating powerful new supranational actors with an interest in cooperation.* (Moravcsik 2005, 352)

A different path for describing integration was taken by *intergovernmentalists*. In intergovernmentalism, Europe-wide decisions are primarily made by Member States through negotiations. This model does not ignore the role of EU institutions or Member States' domestic political culture, but it puts the emphasis on intergovernmental negotiations, and sees governments as the primary players in European-level politics.

There are, of course, differences in this stream – the more optimistic (sometimes even utopistic) liberal intergovernmentalism of Moravcsik is slightly different from the 'new intergovernmentalism' of *Uwe Puetter*, which also reflects on the disequilibrium of the EU, the fact that Member States do not necessarily transfer new competences to the Union, and that adopting decisions in the European Council is increasingly common practice (see also Bickerton et al. 2015; Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2019).

Contrary to intergovernmentalists, *institutionalists* believe that there could be a gap between governmental interests (aims) and political/policy decisions in the EU, so they focus on the functioning of the common European institutions. To put it simply: institutions can 'break out' and live their own life without the limits of governments (Jupille and Caporaso 1999, 438). From this perspective, the role of EU institutions, the values they advocate, and the political decisions they make are at least as important as governmental input, or the social environment.

Another theoretical framework for European integration is used by *constructivist* scholars. Constructivists mostly believe that the social environment in which European integration develops plays the most important role in shaping states' cooperation. In their approach, everything is constructed: the EU and other European organisations; their institutions; the disputes, or the lack of disputes in these organisations; domestic social and political culture, including national identity; party politics; and the states' foreign policies.

EU Member States bring to the negotiations the (political) culture of their country, their domestic politics, which shape their preferences, and many of their choices will be marked by the values they were trained to believe in. As *Jeffrey T. Checkel* puts it, it is a mistake to reify EU "institutions, imbuing them with fixed values and meaning, but not asking from where these came or why certain ones are simply absent" (Checkel 2004, 145). So, the EU and European cooperation are constructed and reconstructed on a permanent basis, and are an unfinished and continuously changing project.

Finally, *realists* see Europe, the EU, and other European organisations as tools to defend and pursue national interests. Their premises are based on the conviction that states are the most relevant actors in international politics, that states' behaviour is determined or even dictated by their environment, and that this environment is an inhospitable place (Kunz 2013, 5). Thus, their thinking about European cooperation is based on creating a balance against the backdrop of the position of Member States in power (especially, big power) politics and also at the international level (Rynning 2005). As the international system is anarchic, states want to cooperate to minimise dangers and boost their potentials to fulfil their interests, i.e. boost their power and influence over others. As such, "EU member states have an incentive to bundle their power resources in order to increase European influence in the world" (Kunz 2013, 11).

On the other hand, realists are not completely unified in how they see the states' role in international cooperation: as is well known, there are different schools in realism (classic realism will be slightly different from the different types of structural realism, for example). Consequently, some realist scholars would argue that states are more defensive and strive for security, while others would follow offensive realism and claim that states tend to maximise power for dominating and gaining incentives. This, then, also has an effect on how they see European integration, and what elements (such as countering the Soviet Union back in the early days of the EEC, or economic interests, or more influence in world politics, or domestic stability) they put into the focus of their attention and research.

EUROPEAN COOPERATION AND THE MAJOR CRISES OF EUROPE TODAY

The European continent, including the EU, has been facing major challenges. If you read other chapters of this book, they try to explain and analyse some of these. They also affect European disintegration. For a long time, scholars openly or implicitly accepted the view that European integration was a one-way process, and that nations had to integrate in order to overcome challenges they faced in the late 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century. However, this way of thinking eroded in the 2000s, and it became especially vague in the 2010s and 2020s.

As I see it, recent political conflicts within the European continent have the potential to push countries further away from each other. To start with, the lack of empathy in times of economic distress has left a lasting impact. At the time of the economic crisis in the late 2000s, countries like Greece received less help and support than they had expected. This did not go unnoticed. With Brexit, a large Member State opted for leaving the EU. One can hardly avoid interpreting this as a form of disintegration: in fact, this is an obvious example of political, legal, and economic disintegration, which was a result of a previous disintegration in values between the UK and the continental core of the EU.

During the refugee crisis as from 2015, several politicians used the crisis for inciting xenophobia and gaining political advantage over democratic forces. It seems that *Ronald Inglehart* and *Pippa Norris* are right when they claim that there is a return to more materialistic values over abstract ones, such as tolerance or humanism (Inglehart and Norris 2016). It is as if a new nationalistic 21st century tribalism could emerge in many countries.

Moreover, as a result of authoritarian tendencies, the anti-democratic value system of the far-right is becoming more influential, challenging key frameworks of the rule of law and of checks and balances. As I explained elsewhere, many of the far-right's panels are taken from fascism – and this new post-fascism is capable of affecting international relations in a negative way, just like its predecessor (Ziegler 2021). In some Eastern European countries, like Hungary, Poland, or Russia, it has become an integral part of political culture, but it is also present in the West. The reactions of the EU to this phenomenon were so weak that *Daniel Kelemen* claims that this has created a new form of democratic deficit (Kelemen 2017).

Talking about democratic deficit: even the old form of democratic deficit remains unsolved in the EU. As *Anna Unger* explains in another chapter of this book, the vast majority of citizens have very limited genuine influence on (EU, but also domestic) decision-making, and most of them cannot relate to these decision-making processes (Hix and Føllesdal 2006). Even apart from this problem, the Union stands very far from everyday people: EU politicians

hardly ever explain their positions in an efficient way to the public, and they have little voice in domestic politics.

On the other hand, at the domestic level, the politicisation of the EU is an existing phenomenon (Kelemen 2017), leading to a one-sided communication. As Habermas puts it,

> *as long as the European citizens see their national governments as the only players on the European stage, they perceive the decision-making processes as a zero-sum game in which their own actors have to prevail against the others.* (Habermas 2010, 131)

Furthermore, in many countries, there is also a lack of proper social policies. Welfare states are under pressure from neoliberals and market-fundamentalists, which can also generate disintegration at the domestic level: the rich get richer, social mobility gets blocked, empathy and the feeling of connectedness are waning. As a result, hyper-individualism and the lonely struggle for survival fills in the void. People also turn away from internationalisation if they feel that they do not benefit from it.

Finally, market rules are harmed regularly, as the new nationalism also alters how we think about the European single market (Ziegler 2020). All these have an effect on European countries, and all these developments can generate a certain level of convergence, or disintegration, among the countries. From this perspective, the question is: do these dynamics lead to disintegration or not?

THE SCIENCE OF DISINTEGRATION – EUROPEAN COOPERATION AS A POLITICAL DISCOURSE

There are many conflicting interpretations of European *disintegration*. While some scholars claim that disintegration does not exist at all, some others even foresee the collapse of the EU (Krastev 2012). While this latter view seems to be grossly exaggerated, we should still analyse the different theoretical perspectives one by one.

From the perspective of *neofunctionalist* theory, *Phillip Schmitter* and *Zoe Lefkofridi*, but also *Annegret Eppler*, *Lisa H. Anders*, and *Thomas Tuntschew* explained disintegration quite plausibly (Eppler et al. 2016; Schmitter and Lefkofridi 2016). According to Schmitter, disintegration is a multicausal phenomenon, which is made up by different factors. One such example could be the unequal distribution of benefits of European cooperation, like Germany's hegemonic economic dominance, while others benefit by far less from the European market, and the weaker countries are not compensated for their position.

The problem also has a social level: the system of the EU is not explained in our schools, and people in general do not really know how the overcomplicated Union and its institutions work.[5] This also becomes important when dubious austerity measures are imposed on a country, like in the case of Greece, and, as a consequence of the interconnected system, individual countries lose their capacity to help themselves. In such a situation, people tend to be far more critical towards European cooperation.

Moreover, there are serious inconsistencies in how EU institutions handle specific countries. Same or similar violations of EU law are treated differently, so the perception of fairness of integration is being put into question (Schmitter and Lefkofridi 2016, 216). A massive transfer of power to the EU, which could cope with the 'no taxation without representation' problem, is not imaginable at present (Schmitter 2012). Finally, Schmitter and Lefkofridi also claim that

> *with or without the EU … European national democracies have been in trouble for several decades. The paradox of these times is that, precisely when so many aspiring neo-democracies have been emerging in the East, the archaeo-democracies of the West have been sliding into crisis. Their citizens have begun to question the very same 'normal' institutions and practices that new democratizers have been trying so hard to imitate.* (Schmitter 2012, 44, emphasis in the original)

Other scholars, like *Erik Jones*, also find that unequal opportunities of Member States can cause disintegration (Jones 2018). Integration creates losers and winners, and "if there is some spectacular collapse, it will most likely result from the isolation of one-or-more member states from the rest of the Union. The British sense of self-isolation is one illustration of this dynamic; the forced isolation of Greece in the summer of 2015 is another" (Jones 2018, 449). If Member States do not receive mutual support or empathy from other countries, people will lose faith in the EU.

Eppler and her colleagues also stress that the expanded competences of the EU and peoples' identity could collide:

> *The growing gap between the dramatically expanded competences of the EU on the one hand and the static levels of European identity on the other hand increases the likelihood that the EU's power has grown to the point where it exceeds the necessary basis of 'identity' safeguards.* (Eppler et al. 2016, 17; see also Kelemen 2007, 60)

These circumstances can generate spill-backs (i.e. the reverse of spillovers), or to put it differently: a 'transcending cycle' (Eppler et al. 2016, 3; Lindberg and Scheingold 1970, 199; Schmitter 2012, 46).

[5] This is also true in other forms of integration as well: the Council of Europe, for example, is a nearly unknown organisation by the European public.

According to the *postfunctionalist* model of *Frank Schimmelfennig*, disintegration could be provoked by "(a) the spillover of integration into identity-relevant areas; (b) the rise of Eurosceptic parties; and (c) an increase in the availability or use of referendums on European integration" (Schimmelfennig 2018, 1159). Furthermore, just as there exists differentiated integration, one could imagine differentiated disintegration, as well, and this is what happened in the case of Brexit.

One could also imagine such situations outside the EU, such as when countries do not follow the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Differentiated disintegration can be threefold: first, there could be internal disintegration within the EU, when the convergence among certain Member States becomes stronger within the Union; second, if a Member State leaves the EU, this moves from internal to external differentiation; third, states can also opt for less cooperation outside the EU (external differentiation) (Schimmelfennig 2018, 1160).

For other scholars, like *Hans Vollaard*, disintegration is a result of the lack of proper available options for protest within the EU (Vollaard 2018). He uses the model of *Albert O. Hirschman*, who claims that in an organisation members have three ways to relate to the system: stay loyal, voice protest against moves inside the organisation, or exit (leave the organization) (Hirschman 1970). According to Vollaard, when protests and critique are in vain, states can break apart from the EU. As he puts it,

> *the basic argument is that an integrative spiral may have started and continued in the EU (and its predecessors) due to a lack of better alternatives and constrained voice* (i.e. effective ways of criticism available – TDZ). *However, continuous challenges related to external de-consolidation, such as enlargement, have constrained the EU's capacity to lock-in resources and actors like member states ... The ensuing dissatisfaction will not necessarily lead to member states leaving the EU fully, as this calculation depends on exit costs and the attractiveness of alternatives outside the EU.* (Vollaard 2018, 142)

Dermot Hodson and *Uwe Puetter* analysed the divergence among EU Member States from a new *intergovernmentalist* perspective (Hodson and Puetter, 2018). The creation of a new theory by intergovernmentalist scholars can be considered justified, as the overtly optimistic attitude of liberal intergovernmentalism seems to have failed. It seems that nations do not necessarily deepen their cooperation, and the EU has not reached that state of equilibrium where all the disputes and differences around power and sovereignty are addressed and solved.

Hodson and Puetter claim that European integration, at some point, reached a kind of equilibrium, which after Maastricht, by the end of the 1990s, turned into the disequilibrium that we are still facing today (Hodson and Puetter 2019, 1159). The reason for this is that the elites of Member States

and their governments made choices that enabled further integration, but also generated opposition and tensions.

At the party politics level, two kinds of parties criticise European cooperation. The first group that of Eurosceptic parties, which are against EU cooperation, and which would abolish such an 'empire-like' system at large. The second group of parties are challenger parties: they do not want to abolish cooperation completely, but to change policy outcomes. Challenger parties do not make an open assault against the EU, but they develop "an ambivalent Euroscepticism when in power" (Hodson and Puetter 2019, 1162). As European cooperation largely depends on governmental negotiations, the more influence such parties have, the more they can turn integration around.

Another explanation, from a *realist* perspective, was suggested by *Barbara Kunz*. Kunz put European disintegration into the realist framework of countries cooperating and competing with each other in an anarchic international system (Kunz 2013). When doing so, she adopts a realist perspective that is first and foremost characterised by the assumption that states' behaviour is shaped by the conditions in their environment. In her opinion, the circumstances that push European countries towards disintegration could have several reasons.

First, since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been absent from stabilising intra-European politics. The more the US removes itself from international politics, the more this tendency will strengthen. This also means that the lack of a common enemy, like the Soviet Union in the past, also weakens cooperation, as common enemies can force countries to stand together and encourage regional cooperation.

Moreover, there are differences in visions of a grand strategy among EU countries, and there is also a lack of means to put any grand strategy into practice. The Union's lame duck situations can be a result of this lack of vision. Furthermore, competition around influence and diverging incompatible interests among Member States can also tear countries apart.

Finally, *constructivist* scholars would focus on people and communities in European disintegration. If the framework of our social environment is constructed, then deconstruction can also happen, which could result in disintegration. A good example of this is Brexit, which had a very important social backdrop, where the key core driver of the 'leave' decision was the strong presence of post-empire thinking in British society (Beaumont 2017; Dorling 2019).

Such new deconstructions or reconstructions of cooperation can happen at all levels of European integration, both in the EU and at the domestic level. The change of mainstream values can even reach family life and all forms of collective living. If EU policies and Member States' foreign policies are politicised, and they increasingly will be so in the future, identity politics in Member States will have greater relevance (Börzel and Risse 2018).

If citizens elect far-right leaders, this will have an effect on EU and intra-EU politics. Policy changes will greatly reflect this in Member States, and

the Union may also change its policies. This is what happened regarding migration and refugee protection. If everything is constructed, communities can construct new ways of living, and these new norms and values can prevail over the old ones. As a result, Member State governments and EU technocrats can also change the framework that they use for cooperation. Or, if they do not do so, we can expect heated debates to take place.

It is important to note, however, that disintegration in the EU can also lead to further integration outside the EU: for example, after Brexit, the UK concluded a trade agreement with Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, announced in June 2021. Similar integration can happen if third countries from outside the Union (like Russia) build closer connections to certain EU Member States (like Hungary). Probably, such cooperations can be enhanced by common or similar value systems, or at least some common interests between countries.

A NEW MODEL OF INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION

In recent years, I developed a new constructivist model of European disintegration, which adds new features to existing theories.[6] This model also takes into consideration that any kind of disintegration among European countries starts at the nation-state level and is mostly a consequence of differences in political culture and attitudes (accepted values). Thus, my theory puts politics and political culture into the forefront.

The EU, but also other European-level cooperations, function like a *dynamic equilibrium*: integration and disintegration are happening at the same time, within the same system, in different fields, continuously. The EU can disintegrate from a territorial perspective (see the case of Brexit), while it is integrating in other fields: for example, Member States establish permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) in the field of common security and defence policy or enhanced cooperation regarding the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), which even create new obligations for them.

Sometimes, there are parallel integrative and disintegrative tendencies in the same field: the many disputes regarding EU asylum law also show this. In certain periods, there are more elements that push countries further away from each other, and this has the potential to generate disequilibrium. However, this does not deny the fact that even under disequilibrium, there can be integrative tendencies present in the EU's system.

To this supranational layer we must also add the domestic layer: societies can also disintegrate. For example, if their citizens see certain issues differently, and start to think of each other as enemies, or support authoritarianism, or

[6] For my take, see Ziegler, Tamás Dezső: EU disintegration as cultural insurrection of the anti-Enlightenment tradition. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* (28)4: 434–448.

if people simply get lonely in a capitalist state and do not feel they belong to their society any more (anomy can cause disintegration in societies). So, to a certain extent, how the EU, or any regional organisation (like the OSCE or CoE), works is quite similar to how national societies and governance function.

In the EU, and in other international organisations, just like in the Member States, contradicting rival *values* are present. When they are not effective (like, for example, when they are unable to enforce respect for human rights), this fact does not necessarily mean that these systems and organisations lack values, but it can also mean that sometimes they contain values which are in a conflict with each other: to put it simply, they incorporate too many values, instead of having none.

For example, while Europe portrays itself as an inclusive continent, as explained later in this book, the EU and its Member States did a lot to deter refugees during the migration crisis. Or, to give another example, while the Union fights against discrimination, in fact, third country nationals are treated very differently from EU citizens in many ways. One could cite hundreds of cases that are based on a cognitive dissonance in these societies, political organisations, and legal systems.

If we look into the epicentres of contemporary key political debates, we find that in most of them two fundamentally different traditions collide. The first one is the tradition of *Enlightenment*, which advocates for equality, rationality, the rule of law, human rights, and mutual respect and cooperation between countries. This tradition has been described in detail by many authors, which I do not intend to repeat here (see e.g. Berlin 1979; Der Spiegel 2014; Pinker 2018; Sternhell 2010; Sternhell 2018; Waldron 2014; Ziegler 2021).

I interpret political pluralism as a direct outgrowth of the French Enlightenment, i.e. modern democracies and their institutional systems are based on Enlightenment values. If you give human beings human rights, they will form communities (including parties), create democratic parliaments and elections, limit the power of authorities through checks and balances, and the state will also respect other nations. Moreover, in my opinion, the social state is also an upshot of the Enlightenment's humanistic ideal: if you respect the human in people, you try to give them equal opportunities, some basic rights (through supporting social mobility), and help them through easing poverty.

However, in the West, there has also been a different tradition, which goes against these values: the *anti-Enlightenment* counter-tradition, which, according to *Zeez Sternhell*, functions as its complete opposite (Sternhell 2018). This tradition maintains that human beings are not equal, difference can be made on the basis of race, ethnicity, or religion, and anti-discrimination measures can be harmful to society's general interest. It disrespects human rights, and bases itself on social Darwinism in and outside society.

As a result, in most of the cases, it promotes a kind of predatory capitalism to create extreme competition in all spheres of society. Furthermore, it

creates a 'new feudalism', where social status is based on ethnicity, birth, or the goodwill of a powerful leader. For this tradition, the humanistic ideal of the Enlightenment is a naïve myth, and in practice, it uses irrationality and heated emotions to undermine rational decision-making. Why this is interesting is that such forces, as *Richard Ned Lebow* puts it,

> *almost invariably assert the distinctiveness and superiority of a people or nation. Claims of superiority and justifications for privileges based on them are really appeals to the principle of fairness and to hierarchy at the expense of equality. Elites who propagate these identifications and claims invoke all kinds of sleights of hand in an attempt to square the two principles, but rarely credibly in the eyes of other actors.* (Lebow 2016, 6)

It is easy to admit that in most cases, the European far-right shares many anti-Enlightenment *clichés*. However, other parties also follow such views, both in the centre, or on the far-left.

The effect of the anti-Enlightenment tradition in European relations are twofold. First of all, it has the potential to block legislation that is based on humanistic, inclusive, and democratic ideals. As such, it generates disputes and conflicts among nations in these fields. Second, it also has the potential to alter decision-making (Ziegler 2020). To counter these tendencies, we should strengthen Enlightenment values at all levels of society, including in education.

CONCLUSIONS

Integration and disintegration among European countries is a multilayered, complex, and often contradictory phenomenon. At present, there is no scientific consensus to whether the disintegration of the EU is on its way, or not. As mentioned above, in my interpretation, the views and speculations about the EU falling apart are exaggerated. However, there are strong disintegrative tendencies, which can seriously hinder or reverse cooperation in certain fields. In this regard, the future of European cooperation is strongly tied to national preferences and the citizens' value preferences. This means that how European nations see each other and what identity choices the citizens make will have a major effect on future cooperation both within and outside the EU.

Key concepts and terms

Constructivism
Disintegration
Dynamic equilibrium
Enlightenment/anti-Enlightenment tradition
Institutionalism
Integration
Intergovernmentalism
Neofunctionalism/postfunctionalism
Political culture
Realism

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Inequalities and Social Europe

Zsófia Katalin Kollányi

In the history of the European Union, there has been a clear trend in the past decades of subordinating the social dimension of European integration to the interests of the common market and economic development. This has led to social tensions stemming from growing inequalities both within and between the EU Member States. In the following, we will review the main contours of this debate, looking at the definitions and conceptions of inequality, the data showing how it has actually evolved in recent decades, as well as the positions of those who advocate for a more integrative focus on social policy as part of the broader process of European integration. We will contrast their arguments with the views of the proponents of a more traditional 'economy first' approach. In concluding, we will argue that for both political and policy reasons inequality needs to be better defined and understood, and the social dimension of European integration must be strengthened in order the reduce the underlying political and social tensions which threaten to tear the fabric of the European project apart.

Keywords: social inequalities, European Social Model, subsidiarity, sovereignty, economic crisis

INTRODUCTION – BREXIT ON THE SURFACE

In June 2016, the citizens of the United Kingdom decided by a majority vote that their country should leave the European Union. In the debates preceding the referendum, a number of arguments and counterarguments were raised both on the Leave and the Remain sides. Nevertheless, most of the arguments centered on a few core issues revolving around the prosperity of the country, albeit understood in different dimensions.

Although *Brexit* is not specifically the subject of this volume, there is no doubt that the secession of the UK and the political turmoil both in the run-up to the decision and its aftermath aptly illustrate a whole range of problems and fears concerning the future of the European community. We find many overlaps between these concerns and the topics addressed in the different chapters of this book. And this particular chapter also covers a multifaceted issue.

Arguments in favour of Brexit focused on two main tracks: a political-cultural track dominated by concerns about the loss of national sovereignty, and a track focused on socio-economic questions – although the latter are not completely independent of the former. This second track itself has split into several branches. In addition to the rather macro-level issue of the net costs of EU membership, the individual-level differences in income have also emerged in the context of EU membership. The latter phenomenon is the subject of our chapter: financial tensions within the community, the individual and political perceptions and interpretations of these tensions, as well as the potential solutions outlined at the political level.

Many of the issues that frequently came up during the Brexit debate, as well as in other countries, may involve some inherent contradictions, and they may also be impossible to resolve within the current framework of the EU. Addressing internal migration, for instance, faces fundamental obstacles within the current institutional set-up, as the free movement of labour is one of the four freedoms on which the Union as an economic community is built and which is thus inviolable.

On the one hand, some of the problems rooted in individual experiences focus very strongly on immigration, including intra-EU migration, more specifically migration from the post-socialist countries to more developed 'old' Member States. Although the real origins of these concerns are the difficulties faced by the locals in terms of income and employment, this experience is very strongly linked to immigration – something the Leave supporters emphasised a lot.

The key message of the 'anti-immigrant' movement in the UK during the Brexit debate (Golec de Zavala et al. 2017) was that immigrants take jobs away from the locals, depress their wages (Little 2016), and – in a self-contradiction – primarily come to the UK to benefit from the welfare services (Danaj and Wagner 2021; Schweyher et al. 2019). The perceptions about individual welfare and well-being are not necessarily false – in the next section we provide an overview of possible interpretations – but linking economic hardship entirely to immigration is definitely false (Wadsworth et al. 2016).

Another stream of socio-economically themed arguments in favour of Brexit concerned the net costs of EU membership. One of the main claims of the Leave Vote campaign was that the UK supposedly spent an average of £350 million on the EU each week, which the UK could supposedly spend on serving the needs of its own people, such as developing and running the National Health Service (The Guardian 2016).

Although this argument (more precisely the specific amount) was repeatedly refuted during the campaign, the question of Member States' contribution to the EU budget is a relevant one, and also a controversial issue in and of itself. A significant part of the EU budget is spent on the cohesion and development goals, and its primary recipients are the relatively underdeveloped regions. As a result, higher-income countries are typically net contributors and lower-income countries are net beneficiaries of the EU budget.

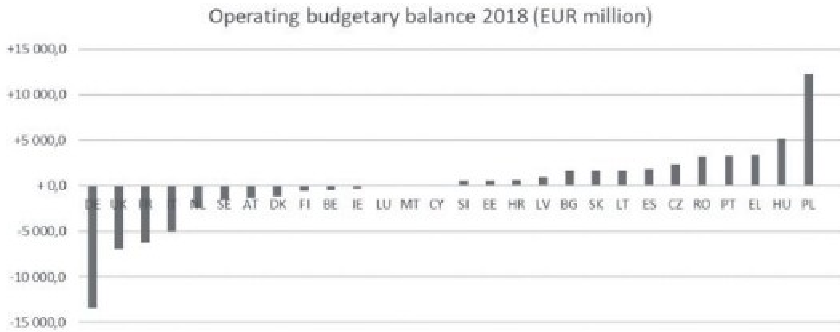

Figure 1: Operating budgetary balance of EU Member States, 2018 (EUR million)
Source of data: European Commission 2019

Figure 1 presents the balance of the net total contributions in euros of individual Member States. The differences seem huge: in 2018, Germany's net contribution to the EU budget amounted to 13 billion euros, the UK's net balance was 7 billion euros, while Poland alone received almost as much as Germany's net surplus, and Hungary netted 5 billions. This may give rise to tensions because even in those EU regions and Member States that are the wealthiest on average there are people who live on low incomes – possibly under worse circumstances than some people in the countries that are, on average, among the poorest. And this phenomenon gives rise to claims like the outflow from the UK of £350 million pounds per week, which became a focal point of the Leave campaign.

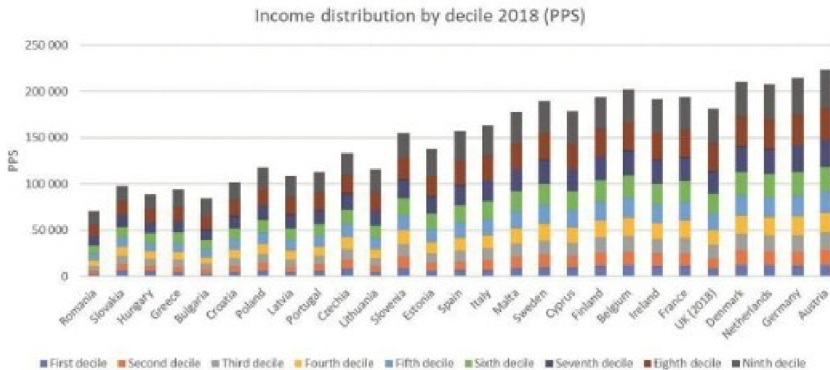

Figure 2: Income distribution by decile in EU Member States, 2018 (PPS)
Source of data: Eurostat 2021c
Note: To construct a decile distribution, people are ordered according to their income. The one-tenth with the lowest income is called the first decile, the second tenth is called second decile, and so on. The richest tenth of the population is called the tenth decile. As there is no maximal value defined for income distribution, the tenth decile is not illustrated. Thresholds of the decile incomes are also called 'cut-off' points.

As an illustration of the abovementioned phenomena, Figure 2 presents the decile distribution of income in the EU Member States in 2018, in PPS, which is the Eurostat's standard of purchasing power parity (a measure of income that adjusts nominal incomes for the impact of different price levels in the various Member States).

It must also be pointed out, however, that the interpretation (and even the proper measurement, for that matter; see Astryan et al. 2020) of the operating budgetary balance is far from being straightforward. Considering relative rather than absolute measures (see Figure 3), we find that while net recipients gain between 1.5 and 4 per cent relative to their GNI, net contributors lose less than 0.5 per cent on the same scale.

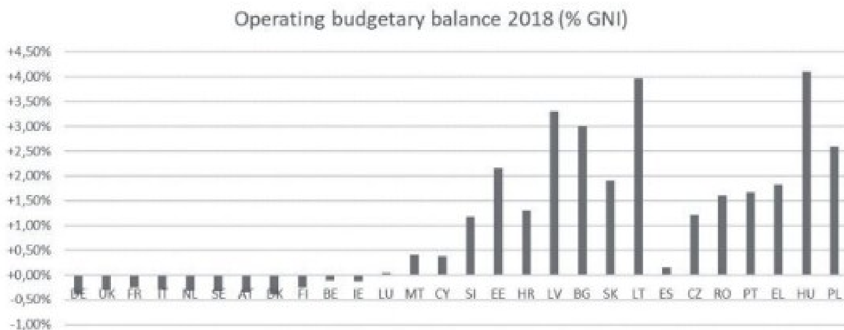

Figure 3: Operating budgetary balance, 2018 (per cent of Gross National Income)
Source of data: European Commission 2019

Despite the significantly different implications of the relative measures, putting these two together – better-off Member States being net supporters of new EU members (which is true), and in the meantime many people from newly-joined countries moving to western Member States as immigrants, taking jobs *and/or* pushing down wages *and/or* exploiting western welfare systems (which is not true; see Wadsworth et al. 2016) – apparently created such a strong sense of injustice that it led to the decision of the UK to leave the EU.

Despite the original claim that this chapter will not be about Brexit, there has been a lot of talk about it thus far. The reason is that Brexit – and especially the debate surrounding it – is a culmination of all the lingering problems of the European Union that had been previously swept under the rug, neglected and denied. Brexit was something nobody had really thought possible, so when it did materialise, after the first shock everyone was suddenly forced to ponder the implications.

In fact, in 2017, a year after the Brexit referendum, the European Parliament held a debate about the issue of "rising inequalities" in the EU (European Parliament 2017). Although this debate was not directly related to Brexit, many of the speeches addressed the political destabilisation and institutional

disintegration of the Union as a potential consequence of rising inequalities. Some of the speakers even referred directly to Brexit. During the debate, inequalities as well as possible solutions were presented from different angles, reflecting the very divergent interpretations and understandings of a problem that is rightfully regarded as highly complex. In the next sections, we partly will rely on this debate as a guideline to provide an overview of how welfare, well-being, and social inequalities in the European Union are perceived, and of the presumed underlying causal relations between them and the relevant policy interventions.

WHAT INEQUALITIES?

In the European Parliament debate about rising socio-economic inequalities, every speaker acknowledged the existence of inequalities, while most MEPs also referred to their rise. The figures they cited to illustrate their arguments, however, also showed that these rely on diverging and in most cases pretty vague definitions of inequalities. Many invoked that a small group of Europeans control the majority of total wealth (which is a relative measure of wealth inequalities and is not limited to the nation-state framework). Others referred to the huge amount of people falling below the poverty line (a relative and country-specific measure of income distribution, as the threshold in at-risk-of-poverty statistics is defined as a share of the median income at a national level).

There were mentions of exclusion and deprivation, which, in turn, are absolute measures and based on a unified definition for the entire Union. In-work poverty, child poverty, and wage inequalities between men and women were also frequently mentioned in the speeches. Most of the claims referred to the EU as a whole, addressing inequality/poverty as a social phenomenon that arises at the level of individual persons, regardless of their country of residence. However, several MEPs also raised the issue of structural differences between Member States in terms of the income, wealth, and opportunities of citizens.

To find a common ground, we must first identify a shared understanding of the state of *welfare*. However, to define inequalities meaningfully in an international arena is far from straightforward, precisely because of the problem of the comparability of national measures, especially considering the tremendous heterogeneity of European countries (Dauderstädt and Keltek 2011). For example, some scholars argue that although it is widely claimed that inequality in Europe has increased significantly following the crisis of 2008 (Bubbico and Freytag 2018), based on figures looking at the entire, that is not in fact the case. Measurement issues are also a concern for the advocates of a more 'social' Europe, that is why the Social Scoreboard for the European Pillars of Social Rights (which we describe in more detail in

the third section) was created, with indicators that are similar to, or partly overlap with the one we use here.[1]

Obviously, there is a trade-off between the clarity and the totality of information. The more data points are presented, the more accurate the picture becomes. At the same time, the increasing amounts of data will also make the information we gain more overwhelming. The disparities we find between individual Member States are potentially enormous, which may offset at the EU level. Also, intertemporal trends can be different not only in scope but also in their long-term trajectory, which may shift over time.

As a compromise, I decided to present data at the country level (wherever that was possible) and at different points in time. Another problem is the actual measurement of socio-economic welfare and its distribution. Different ways of measuring shed light on different aspects of welfare and inequalities. Although these are all valid, they could potentially be telling different stories. In the following, I present a handful of such basic measures, aiming to clarify how they are different and why they are significant.

We can start with a relative measure of inequality: the *income quintile share ratio*, or S80/S20 ratio. This captures the difference between the share of total income earned by the bottom quintiles of the population compared with the top quintile, that is, the respective earning levels of the one-fifth of the population with the lowest and the one-fifth with the highest incomes. If this measure is, say, four, then that number means that on the whole, the richest (in terms of income) fifth of the population earn four times as much in total income than the poorest (for example, if the aggregate income of the poorest is 10 per cent of all income in society, then the richest make 40 per cent of all income).

It is important to point out that this is a relative measure, which means that if there is an absolute change in the income of these groups but no proportional shift, then these figures will not change either. For example, if previously the bottom group earned 10 units, and the top earned 40 units, and the earnings of each grouped doubled to 20 and 80 units respectively, the S80/S20 will not change, even as the absolute gap between the income of the two groups

[1] The headline indicators of the Social Scoreboard fall into three dimensions. Under "Equal opportunities", the headline indicators are: early leavers in education; share of people with digital skills; share of NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) young people; gender employment gap; and income inequality based on quintile share ration (S80/S20). The headline indicators of the category of "Fair working conditions" are: employment rate; unemployment rate; long-term unemployment rate; real gross disposable income of households; and per capita increase. The headline indicators under the "Social protection and inclusion" dimension are AROPE (at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, which is based on relative income poverty, the rate of severe material deprivation, and the share of people living in households with low work intensity) for the total population, and AROPE for children; the impact of social transfers on poverty reduction; disability employment gap; housing cost overburden; share of fewer than three children in childcare; and self-reported unmet needs for medical care (Eurostat 2021i).

increased from 30 to 60 units. Consequently, in and of itself, this Figure tells us nothing about the actual welfare or the income levels of a population, only about how that income, however much it would be, is distributed.

Figure 4: S80/S20 ratio regarding net market income (total population) in 2010, 2015, and 2019, and percentage change between 2010 and 2015 (right scale) in EU Member States

Source of data: Eurostat 2021f

Note: Change is measured as percentage change in share compared to 2010. Countries are ordered according to the magnitude of change.

Three important lessons can be learned from Figure 4. One is that there are vast differences between countries: from a five-fold difference in Czechia to a fifteen-fold gap in the UK, very different levels of baseline inequality can be detected. Second, while some countries experienced an enormous surge in inequalities in the first period, in other countries social disparities even decreased in these relative terms. And third: in most of the countries that have experienced an increase in inequalities, this increase was just temporary. Apart from Bulgaria, Italy, and Luxemburg, incomes were similarly or even more evenly distributed in 2019 than in 2015.

An additional, fourth aspect is revealed only when contrasting income distribution data with information on the magnitude of income, as seen in Figure 5. This Figure presents the actual *PPS-adjusted median income* in European countries, which means that differences in local prices are taken into consideration. A closer examination reveals that an increase in (in-country) income inequalities is not closely related to the magnitude of income. In some countries, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Spain, increasing incomes go hand in hand with rising inequalities, while elsewhere (e.g. Spain, Greece, Cyprus) higher incomes are accompanied by decreasing inequalities. Also, both rising and decreasing incomes can be coupled with decreasing inequalities (examples for the former are Austria, France, and Slovakia; and for the latter Latvia, Lithuania, and the UK).

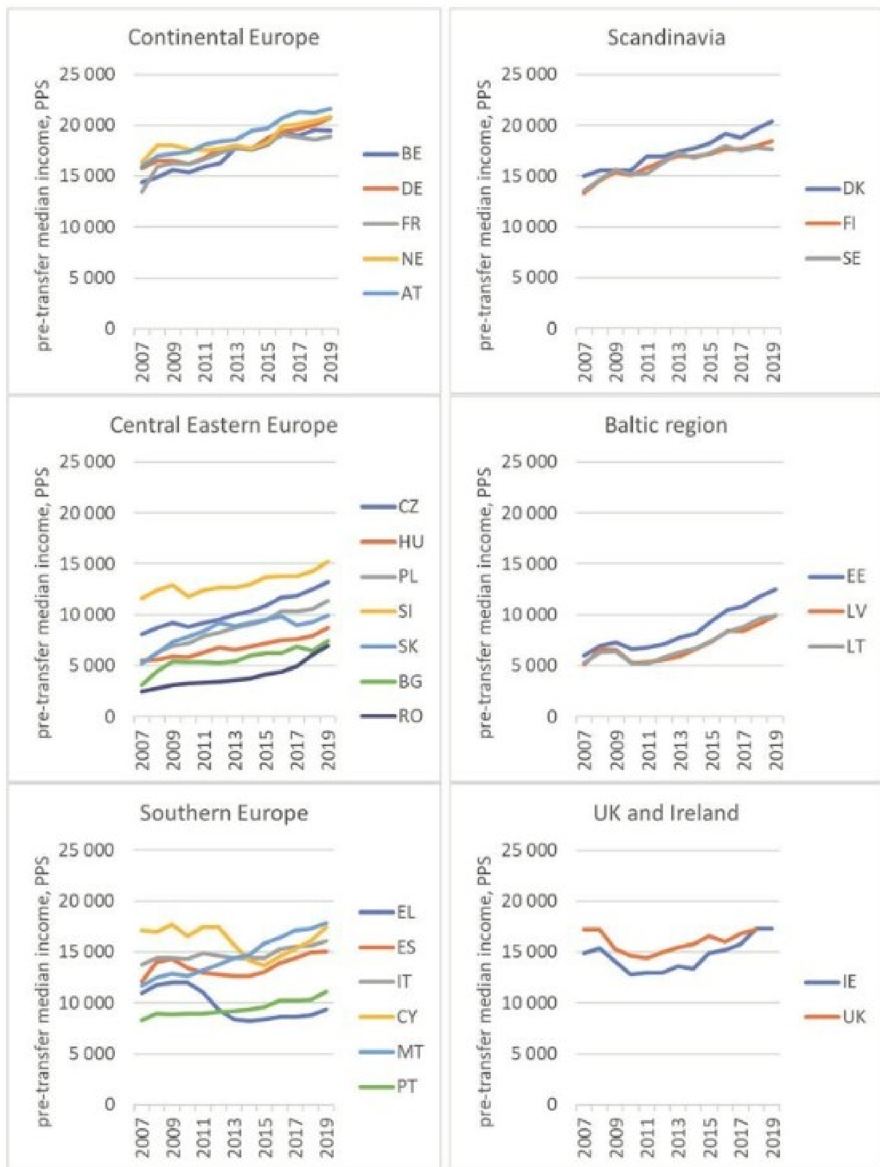

Figure 5: Median income before social transfers in six country groups in the EU, 2007-2019, PPS

Source of data: Eurostat 2021g

Note: All figures refer to the total population and to median equivalised net income, taken into consideration the composition of households. Income levels are expressed in PPS, the Eurostat's version of purchasing parity standard, which filters out country-specific price level differences.

Considering the income figures, we can see that the impact of the financial crisis differed among countries. Typically, the populations of the UK, Ireland, the Baltic states, and some Southern European countries (Spain, Greece, Malta) suffered a drop in their before-transfers income in the years following the crisis, while in the countries of continental Europe and Scandinavia the crisis merely led to a stop in the further rises of people's income – which can, of course, also be a painful experience pending the conditions.

Looking at the trends in incomes and income inequalities – which we posited as being connected to the macro-economic crisis – one also needs to examine how this crisis affected main macroeconomic indicators, specifically GDP and employment. Figure 6 presents average *GDP growth* figures for EU member countries individually for two separate periods: 2008 to 2013, and 2014 to 2019. In the second period, on average, all countries experienced positive growth, while in the first period directly following the crisis, nearly half of them reported a drop in their Gross Domestic Product.

How a global crisis affects an individual country is determined by several macroeconomic factors, including general economic structure, and the strength and openness of the economy. Also, the effect of a drop in the GDP is likely to affect personal incomes differently. Juxtaposing the results in Figure 6, respectively, we find that while in most countries the drop in the GDP also resulted in declining incomes, there are exceptions like Italy, Portugal, Finland, and Hungary. Also, in some cases incomes dropped even though there was no concomitant drop in the GDP decline, such as in the case of the UK.

It also needs to be noted, however, that these GDP growth averages offset the year-to-year details. For example, the fact that in the UK in 2009 – the hardest year of the crisis for many countries – GDP fell by more than 4 per cent. And while in other countries, for example in Germany, which experienced an almost 6 per cent decline in the same year, this was offset by a relatively robust recovery and rising GDP growth rates in the subsequent years (4.18 per cent in 2010 and 3.96 per cent in 2011), in the UK the GDP growth rate was only 2.07 per cent in 2010 and a mere 1.28 per cent in 2011. This was enough to yield a positive average value for the period from 2009 to 2013, but it nevertheless resulted in radically different social consequences. Once again, these diverging outcomes are deeply rooted in the differing structures and situations of the respective economies, as well as the distinct policy approaches applied at the national level.

For employment, I present the *employment rate* rather than the rate of unemployment. I do so because unemployment figures fail to capture discouraged workers and others who quit the labour market for reasons that are not independent of the economic situation. Also, Figure 7 presents the relevant values for two individual years (2009 and 2019), along with average values for a selected three years' period. More detailed data at our disposal have shown that these three years marked the peak of the crisis with respect to employment.

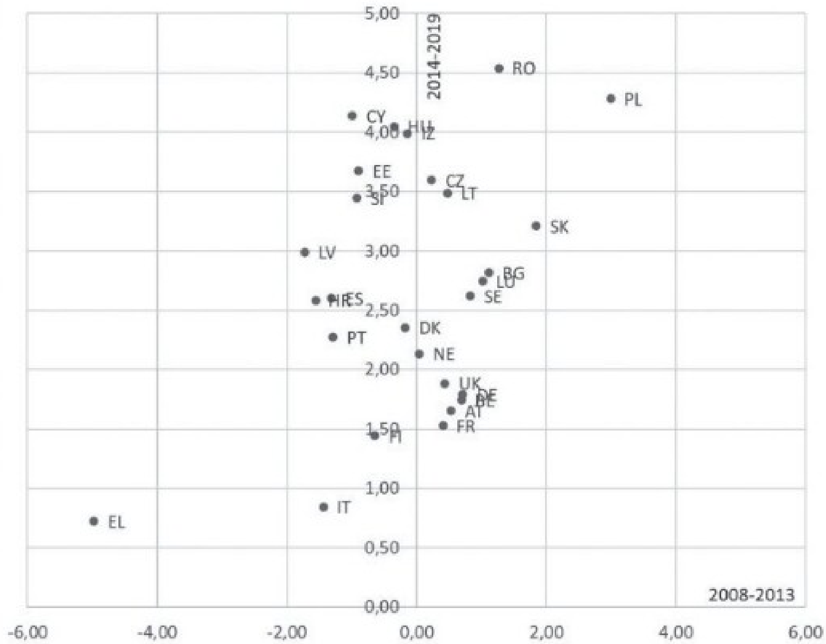

Figure 6: Average GDP growth between 2008-2013 (horizontal scale) and 2014-2019 (vertical scale) in the EU, in percentage
Source of data: Eurostat 2021d
Note: For reasons of convenience, Ireland and Malta are not presented, as their being outliers decreases the visibility of the Figure. GDP growth in Ireland for 2008-2013 and 2014-2019 on average was -0.92 and 9.8 per cent, wile in Malta 3.5 and 7.31 per cent respectively.

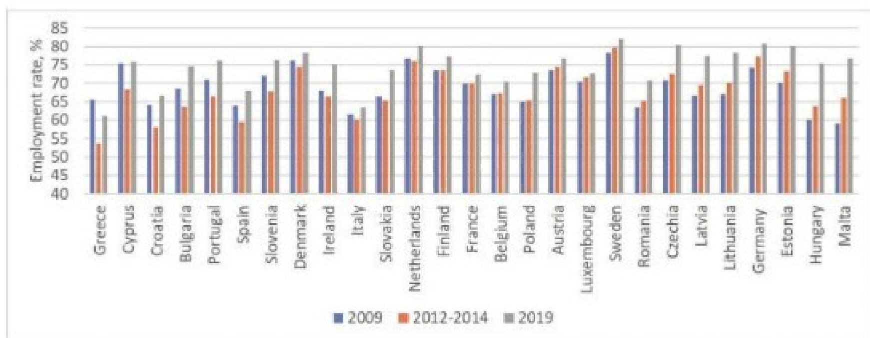

Figure 7: Employment rates in EU Member States, age 20-64
Source of data: Eurostat 2021e

What the above data show once again is the great heterogeneity of effects and trends, with employment decreasing in roughly a third of the countries after the crisis (left side of the Figure), stagnating in another third, and increasing

in the rest. Again, the underlying differences stem from differences in both the macroeconomic situations in the countries affected as well as their divergent policies. We also should note the vast differences between employment levels in various countries, which are independent of the crisis: high employment rates in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden (around 75 to 80 per cent) stand in contrast to significantly lower rates of employment in southern countries (e.g. Greece, Spain, Italy).

When European politicians speak of inequalities, they probably do not refer simply to the issue of some groups having much higher incomes than others. The problem they actually address is twofold. On the one hand, they think about people who lack decent incomes and live under adverse financial circumstances. On the other hand – and closely related to the former – they take issues with the unequal distribution of opportunities. To capture this, the latest two Figures display data concerning poverty and deprivation – both are related to some form of exclusion, or at least the risk of exclusion, still representing very different approaches to relative and absolute deprivation.

Figure 8 presents the *at-risk-of-poverty rate* in individual EU countries at three distinct points in time. On the one hand, this is a relative measure of poverty, which defines people as poor (or being at risk of poverty) if their income is less than that of the 'middle' person in the income distribution in the same country (called the median income). The problem with this indicator is that it provides no information about the actual material circumstances of 'poor' people, it only states that they have less (or equal) income than the 60 per cent of the median, who may well be themselves better-off persons given the high enough levels of overall income.

On the other hand, as this measure is defined at the national level, people considered as 'poor' in one country could be far above the poverty threshold in other countries with the same level of welfare – and vice versa, people high above the median income in a country may well fall into the category of 'poor' persons in another. The concept behind this measure, relative inequality, undoubtedly affects the quality and cohesion of a society (Wilkinson 2009). Still, the data should be treated with caution.

Two Figures are shown below, one referring to the total population and another referring to children below the age of 16, while both referring to the three different points in time (2008, 2014, and 2019). In both Figures, countries are ranked according to the respective changes in at-risk-of-poverty rates between 2008 and 2014. Obviously, the poverty rates for children are higher in most countries, albeit not in all of them.

Also, the underlying economic turmoil did not necessarily result in increasing poverty rates. However, taking the definition of this indicator into consideration, it does not mean necessarily that no one's situation has deteriorated: lower median incomes also imply lower values in the absolute value of the poverty threshold (60 per cent of the median income), which is

also falling. Moreover, this relative measure says nothing about the relative or the absolute situation of those below the poverty threshold.

Figure 8: At-risk-of-poverty rate in EU Member States (per cent of given population, based on 60 per cent of median income)
Source of data: Eurostat 2021a
Note: At-risk-of-poverty rate is defined as the share of people living in households with equalised, after-transfers income lower than 60 per cent of the median income of the given population.

Examining these Figures in more detail, we once again find several distinct trajectories in the various countries. In some countries, in the immediate aftermath of the crisis both the overall and the child poverty rates increased temporarily, only to then drop again to their original levels, although they remain slightly elevated in several countries (e.g. Hungary, Spain, Greece, Romania). Some other countries experienced a constant but moderate increase in either the poverty rates of both segments, or at the level of the total population only (e.g. the Netherlands, France, Czechia, Bulgaria, Italy, Malta). Regarding the total population, Lithuania, Latvia, and the UK, while regarding children only, the UK alone was where, following a decrease, the rates increased between 2014 and 2019, too.

Figure 9 presents a significantly different approach. *Material deprivation*, which is based on a definitive list of certain attributes, typically goods and

activities which a person does or does not have access to in his/her life, represents the concept of absolute deprivation or poverty, and its definition is exactly the same across the whole community. That explains the massive disparities we observe in the Figure: the share of people living in material deprivation is several orders of magnitude higher in the worst-off Member States than in the most well-off countries. Once again, the countries are arranged according to the changes in the rate of deprivation between 2008 and 2013 in absolute terms. As emerges from the Figure, Hungary has experienced the greatest increase in the rate of deprivation, while Poland has registered the greatest decrease.

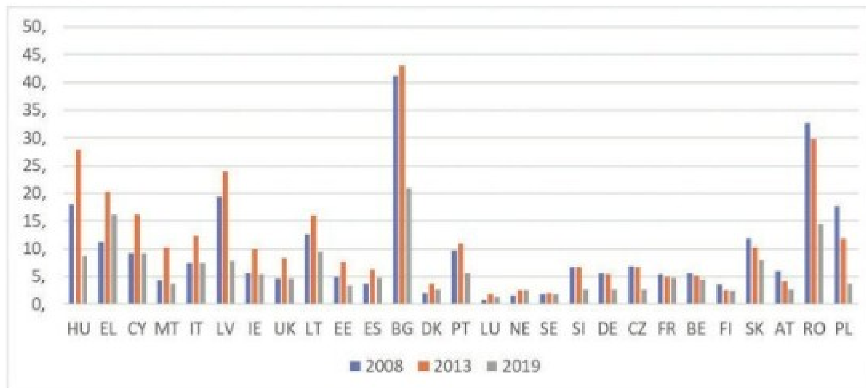

Figure 9: Severe material deprivation rate in EU Member States (per cent of total population)
Source of data: Eurostat 2021h

Just like in the case of the poverty rate, the increases were temporary, and in many cases, they were followed by an even greater decline (see Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Portugal). In other countries, the rate of deprivation rate returned to its original level after a temporary increase (e.g. Cyprus, Italy, Ireland, the UK). Despite their relatively high deprivation rates, many Eastern European countries have managed to avoid any increase in the rate of deprivation and, in fact, experienced a constant decline of this indicator over the years (e.g. Slovakia, Romania, Poland).

However, the most obvious message of this Figure is that there are vast differences between the countries we measured. This is the problem of internal inequalities within the Union. Although this problem is rarely mentioned, it is probably the most potent source of tensions at the EU level. At the same time, however, we also observed a gradual decline in the differences between countries (thus, the average difference between deprivation rates in 2019 was much lower than in 2008).

To summarise, we can say that the financial crisis of 2008 has indeed put substantial pressure on European societies, causing poverty as well as inequality to rise in many – though not nearly all – of them. Taking a closer

look at the figures for the UK, these figures could at least partly explain the social tensions that led to the Brexit decision. Nevertheless, one must also point out that other countries experienced similar or even worse outcomes without the same consequences.

Relative poverty rate considers a person poor if his/her income is lower than a specific threshold, defined in accordance with other people's income. The most common relative poverty measure is the share of those in a country whose income is below the 60 per cent (or 50 per cent, or other) of the median income in the given country.

Material deprivation rate is an absolute measure of poverty. We talk about deprivation if a person cannot afford the consumption of certain goods and services, or not in the expected quality. Defining items of material deprivation in the EU are, for example, hardships to pay unexpected expenses, affording a one-week annual holiday away from home, a meal involving meat, chicken, or fish every second day, or the adequate heating of a dwelling. Also, the lack of ownership of certain durable goods like a washing machine, colour television, telephone, or car adds here.

Median income is the income level dividing the population into two: one half of the population has less, and one half of the population has more. Or, if we put the whole population in a row according to their income, the person standing exactly in the middle of the row will have the median income.

Gini coefficient is an indicator of the inequality of the distribution of income or wealth in a society. Gini is a single number between 0 and 1. The higher its value is, the more unequal the distribution is.

European Social Model (ESM): "The Commission's 1994 White Paper on social policy described a 'European social model' in terms of values that include democracy and individual rights, free collective bargaining, the market economy, equal opportunities for all, and social protection and solidarity. The model is based on the conviction that economic progress and social progress are inseparable: Competitiveness and solidarity have both been taken into account in building a successful Europe for the future" (eurofund.europa.eu).

European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is an initiative launched by the European Commission, with the very ambitious aim to bring back the social dimension of the EU and rebalance economic and social considerations. Its goal is to serve as a guide towards efficient employment and social outcomes facing challenges affecting the fulfillment of people's essential needs. The Pillar does not give the Union more power or competences. However, all EU countries agreed to implement the Pillar's twenty principles (see more at https://ec.europa.eu; https://www.epr.eu).

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a regular payment paid by public bodies and received by everyone in a society in order to provide a minimal income to each society member.

Box 1: Inequalities and Social Europe – main concepts

DEBATE ON CAUSES AND RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS – THE CASE OF SOCIAL EUROPE

Given the wide variety in the ways in which actors at the European level have defined this problem, it is only to be expected that their perceptions of its roots and potential solutions differ as well. In this section, we present the main lines of the arguments concerning inequalities, and in the process we introduce the concept and evolution of a Social Europe.

Considering the many different and often contradictory arguments that arise during these debates, even the previously clear boundaries between the respective positions of political coalitions seem to blur (Vesan and Corti 2019). Both the directions and the suggested areas of action diverge substantially. They range from completing the integration of social welfare systems to reducing their current level of integration; from long-term and indirect actions concerning education and the development of skills to immediate actions, such as introducing a universal basic income (UBI) in the euro area.

The European Union came into existence with the general goal of ensuring peace and stability for the citizens of the participating countries, in order to avoid the future recurrence of such major traumas as the Second World War (Dodo 2014). However, how these widely accepted goals could be realised has been the subject of a seemingly endless debate between advocates of the economic and the social dimensions.

To put it simply, the former are arguing for economic liberalism and believe that removing all possible barriers from the market and intensifying economic integration will produce economic prosperity, which, thanks to workfare and the trickle-down effect, creates welfare for everyone. Besides a *laissez-faire* perspective, this group also advocates the sovereignty of Member States and caution in further tightening the social bonds of integration (Niklasson 2014). The latter group, however, who are for an enhanced European authority and deepening integration, emphasise that society is more than the economy or than employment, and they point out how the strictly economic focus may fail societies, deepen social inequalities, ruin cohesion, and cause mass dissatisfaction, restlessness, and instability.

Nevertheless, the actual integration process has predominantly focused on the economic aspects, and it has been of the neoliberal, free market-focused kind from the very beginning. Consequently, most of the instruments deployed served the removal of the obstacles in the way of free trade within the community's borders (Whyman et al. 2014). Although the social pillar of Europe has been gradually expanded over the past decades, it has always been subordinated – or, rather, it was defined to serve – the economic cooperation and the single market, which were seen as the foundation of the EU (Plomien 2018), similarly to the policies enacted in most other areas.

The choreography of the economic and the social debate in European discourse is such that the economic dimension is considered as the baseline until the point when some crisis shifts attention to the issues related to social tensions, resulting in urgent demands from pro-social actors calling on the Union to act in order to mitigate these problems. And the EU usually does take action – not necessarily in ways that are seen as satisfactory by all, however.

Certain employment-related rights were mentioned already in the Treaty of Rome, along with the common goal of establishing the European Social Fund (Dodo 2014). At the same time, however, these served more as guidelines for the Member States than as compulsory and enforceable regulations (Niklasson 2014). As the breadth and depth of the economic integration intensified over the decades, the number of social areas affected by some kind of regulation also increased. Nevertheless, they focused almost exclusively on employment, and furthermore they took the form of non-binding guidelines.

Following the Paris Summit in 1972, where EC leaders acknowledged the "imbalance between the economic health (growth) of the Community and the quality of life of its citizens (social dimension)" (Dodo 2014), the Community's first Social Action Programme was launched. It followed three main objectives: promoting/providing full employment, providing an improvement in living and working conditions, and increasing workers' participation in the industry.

Not much later, after the first enlargement of the EC in 1975, the European Regional Development Fund was established. Its objective is to mitigate the regional disparities within the community. The Single European Act in 1986 reaffirmed this, by emphasising the need for reducing disparities between regions and increasing economic and social cohesion.

In 1989, the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights was presented by the European Commission, and it was subsequently enshrined in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty as the Social Chapter of the Union. The areas which the relevant regulations extended to were health and safety, gender equality, collective bargaining and workers' rights, social security and social exclusion – these policies clearly bear the signature of the ideologically dominant workfare approach.

Controversially, it was precisely the same Maastricht Treaty which gave rise to the European Monetary Union and paved the way to the introduction of the euro, one of the most important projects of the EU so far. As a consequence, in Maastricht, the asymmetry between the economic and social dimensions of integration was reinforced by elevating monetary policy entirely to the European level, even as most of the fiscal policy prerogatives remain in the hands of national governments, albeit with strict fiscal policy regulations (De la Porte and Heins 2016).

By the 2010s, the Community had developed distinct policies in several areas that can be regarded as 'social', such as education, public health, consumer protection, culture, and employment. Among these, employment policy is the

area that is most closely connected to economic welfare and well-being (even though all the others are also undoubtedly related but to differing extents and degrees). The employment policy, introduced by the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 as a substitute for the Maastricht Treaty Protocol on Social Policy, gave the Union the responsibility to support the Member States in reaching their employment goals, as well as acting as the guardians of certain social and employment rights, for example regarding working conditions and safety, gender equality, or social bargaining.

The 2010s led to the deepest crisis in the history of the EU. The enlargement of 2004 increased the levels of inequalities between the Member States and posed a serious challenge to the entire community and especially its cohesion policy – as was expected. What was not expected, however, was the financial crisis that began in 2007/2008, which shook the entire Union, exposing it to a dual pressure: a pressure on societies, on the one hand, with increasing unemployment and decreasing incomes, and, on the other, on the euro, which had to be protected to avoid a further escalation of the crisis. The strict austerity measures, which were mainly the results of the efforts to stave off a currency crisis, intensified the social pressure on governments and societies, especially in the southern part of the EU.

This also resulted in increasing mistrust and scepticism about the Union in the populations of the Member States (European Parliament 2016). Over time, an increasing number of actors began to call for actions to advance social equity, from international economic organisations like the IMF or the OECD, all the way to the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. In the surrounding debate, the desire for a more active European policy, going beyond the mere expression of goodwill and principles and offering concrete and targeted instruments to address the underlying problems, moved to the fore.

This gave rise to a social investment package announced by the European Commission in 2013 to mitigate the social impact of the crisis, which was followed by the enactment of the *European Pillar of Social Rights* (EPSR) in 2017. The EPSR consists of a list of non-binding rights and principles, aiming to "support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems", tackling evolving social challenges and changes in view of the newly emerging types of employment stemming from the digital revolution and the rise of new technologies. The objective of the EPSR is to foster "a renewed process of convergence towards better working and living conditions across Europe" (Altafin and Lamer 2018), although the realisation of these is optional and remain in the competence of the Member States.

Some in the European political as well as academic arena welcomed and acknowledged the EPSR as the sign of the EU putting the social cohesion back into the center of the integration process, and they also saw it as an appropriate instrument to this end. As *Marianne Thyssen,* a Flemish christian democrat politician and the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights at the time put it:

> *Lastly, we must respond to the rise in inequalities by boosting our social policies. That is why we proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Pillar's principles range from wages to social protection systems, from minimum income to gender equality, from childcare to old-age income, and from health care to access to housing.* (European Parliament 2017)

Others, however, expressed strong doubts, and such reservations were aired from different sides of the political aisle: conservative and liberal politicians alike disagree with the method, insisting that the real solution would be not to tinker with social policy but to increase the flexibility of labour markets, increase competitiveness, and cut taxes. They believe that such measures would put Europe back on track. Others, mostly on the left of the political spectrum, believe that the EPSR in its proposed form will be a mere fig leaf, and they either refer to the Pillars as merely symbolic instruments (Börner 2019) or claim that as the EPSR is not more than "the summary of the EU's current acquis social, no major improvements can be expected" (Seikel 2021).

Another stream of strong opposition to the EPSR specifically, as well as to the general idea that the current social problems of the Union should and could be solved through social policy measures, stems from those who stress that the deterioration in social cohesion is primarily the result of austerity measures and forced fiscal restrictions for the sake of monetary stability, which were enacted during the hardest years of the crisis (Seikel 2021). Consequently, this view holds, it is the rules of the European Monetary Union as well as of EU-level macroeconomic policy that need to be reconsidered.

Some analysts argue that "the main imbalances between economic and social priorities at the EU level risk remaining basically untouched by the Social Pillar as such" (Vesan and Corti 2019). Leaving aside for the time being whether these are adequate steps towards a more content Union with more popular support, or not, the insistence on national sovereignty regarding redistributive policies is basically blocking any real active social policy measure at the community level (Notermans 2019). This issue is often raised by a variety of actors, as it was the case also in the European Parliament during the debate on inequalities in 2017 (European Parliament 2017).

Social policy is without a doubt one of the policy areas that – apart from the abovementioned dimensions mostly related to employment and the transferability of social rights – have remained to the largest extent within the regulatory competence of Member States. When trying to define the European Social Model, some argue that even today this is no more than the sum of national social systems rather than a jointly developed entity (Seikel 2021). Even in the mid-2010s, theoreticians pointed out how vaguely defined the European Social Model was – which might even be a deliberately used technique to avoid a direct conflict between conservative (typically against) and social democratic (typically for) forces, as the prevailing model allows all

of them to see the existing contours of a Social Europe in a more appealing light from their respective perspectives (Whyman et al. 2014).

Apart from principles and theoretical considerations, some claims against a more binding and active social policy are also practical. As an Eastern European conservative MEP put it: "The countries admitted to the EU after 2004 … still cannot afford the same level of spending for social purposes" (European Parliament 2017).

In the meantime, while many supporters expressed their fears concerning the EPSR being an EU "business as usual" initiative (Roy and Kitzmann 2020), some elements of the Pillar may gain special attention. One such is the issue of the guaranteed minimum income (Principle 14). In the ESPR, the term refers to social benefits acting as the last resort of the safety net in Member States, provided on a discretional basis for those in need only. However, the advances that have happened since the introduction of the Pillar point into a direction that involves more proactive and fewer optional social regulations in the EU (Konle-Seidl 2021). This is especially true of the EP's December 2020 resolution on a "strong social Europe for Just Transition", in which the Parliament called for legally enforceable social rights (European Parliament 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis has undoubtedly reframed the underlying conditions as well as the perception of the idea of Social Europe, and it has most probably played a significant role in the turn towards a greater awareness of the social dimension of integration. Nevertheless, some – mostly progressive/green/social democratic parties and theoreticians – propose an alternative and long-debated approach, to wit the *universal basic income* (UBI) (Van Parijs 2013; Neves and Merill 2020). This alternative approach aims to enhance social inclusion and mitigate inequalities and the resulting social tension. On the whole, the objective is to keep the community viably together.

The arguments for the introduction of an unconditional UBI are far from being idealistic, though. Instead of centering on social and equity, they are rooted in the extreme vulnerability of the euro zone: the lack of important buffering mechanisms as substitutes for the lack of the wiggle room available to Member States from exchange rate adjustments; the problems arising from internal migration within the EU; the problem of the four freedoms[2] eroding the redistributive capacities of Member States; and finally a seemingly more symbolic issue, namely the citizens' sense of belonging (Van Parijs 2013). There is no question that this initiative interferes with many of the abovementioned concerns and raises several issues, and as such it remains controversial across Europe (Benecke 2020). However, it also has clear advantages, starting with its complex nature in terms of its consequences not only in the social realm, but also in that of the economy.

[2] The free movement of capital, people, goods, and services across internal EU borders.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we focused on the issue of social inequalities, welfare, and well-being in the EU, and the debates regarding the policy, and especially social policy measures the community could take in order to handle these. We presented the most frequently used diverging definitions as well as the current main streams of political debates.

Clearly, several relevant areas had to be omitted. We did not cover the strictly macroeconomic aspects of welfare, how economic growth and economic policy may affect it; neither did we present the welfare effects and critiques towards the utilisation of the structural and cohesion funds, the main tools of the Union to mitigate regional inequalities.

From the debates about the role and weight of the social dimension in European policy, a deep controversy takes shape. On the one hand, greater influence of the EU on the formulation of social policy measures currently defined at a national level would sharply contradict the current principles of subsidiarity and national sovereignty, and would question national fiscal policy as a possibility. However, on the other hand, the lack of such measures, considering the enormous income disparities between the Member States, could lead to an increasing disintegration of the community.

Besides the fact that inequality needs to be more clearly defined and understood, the only certain point is that the status quo in the EU is very probable to be about to change. The integration either gets further enhanced in order to mitigate the underlying political and social tensions, or these tensions might even tear the European project apart.

Key concepts and terms

At-risk-of-poverty rate
Employment rate
European Pillar of Social Rights
European Social Model (Social Europe)
Income quintile share ratio
Material deprivation
Median income
Social inequality
Universal basic income
Welfare

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Demography and migration

Zoltán Simon and Tamás Dezső Ziegler

Europe's demographic decline is in the limelight of contemporary public debates and is a major source of concern in a number of countries across the continent. Some public intellectuals warn against a "collective suicide" of European societies in the light of low birth rates and a rapidly ageing population. These dynamics also feed into key policy challenges, such as a shrinking labour force in the European economy, or the sustainability of existing public health and pension systems, but may also create political tensions – between older and younger generations, for instance – in the future. Moreover, they have negative implications on Europe's posture in the global arena. A potential answer to shrinking and ageing societies could be more openness towards immigration into Europe. Nevertheless, as migration is closely intertwined with other highly sensitive topics, such as identity, security, or social integration, it has also become a strongly emotional matter in public debates, which is not only politicised but also instrumentalised by some political actors. In the lack of a proper balance between these various factors, migration has the potential to become a major source of disruptive disintegration dynamics within the European Union and in European societies.

Keywords: demographic decline, ageing societies, immigration, Leitkultur, politicisation

DEMOGRAPHY AND POLITICS

— Zoltán Simon[1] —

If we established the top list of topics associated with trouble in contemporary European public debates, *demographic decline* would certainly be a strong candidate. Europeans have heard about demography as a "time bomb" of population explosion at faraway places for decades (see e.g. Ehrlich and

[1] The views and comments presented in this subchapter are part of the author's individual research and publication activities, and do not represent in any way or to any extent the positions of the institution he is an official of.

Brower 1968; Emmott 2013). Today, they hear about demographic troubles in their own continent, which, against this backdrop, is all the more frightening.

Moreover, the problems they hear about are not part of their perceptible present, but of their (children's) prospected future, making their unease even more difficult to appease. The fact that we have no personal influence on these developments at an individual level gives the impression of facing the 'forces of nature' or 'destiny'. Nevertheless, as demographers never omit to underline, demography is not destiny: we are not the victims but the masters of our demographic future.

We will only focus here on basic demographic trends in contemporary European societies and their impacts on European politics. When doing so, we follow *Massimo Livi-Bacci*'s diagnosis, who identified decreasing mortality and increasing life expectancy; declining fertility rates below the replacement level; rapidly ageing societies; the end to emigration from, and the beginning of immigration to our continent; and the related changes in social norms and behaviours as the core components of Europe's ongoing demographic transformation (Livi-Bacci 2000, 166 quoted in Berend 2010, 222).

a. Demographic transition

In order to understand the present European demography, we need to look into its past through the concept of *demographic transition* (even if this concept is being increasingly challenged among demographers). The classic model of demographic transition is composed of four stages. Its early phase is characterised by high birth and death rates in a relatively stable community (phase one). Then, improving life conditions lead to decreasing mortality, which combined with continued high fertility results in a rapidly growing population (phase two). In the next step, dropping fertility converges with low mortality, and population growth slows down (phase three). Finally, a new balance between low mortality and fertility rates produces a relatively stable but ageing population (phase four).

Europe was the first continent that started its demographic transition back in the 18th century, and has basically completed it. Some demographers talk about a second, or even a third demographic transition today. The second transition is understood as a new cycle of demographic change, with fertility rates well below the replacement level, leading to a declining and ageing population; while *David Coleman* describes an eventual third transition as "a change in the composition of the population itself, the universalisation of new ethnic diversity, leading possibly to the replacement of the original population by new ones through immigration and differential fertility" – adding that this "may never truly arrive" (Coleman 2012, 191, 193). However, this scenario is already present in the imagination of the European public, with a significant political impact.

b. Demographic decline

It would be difficult to deny that European societies are not in their best shape ever. *Iván T. Berend* speaks of "dramatic demographic changes" (Berend 2010, 222), while *Paul Demeny* warns against a "collective national and civilizational suicide" (Demeny 2016, 111). We cannot ignore, however, that European countries, including EU Member States, show marked differences in their demographic features and dynamics. Some countries, such as France, Ireland, the Netherlands, or Belgium, are on a more sustainable track, while others are facing major challenges, making it difficult to identify pan-European solutions in this field (for EU measures see European Commission 2020).

A key factor presented to, and perceived by, Europeans as dramatic news is the low level of birth and *fertility rates* across the continent. These data are sometimes interpreted as an irreversible and irreparable trend, which some call the "low-fertility trap" (Harper 2018, 44). Well, the crude reality is that fertility rate is above the replacement level (2.1.) in no single EU Member State today. In fact, none of them is even close to it: in 2019, France had the highest rate with 1.86, while eleven EU countries were below 1.5, with Malta at 1.14 (!), followed by Spain (1.23) and Italy (1.27) in the so-called 'lowest low' spectrum.

As a matter of fact, there has been no EU-27 society above the replacement level for a while. In 1990, Cyprus (2.41), Sweden (2.13), and Ireland (2.11) were still above the bar, before experiencing a steep fall in the decade that followed (to 1.64, 1.54, and 1.89, respectively). All this against the backdrop of a decline in European fertility rates since the 1960s. This trend seemed to hit the ground around the millennium, with the EU-27 average falling to the 1.44–1.46 spectrum, while it has been oscillating in the 1.53–1.57 margin over the past years. As a consequence, the number of live births in the EU-27 area (4.15 million in 2019) is fewer than two-thirds of the peak data (6.69 million) from 1964, despite the fact that the combined population of current EU Member States has grown by around one-quarter during the same period (EPRS 2021, 9).

Nevertheless, in reality, the Union has never experienced a shrinking population so far (we ignore Brexit here). In January 2021, the EU-27 population was estimated at 447 million people. This is projected to slightly grow in the coming years, and peak around 450 million in 2026, before declining to 441 million in 2050, and 416 million in 2100. However, the COVID-19 pandemic may have an earlier disruptive effect through increased mortality, which resulted in the loss of 300,000 lives in 2020 and in decreased birth rates (see e.g. *Le Monde* 2021).

Fertility rate is the average number of children born to women during their lifetime in a population during a certain period.

Life expectancy at birth is the average number of years that people born at a specific moment can expect to live if subjected to the same mortality conditions of the time of their birth in a population.

Median age is the compiled overall average age of a population at a specific moment.

Old-age dependency ratio compares the number of those aged 65 or over to the number of those aged 15–64 in a population at a specific moment.

Replacement level is the fertility rate required in a population to exactly reproduce its size from one generation to the next, which is defined at 2.1 children per woman in developed countries.

Box 2: Mini glossary of basic demographic terms

Low birth and fertility rates are accompanied by dropping mortality rates and rapidly increasing *life expectancy* across Europe. Life expectancy at birth in the Union was estimated at 81.3 years in 2019, reaching 84 years for women and 78.5 years for men.[2] Compared to 2002, when these data became available for all EU Member States for the first time, life expectancy has increased for both women and men by 2.8 and 3.9 years respectively, or by 3.3 years on average since (EPRS 2021, 6).

On a broader time horizon, the picture is all the more striking: if you compare present data to those of the early 1960s (1960–65: average 69.9 years, 72.4 years for women, 67 years for men), you realise that Europeans live more than a decade longer nowadays than they did just sixty years ago (EPRS 2021, 7). Extending a population's life expectancy by ten years in just half a century is an unprecedented achievement in human history, but without ready-made recipes on how to deal with it. Moreover, this trend is not expected to abate. Data from the UN 2019 World Population Prospects suggest that life expectancy in the EU-27 area will exceed 85 years by the 2045–2050, and 90 years by the 2095–2100 period (quoted in EPRS 2021, 7).

Dropping fertility rates plus increasing life expectancy equal a rapidly *ageing* society. The median age of the EU-27 population was 38.4 years in 2001, and increased to 43.7 years in 2019 – by 5.3 years in less than two decades (EPRS 2021, 2). The data of a median age of 29 years from 1950, and 33 years from the early 1980s make this even more astonishing. Yet, this trend is not foreseen to abate, either. In fact, the median age in the EU-27 area is

[2] See Eurostat data at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Mortality_and_life_expectancy_statistics#Life_expectancy_at_birth (last accessed in July 2021)

projected to increase by 4.5 years, to reach 48.2 years, by 2050 – with a few EU countries expecting a median age above 50 years by then, to be joined by many others in the decades that will follow (EPRS, 2021).

An ageing society also means a shrinking *working-age* population. The European Commission projects a decline of 15.5 per cent – around 30 million people – in the Union's labour force by 2070, the bulk of this in the period after 2030 (European Commission 2021, 5). A decreasing labour force has already been a main driver of immigration to – and mobility within – Europe, and it is expected to remain a strong pull factor in the future.

Finally, ageing societies with a declining working-age population means growing *dependency* ratios. From our European perspective, the evolution of the so-called old-age dependency ratio is of particular importance. This data gives us an indication of the number of economically active people between the age of 15 and 64 for every elderly and economically typically inactive person above the age of 65 in the same society – which is crucial for the financing of pension and public health systems in particular.

The EU-27 old-age dependency ratio was at 23.4 per cent in 2001, which climbed to 26.3 per cent in 2010, and 32 per cent in 2020, and is projected to further increase to 39.1 per cent by 2030, before crossing the 50 per cent threshold by the middle, and reach 57.1 per cent by the end of the century.[3] This implies that the Union would go from about three working-age people for every person aged over 65 today to only less than two by 2070 (European Commission 2021, 4). Adding young people, this means that by 2080 there would be around five economically active working-age (15–64) people for every four younger and older citizens in EU-27 societies, creating a fundamentally different reality for upholding and financing our welfare systems (EPRS 2021, 6).

c. Policy and political challenges

All these data have far-reaching political implications. In *Neil Howe*'s and *Richard Jackson*'s view, "demographic change shapes political power like water shapes rock. Up close the force looks trivial, but viewed from a distance of decades or centuries it moves mountains" (Howe and Jackson 2012, 37). In any case, we may agree with *Ian Goldin* and *Robert Muggah* that a coming key challenge for governments in developed countries, and in Europe in particular, in the coming period will be to learn "how to cope with 100-year-life societies" (Goldin and Muggah 2020, 290).

This will certainly require creative thinking, political courage, and solid support among citizens – against the backdrop of shaken societies, which

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[3] See Eurostat data at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00198/default/table?lang=en and https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00200/default/table?lang=en (last accessed in July 2021)

usually prioritise stability over risk-taking and the status quo over reforms. In *Danni Dorling*'s and *Stuart Gietel-Basten*'s observation:

> *Today there are no shortage of demographic bombs presented as nascent threats, with their fuses already burning: ageing time bombs, migration time bombs, delayed fertility time bombs; you name it, there's a bomb for it. The political potency of these metaphors can be huge.* (Dorling and Gietel-Basten 2018, 7)

Contemporary European political challenges rooted in demographic change are multilayered, composed of policy, political, and external dimensions. On the *policy* side, they bring into question the very sustainability of our economic and welfare systems in their current shapes. Or, as Demeny states more explicitly: "this drastically reduced population would have an age distribution inconsistent with economic sustainability" (Demeny 2016, 111).

From a *public health* angle, while people live longer, which is a major achievement to celebrate, these extra years are quite 'expensive' at a collective level due to increased needs for medical support and personal care at an advanced age – against the background of already troubled public health systems in a number of European countries.

Another main challenge is to ensure appropriate income for the elderly through prolonged work activities, own savings and assets, and *pensions* in particular. When you raise this subject with university students, many of them express deep pessimism about their future pension prospects. They are right, pension system reforms will be a key challenge for their generation if they wish to preserve hard-won achievements against the backdrop of a number of state (usually pay-as-you-go) and private pension systems already stretched today.

Still, these are problems relatively 'easy' to solve as a matter of innovative planning and vigorous implementation (through redefining what we understand by being 'old' in contemporary societies, for instance) – while solutions might prove to be difficult to put in place politically due to vocal resistance by large groups of citizens (voters). Of course, ageing societies also create economic opportunities, through the growing *silver economy* in particular. Nevertheless, upholding our existing welfare systems, as we know them today, may prove to be very difficult, if not impossible.

Even more difficult may be to influence low birth and fertility rates. These are seen by many as not the cause but a symptom of deeper troubles in European societies, mainly related to increasing fragility and risks in individual life courses, concerning young adults in particular. Dorling and Gietel-Basten consider this proven in surveys showing that the two-child norm does remain the intended ideal family size among the European youth today – it is just getting more and more difficult to achieve it (Dorling and Gietel-Basten 2018, 113–119).

Demographers and other social scientists also claim that demographic trends are not (only) economic, but essentially ideational in nature. Research

shows that individual and collective choices shaping demographic dynamics are often based on culture, tradition, value, or identity, rather than economic calculation. This may also be one reason, by the way, why government policies aimed at shaping these trends usually give limited results.

Demographic developments are also a source of *political* turbulences. They certainly contribute to the contemporary European political *malaise*, nurturing the politics of fear and – due to a lack of a proper understanding of the laws of demography and thus the inability to properly frame perceived or imagined demographic challenges – also the more diffuse politics of anxiety (see the introductory chapter of this book).

Another, sometimes underestimated, implication is the potential emergence of *intergenerational tensions* due to the growing demographic weight, and consequently political influence, of elderly populations. Some researchers praise the stabilising and moderating effects of mature societies. However, this also has a flip side: stability may come at the expense of political flexibility and innovation, reducing the capacity to adapt to internal and external change.

This brings us to Livi-Bacci's point on the transformation of social norms and behaviours, which we have largely ignored so far and are not in a position to discuss in detail here. However, the changing role, size, and forms of the *family* across Europe cannot be disregarded, also because it has recently become a frequent topic in political debates in some countries – in Central and Eastern Europe in particular, also in the context of rising identity politics in the region and beyond.

Current demographic trends have the negative potential of deepening the cleavages between Western and Eastern societies in our continent, and between 'old' and 'new' Member States in the European Union. Central and Eastern Europe, home to the world's fastest shrinking and a rapidly ageing population, is in a particularly vulnerable situation. As Berend concludes,

> *[a]lthough the turn-of-the century demographic changes in the region are not unique and equally characterize the entire European continent, it may have a more devastating impact on Central and Eastern Europe ... The rapidly aging population may further sap the fragile welfare institutions, thus endangering social stabilization and providing greater room for populism ... Countries of the region with historically developed and traditionally strong nationalism and xenophobia might not be able to handle a massive inflow of immigrant labor, if it is needed, which is a difficult problem even for well-established democracies. In other words, the same demographic trends may cause more severe problems in transforming Central and Eastern Europe than in the Western member countries of the European Union.* (Berend 2009, 225–226)

Last but not least, we cannot forget that the European demography also has *global* implications. Experts voice diverging views about the role of demographic trends in global (power) relations. For many, population size and composition are fundamental factors in shaping world order. Others find

this approach "almost obsolete" today (see e.g. Goldstone 2021, 269). In any case, European public discourse is loaded with a double concern nowadays: fears of a population explosion in the world, and worries about a population implosion within Europe. Combining these two generates a third concern about the shrinking proportion of the European population globally: from 11.68 per cent in 1960 to 5.7 per cent today, and only 3.7 per cent by 2070 (EPRS 2021, 1; European Commission 2021, 4).

This international context also brings us to one of the hottest potatoes in European public debates today: migration. As you might have noticed, this is a word that we have hardly used in this chapter so far. One specific reason is that migrants should be seen neither the source of, nor the solution to essentially home-grown demographic turbulences in Europe, which we discussed above. Mobility within, and immigration to Europe, while they are intertwined with these in many ways, deserve to be discussed on their own. This is what we will do right now.

MIGRATION AND POLITICS

— Tamás Dezső Ziegler —

a. Misleading political discourses about migration

Migration has taken centre stage of heated Europe-wide political debates, which will surely have a strong effect on European life in the future, especially in the light of demographic trends explained above. Seemingly, if we only scratch the surface, we find two distinctively differing *political views* about this topic: one is a more open, welcoming, mainstream, rather 'technocratic' perspective about migration. Contrary to this, we find the more critical, sometimes even xenophobic view of migration, which opposes most forms of migration, stresses the relevance of divergent cultures, and would limit migrants' access to European countries as strictly as possible. Why we write "seemingly" here is because these two sides in real life policing are nearly never as coherent and intact as their rhetoric.

For example, as will be explained below, the seemingly open pro-migration mainstream parties and movements in Europe and the seemingly open leaders of the EU have, in fact, often accepted harsh measures against migrants and refugees. Other actors, which advocate limiting migration in their speeches, often do exactly the opposite in their action. A good example of this is the Hungarian state, where on the rhetorical level Prime Minister *Viktor Orbán* is very strongly against accepting migrants. However, while several measures were introduced to hit asylum-seekers as harshly as possible, the state also established in parallel an Investment Immigration Programme, which welcomes wealthy investors (some of them with a dubious background).

The same is true about giving Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary – many of whom travelled to Hungary for the first time after receiving citizenship.

According to the first, technocratic perspective, Europe and ageing European societies need migration, because otherwise they would be unable to cope with their decreasing workforce. In many countries in Europe, we see that the lack of foreign workers may lead to serious pitfalls in industries. Incidentally, this is in line with some of the statements of *dual labour market* theory:

> *Piore (1979) has been the most forceful and elegant proponent of this theoretical viewpoint, arguing that international migration is caused by a permanent demand for immigrant labor that is inherent to the economic structure of developed nations. According to Piore, immigration is not caused by push factors in sending countries (low wages or high unemployment), but by pull factors in receiving countries (a chronic and unavoidable need for foreign workers). This built-in demand for immigrant labor stems from four fundamental characteristics of advanced industrial societies and their economies.* (Massey et al. 1993, 440)

For most non-experts, most of Western European mainstream parties and the European Union also seem to propagate *openness*. EU leaders regularly express the same view towards controlled migration: as European Commission President *Ursula von der Leyen* put it, "migration has always been a fact for Europe – and it always will be. It enriches our societies, it brings new talent to our countries, when well managed" (Von der Leyen 2020).

An example for such kind of openness could be the EU Blue Card directive (Council Directive 2009/50/EC), which was recently re-formulated to serve the demands for migration. However, if we scratch the surface again, we see that the Blue Card system has never really been as open as it is portrayed: only 36,806 Blue Cards were issued in the whole of the EU in 2019, and most of these by Germany (see European Parliament 2021).[4]

In public debates, this technocratic openness is opposed by voices calling for limited or no immigration into Europe, which is a view often, but not only, represented by xenophobic far-right parties. For example, in Hungary, a constant topic on the government's communication agenda since 2015 has been to portray migration as highly dangerous for national culture and identity. In several campaigns, the government spread conspiracy theories claiming that *George Soros* was behind the EU's open border policies, and

[4] In October 2021, many of the former limitations were modified, but not completely abolished. Thus, for example, even if someone is highly educated, a certain amount of salary – a minimum of 100 and a maximum of 160 per cent of the average salary in the country of origin – is still needed to be able to receive a Blue Card: a nonsensical limitation, which shows a reluctance to openness. Furthermore, arrivals also need to have a work contract, which is quite problematic to get when staying outside the destination country.

that he also controlled the leaders of Europe to allow mass immigration into their countries.

Nevertheless, the criticism of open borders is not to be ignored, or taken lightly. The prominent late historian *Walter Laqueur*, for instance, also expressed similar views, though in a somewhat softer, more conventional way. Laqueur was highly unsatisfied with the general state of the European continent, including the lack of proper answers to social problems, economic crises, low fertility rates, and the negative effects of migration. In his opinion, such issues could be attributed to the lack of desire to assimilate, the widespread presence of Islamic fundamentalism in Europe, and the rise of far-right forces as a response to all this. In his opinion, fundamentalism is sometimes even supported by the state: for example, the German state is actively financing fundamentalist imams (Laqueur 2007; 2012). What he described is a slow erasure of norms and culture taken for granted earlier in Europe.

b. Friendly rhetoric hides an inhospitable Europe

Contrary to the above, what we can ascertain if we check the policies in European countries and the EU is that they are not at all as open as they are portrayed. In the radical criticism of *József Böröcz*, for instance,

> *[t]he physical exclusion of non-"White," non-west-European subjects … takes place through supra-state legal means – via the European Union's shared visa regulations –and through a murky reference to the requirement of the never meaningfully defined "European identity" as a legal precondition for any non-EU-member state to be allowed to file a membership request in the European Union. All that is taking place in a context in which, as we have seen, the semantic fields of west "Europeanness," Pink skin tonality and "Whiteness" overlap to a considerable degree, particularly if we define "Whiteness"… as a set of global privilege claims. In that sense, the institutional arrangement of the European Union, especially its shared border policing and foreigner/migration "management" systems, function as quasi-state organizations created with the purpose of preventing access to the territory of western Europe – defined, hence, as a "White" space – by members of Other societies, racialized as non-"White".* (Böröcz 2021, 11)

This criticism by Böröcz becomes interesting if we check the present migration landscape in Europe, and especially add the latest *securitisation* of the topic (Bello 2020). This securitisation has even changed the language in EU documents, which started to talk about irregular migration instead of refugees, for example.

Several patterns show the unfriendliness of the present European system. First of all, in most EU documents, only third country nationals are called migrants. EU citizens are handled differently. This, then, has an effect on the

status of those who arrive in Europe: difference-making is not interpreted as discrimination in many cases. Only to bring a couple of examples: they can be asked to pay more tuition for their studies. Their family unification can be regulated differently from European citizens, and it is not obvious at all that family members can join them.

Furthermore, contrary to the text of Article 79 TFEU, a unified, extensive EU long-term visa policy does not exist: still Member States decide to whom they give long-term visas, and to whom they do not. They also decide what are the grounds they accept, and what grounds they refuse. This is the result of Member States trying to maintain control in this field – and this way they do not have to explain why they refuse visas for certain people.

Going even further, we must highlight that all around Europe we find dual labour markets: most newcomers only find jobs at the lowest ranks of societies, and one reason for this is the extensive discrimination in most European countries (for a deeper analysis of Germany, see Goldberg et al. 2010. One could cite hundreds of similar studies describing this phenomenon from a thorough empirical perspective. Very similar findings have been made about the UK, France, etc.). Also,

> *while some refugees succeed in finding highly skilled employment, this is not the case for the majority of asylum-seekers, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and refugees. The majority tend to find employment in what is considered the secondary labour market. Employment in the secondary labour market is generally characterised by low wages, long working hours and little to no job security and protection (commonly referred to as low-skilled, atypical and/or precarious work), employment which nationals tend to avoid.* (Schenner and Neergaard 2019, 15–16)

Second, apart from the positive actions, the refugee crisis showed some dark sides of European societies. EU Member States concluded a deal with Turkey, which violates international law and European law, in order to enable European countries to send asylum-seekers back to Turkey (for a deeper analysis about the deal, see Coe 2016; Idriz 2017a; 2017b; Ziegler 2019). When some individuals challenged this agreement at the European Court of Justice (ECJ), in its judgment in *Case 2/233* the Court claimed that the deal was not an EU document, so it did not have power to rule about its content. If we accept the findings of this judgment, the fact that the EU–Turkey deal changed basic EU asylum law terms gets even more confusing (Idriz 2017b).

Moreover, the quota system collapsed, as certain countries, like Hungary, refused to accept refugees. The EU revoked rescue ships from the Mediterranean Sea, resulting in massive loss of lives. Italy even criminalised the helping of migrants, and started procedures against captains like *Carola Rackete*. It took years until courts decided that helping people in trouble is not a crime (*The Local*, 2020). In Greece, the conditions in some of the refugee camps became unbearable, and people had to wait several years for a decision.

Countries also started to send refugees back to non-safe third countries, often without taking into real consideration the circumstances of the country – their actions regularly going against leading case law, like the *M.S.S.* judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, or the *N.S.* judgment of the ECJ. Moreover, EU Member States send people back to countries like Afghanistan, where their lives are obviously in danger, *en masse*. In Hungary, refugees were detained in transit zones and some of them did not receive a proper meal for days, including children with diabetes. In the meanwhile, Denmark seized the property of refugees as a compensation for state services. All this was in stark contrast with the rhetoric of open and tolerant societies.

Third, the future seems even shadier. If we check the agenda set by the New Pact on migration and asylum promoted by the European Commission,[5] we find that it goes even further with securitisation, and while there are some good points in it – like the protection of children – it does not give answers to some of the crucial problems, like the unbearable situation in certain countries, the necessary answers to biopolitics, institutionalised discrimination in Europe, or cultural conflicts between citizens and arrivals. Furthermore, it aims to continue the 'outsourcing' of migration control to proxy countries outside Europe, so that most of the migration could be stopped there. But is this in line with European demands and the demographic trends mentioned before? And what about general moral requirements of the Enlightenment tradition? The lack of human rights guarantees in many countries of Northern Africa and Turkey are very serious concerns here, which are not always taken seriously by European decision-makers.

c. Leitkultur and social conflicts

In the disputes around openness and closedness in European societies, there was one debate that received less attention in the press: notably that about *Leitkultur*, i.e. a domestic culture in European countries that could serve for the integration of migrants (Manz 2004). This is interesting because there is a high chance that there will be cultural conflicts if we mix people with different backgrounds, especially if arrivals come from societies which do not have a democratic public culture. How we solve these conflicts could be the key to a successful Europe.

As *Francis Fukuyama* wrote in his book *Identity*,

> *[i]n the early 2000s, a German academic of Syrian origin named Bassam Tibi proposed Leitkultur, "leading culture", as the basis for German national identity. Leitkultur was defined in liberal Enlightenment terms as belief in equality and*

[5] See more at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

> *democratic values. Yet his proposal was attacked from the left for suggesting that those values were superior to other cultural values; in doing so the left gave unwitting comfort not just to Islamists, but also to the right that still believed in ethnic identity. Germany needs something precisely like Leitkultur, a normative change that would permit a Turk to speak of him or herself as German. This is beginning to happen, but slowly.* (Fukuyama 2018, 169)

Jürgen Habermas was one of those who harshly criticized the idea of *Leitkultur*. As he claimed in *The New York Times* in 2010,

> *to the present day, the idea of the leitkultur depends on the misconception that the liberal state should demand more of its immigrants than learning the language of the country and accepting the principles of the Constitution. We had, and apparently still have, to overcome the view that immigrants are supposed to assimilate the "values" of the majority culture and to adopt its "customs" ... I do not have the impression that the appeals to the leitkultur signal anything more than a rearguard action or that the lapse of an author into the snares of the controversy over nature versus nurture has given enduring and widespread impetus to the more noxious mixture of xenophobia, racist feelings of superiority and social Darwinism. The problems of today have set off the reactions of yesterday – but not those of the day before.* (Habermas 2010)

The idea of *Leitkultur* entered the centre of public attention again when *Thomas de Maizière*, who was Germany's Minister of Interior from 2009 to 2011 and from 2013 to 2018, proposed a plan for such a culture in the newspaper *Bild am Sonntag* in 2017 (de Maizière 2017). De Maizière raised certain points that provoked harsh debates. First, he claimed that Germany had a distinctive culture. In this culture, people shake hands and do not cover their faces, not even in mass demonstrations (as he famously put it: "we are not Burka"). Second, Germans see education as a tool to success, because a society can only be successful if its members are educated enough. General education is a value in itself. Third, Germans see performance as something to be proud of in a "performance-centred society". Under 'performance' de Maizière also means social assistance for those in need, as this is also a performance Germans can be proud at.

Fourth, Germany has a unique history with its ups and downs, which also shapes the future, including friendly relationships with countries like Israel. Fifth, in his interpretation, the Germans are a nation of culture, where cultural events and achievements like music are important, and also politicians participate in cultural events. Sixth, albeit religion is separate from the state, religion is still serving the society in connecting its members. On the other hand, religious freedom means that everybody can practise his or her religion, and this includes Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike. Seventh, in Germany, conflicts are solved peacefully, and there exists a culture of democratic conflict resolution. Eighth, Germans love their country, as they are "Enlightened

patriots". Ninth, Germany is part of the Western world, both culturally and politically. Tenth, Germans have a collective remembrance of certain events like football world cups, or the unification of the country. These events and places belong to the German collective memory.

What is interesting here is the difference between the *Leitkultur* proposed by Fukuyama and the one by de Maizière. De Maizière only selects some components of the heritage of Enlightenment, while other items are only for creating some kind of a bond between the individual and society. However, of these, many could be questioned: is somebody against German mainstream culture if s/he does not like football? And what if someone believes the Germans do not separate religion and governance properly, or Christianity should not play a central role in society as de Maizière portrays it? And what if someone is critical towards the idea of an overtly capitalist German performance-based society? If we add the fact that exclusion, xenophobia, and making an artificial connection between ethnicity and 'Westernness' are also part of the culture of European countries, it seems that we should be very careful what we propagate under 'leading culture'.

d. Conclusions

Against the backdrop of current demographic trends, Europe will be unable to maintain its competitiveness, prosperity, and hard-won welfare systems without migration. However, migration has become a strongly politicised matter, which can strengthen far-right forces in European societies. This means that European societies should be able to create a culture that truly accepts immigrants and handles them equally, but which is also able to integrate them into society. If they are unable to achieve a balance between their economic interests and proper social integration, migration will become a serious source of disintegration among European countries, and also within European societies.

Key concepts and terms

Birth/fertility rate
Demographic transition
Dependency ratio
Intergenerational conflict
Life expectancy
Migration/immigration
Policy challenges
Securitisation
Shrinking population/labour force
Silver economy

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Ecological debt and sustainable development

Gábor Szabó and Szabolcs Diósi

The ecological debt, climate change, and sustainable development are key challenges that our planet is facing today. The global community has been making considerable efforts to address them, including through the Stockholm Declaration, the Brundtland Report, and successive global summits and agreements, over the past decades. Nevertheless, humanity is still not on the right track to achieve its sustainable development-related objectives. The European Union has an outstanding record in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda programme. However, this performance is still falling short of the set objectives and remains unevenly distributed among the Member States.

Keywords: 2030 Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals), circular economy, ecological debt, European Green Deal, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

The term *sustainable development* gained international recognition for the first time in 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development published its historical Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*. According to the classical definition given by this Commission, the notion refers to a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations 1987, 43).

In a more general sense, sustainable development entails a social-economic model that prioritises environmental protection and considers the long-term consequences of the planet's economic activity. It stresses the importance of creating a better quality of life for everyone on earth, not just in the present days but also for future generations to come. It focuses on shaping the economy in a way that makes sure that people living on our planet "don't consume more resources than the planet has to offer, and the benefits of economic growth are allocated fairly among all members of the world population" (European Commission 2019b, 3).

Sustainable development actively promotes the dissemination of knowledge and information to give people real choices for a better life while aiming to improve their living standards across every continent. It also seeks to transform the economy into a green economy through the smarter use of resources, which eventually would serve the health and well-being of all.

The sustainable development mindset still considers economic growth essential, but understands that progress towards a more developed future cannot be measured only in terms of GDP (European Commission 2001b). In order to improve the quality of life for current and future generations, it is not enough to aim at the general increment of material wealth. The global economy, society, and environment are all parts of one comprehensive system, and to achieve progress, a broader perspective in policymaking is needed.

THE STATE OF OUR PLANET

People living in the 21st century are facing many global threats simultaneously. One of the greatest challenges today is the growing *ecological debt* that humanity has developed – and is still developing – over the last century. The consumption needs of all people living on the planet today are roughly equivalent to 1.7 Earths.[1] Due to the rapid growth of the world population (which is expected to reach 9.3 billion until the year 2050; see Roser 2019) and the recent economic growth of less developed countries, the pressure on the planet's ecosystem has never been higher. The exhaustion and depletion of finite natural resources (e.g. freshwater, fertile lands, forests, fresh air) threaten the loss of the planet's biodiversity, as well as endanger the life of the human species as a whole.

The trends are still unfavourable today. The global consumption of material resources increased fourteen-fold between 1900 and 2015, and it is predicted to more than double between 2015 and 2050 (European Commission 2018, 12). The degradation of the natural environment and the reduction of energy reserves is complemented with a similarly significant threat: climate change. The decade between 2010 and 2019 was the warmest in recorded history, and despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which slowed down economic activity worldwide, the concentrations of greenhouse gases continued to increase in 2020, reaching new record highs. The year 2020 was one of the three warmest years on record, with the global average temperature about 1.2 °C above the 1850–1900 baseline (United Nations 2021, 52). Extreme weather conditions including massive wildfires, hurricanes, droughts, floods, reduced rainfall, and rising sea levels are threatening the life and living standards of people in most nations across the world.

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[1] Global Footprint Network data available at: https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/ecological-footprint

The environmental crisis experienced today has evolved gradually for many decades. Governments, public policymakers, and private sector actors – for short-term economic or political gains – have neglected it for far too long. Today, the lack of meaningful action threatens the planet – and all people living on it – with irreversible damage. Since the chain of effects would undoubtedly end up in significant financial burdens affecting all countries alike, governments around the world are finally determined to act. They understand that the prevailing mindset of profit and production maximisation cannot be maintained any more: an alternative new approach to growth must be developed. One that can transform economies and societies to be more reliant on sustainable resources.

GROWING AWARENESS AT AN INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

As the scope of this chapter does not allow us to elaborate on the progress of sustainable development policies in a more detailed manner, we only aim to explore the most significant steps on the way forward. The year 1972 marked the beginning of global environmental awareness. A total of 114 governments gathered in Stockholm to participate in the UN Conference on the Human Environment (also known as the Stockholm Conference). For the first time in history, the represented nations formally accepted responsibility for the environmental consequences of human activities, and signed the *Stockholm Declaration* (Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment).[2]

Even though the global community has failed to implement the majority of the goals listed in the Declaration, the Conference was essential in raising attention to troubling environmental conditions, as well as putting the environmental agenda on the map of international diplomacy. The succeeding UN summits (1992 Rio de Janeiro, 2002 Johannesburg, 2012 Rio de Janeiro) all built their policy strategies on the declarations made at the Stockholm Conference.

In 1987, the United Nations published the above-mentioned *Brundtland Report*, which acknowledged the increasing danger the planet and humanity were facing, but also asserted that instead of feeling dread or fear, the global community should see an opportunity "for a new era of economic growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base" (United Nations 1987, 16). With a new approach to the

[2] Section 6 of the Stockholm Declaration asserts: "A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment on which our life and well being depend" (United Nations 1972, 2).

economy, the goal should not only be to restore environmental safety, but to relieve poverty, which is deepening in the developing world.

In 1992, ten years after the Stockholm Conference, members of the global community joined together for the second time at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also referred to as the *Rio Conference*) and agreed upon new strategies and measures that stop, decrease, or even reverse the unsustainable degradation of the environment, and on promoting environmentally and socially sustainable practices.

A decade later, in 2002, participants from around the globe gathered again in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. They proclaimed that the Rio Conference and its declaration had been a significant milestone, which had set a new agenda for sustainable development, and that meaningful progress had been made towards achieving the stated objectives. However, the threats facing the planet and humanity as a whole were far from disappearing.

The global environment continues to suffer, the loss of biodiversity is ongoing, natural disasters are more frequent and more devastating, and developing countries remain vulnerable (United Nations 2002). Globalisation and the global economy have even added a new dimension to these challenges and the injustices. Against this backdrop, UN members in Johannesburg collectively committed themselves to building a humane, equitable, and caring global society, and assumed shared responsibility to advance and strengthen global policy efforts toward a sustainable future.

Since the Johannesburg Conference, sustainable development has represented one of the most important policy goals at the global level. In many ways, the year 2015 proved to be a cornerstone in addressing global challenges. Under the leadership of the United Nations, three major strategy plans were adopted in that year, notably the 2030 Agenda (which consists of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs), the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework.

The Sendai Framework constitutes an independent programme, which defines objectives and priorities for action to prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disasters.[3] The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement, on the other hand, are closely intertwined and can be viewed as one extended initiative. The Paris Agreement – by committing countries to concrete measures for climate protection and neutrality[4] – puts

[3] The core goal of the Sendai Framework is to improve preparedness and national coordination for disaster response, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, and to use post-disaster recovery and reconstruction to "Build Back Better".

[4] The Paris Climate Treaty's central aim is "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change" (see Paris Climate Agreement, Article 2a).

its main focus on environmental challenges and aims towards the year 2050; while the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs operate on a much wider perspective and in a fifteen-year time frame.

Without a doubt, the adoption of the *2030 Agenda* in September 2015 gave a massive new rise to globally shared efforts for achieving sustainable development. "Leave no one behind" is the central message of the initiative, representing the firm commitment of all UN member states to move forward towards a sustainable, inclusive future, which considers the well-being of all members of the global community (United Nations 2015). The SDGs cover a wide range of different objectives from eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities to combating climate change and fighting for peace, justice, and strong institutions – a vision fully consistent with Europe's future policy strategies.

The European Union was instrumental in shaping this global agenda, and it fully committed itself to delivering on the plan and its implementation. Over this five-year period, the EU has made significant progress towards most of the Goals, although this progress has been unequal among the Member States (see also Eurostat 2021). We will return to the EU's 2030 Agenda contribution later, but let us first take a wider look at the Union's record in sustainable development policies.

THE EU'S PATH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

For many years now, sustainable development has represented a great deal of the EU's overall political vision. It brings various forms of economic, social, and environmental policies under one collective objective: to improve the quality of life and well-being of all people in the continent, and globally. The European Community had always been proud to promote peaceful societies, social inclusion, and economic prosperity, but in 1997, with the adoption of the Amsterdam Treaty, sustainable development was formally declared as one of its fundamental objectives.[5]

Since that year, sustainable development has been a decisive factor in EU policymaking, shaping numerous sectoral policies, both at national and international levels, and the workings of many institutions and agencies,

[5] Although sustainable development did not gain full legal recognition until 1997, the notion itself had raised significant attention among EU institutions even before. In 1988, only a year after the Brundtland Report had been published, the term sustainable development was mentioned in European Council Conclusions for the first time. In 1993, when the Community adopted its fifth Environment Action Programme, it named the action plan *Towards Sustainability*. The document defined sustainable policy goals as "a policy and strategy for continued economic and social development without detriment to the environment and the natural resources on the quality of which continued human activity and further development depend" (European Community 1993, 12).

and steering projects, reports, and various strategic initiatives. Its leading role is also reflected in Article 3.3 of the Treaty on European Union, stating that the EU "shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment."

The first extended, long-term European action plan that involved important sustainable development elements was the Lisbon Strategy adopted in March 2000. In its ten-year-interval (2000-2010), it aimed to set the strategic goal to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. In the end, the Strategy failed to deliver its central promise: during the ten-year period, the EU did not become a more competitive economy in the global market. However, it is important to note that sustainable development-related goals were seen as some of its genuine successes.

One year later, in June 2001, at the Gothenburg European Council meeting, the Union adopted its first sustainable development strategy (*A Sustainable Europe for a Better World*) based on a Commission Communication. This was an ambitious long-term vision that had grown out of the broader global Rio process. The strategy dealt in an integrated way with economic, social, and environmental issues aiming to achieve economic growth, greater social cohesion, and a better environment.

It was composed of two main parts. The first proposed objectives and policy measures[6] to tackle a number of key unsustainable trends,[7] while the second part called for a new approach to policymaking, which is able to secure the EU policies' future success. It asserted that there was no time for further delay, urgent action was needed, and since the commitment towards sustainable development would provoke many conflicting interests, strong political leadership was essential.

It also claimed that since too often in complicated EU policymaking processes actions made to achieve certain objectives in one policy area

[6] It listed the following seven key policy areas: climate change and clean energy; sustainable transport; sustainable consumption and production; conservation and management of natural resources; public health; social inclusion, demography, and migration; and global poverty.

[7] The six key unsustainable trends it established were: growing emission of greenhouse gases and climate change that is likely to cause more extreme weather events (e.g. hurricanes, floods, wildfires); severe threats to public health that are posed by resistant strains of some diseases; poverty and social exclusion that have immense direct effects on individuals, such as ill health, suicide, and persistent unemployment; gradual ageing of the European population that threatens a slowdown in the rate of economic growth, as well as the quality and financial sustainability of pension schemes and public health care; the loss of biodiversity in Europe that has accelerated dramatically in recent decades; persisting regional imbalances in the EU.

hindered progress in another, coordination between different sectoral policies must be improved. It noted that the Union must engage more actively with the global community because in order to adequately tackle the challenges ahead, global measures will be necessary (European Commission 2001a, 4–15). A few years later, in 2007, the European Commission asserted that while the Union should continue to focus on the challenges identified before, it must give particular attention to climate change-related problems (European Commission 2007, 14).

In 2010, just two years after the emergence of the 2008 financial-economic crisis, the Europe 2020 Strategy was adopted. Its objective was to move the continent's economy out of the crisis and lay the foundations for a more sustainable future built on smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. By smart, the Strategy referred to an economy based on knowledge and innovation. Sustainable meant the active promotion of a more resource-efficient, greener, and more competitive economy; and inclusive growth meant fostering a high-employment economy that delivers social and territorial cohesion (European Commission 2010).

The Union has mixed experiences with the implementation of this Strategy, which ended up being a 'revised Lisbon Strategy' rather than a new, innovative long-term vision. It mainly focused on EU domestic policies, and both its general scope and efficiency remained limited. Since the Member States took little ownership of the reforms and did not prioritise relevant actions, the Strategy ended up lacking actual governance and engagement, and thus had little effect on actual EU policymaking.

As mentioned before, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, in 2015 has generated a new wave of globally shared efforts for achieving sustainability. The EU played a leading role in creating the plan, and since its adoption it has made substantial steps towards its implementation. The European Commission's comprehensive "whole of government" approach on implementing the SDGs comprises several key elements aiming to effectively design and apply sustainable development policies (e.g. further coordination of economic policies, promoting the engagement of both civil society and the private sector, continuous monitoring and reporting on results, strengthening the EU's engagement in international relations; see European Commission 2020c, 2–15).

As of today, the Union stands out in the global community with its impressive SDGs record. All the ten countries that are the closest to attaining the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda are Member States of the EU (and from the top 20 best-performing countries, 17 are EU Member States).[8] EU countries usually obtain the best results on socio-economic development Goals – e.g. SDG 1 (No Poverty) or SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) – which comes

[8] The order being: 1. Denmark, 2. Sweden, 3. Finland, 4. Austria, 5. Germany, 6. France, 7. Netherlands, 8. Czech Republic 9. Slovenia, 10. Estonia. See Sachs et al. 2020, 25–33.

as no surprise since Europe is among the few regions around the world where poverty and inequalities are relatively low, and access to health care and treatment is almost universal.

Over the past five years, most EU countries have been able to achieve further progress in areas where they were already in a leading position. For instance, the Union – being a global leader in education – still manages to improve its SDG4 results every year.[9] Since Member States recognise that quality education is one of the key drivers for a prosperous and sustainable future, they effectively foster the critical areas of the education agenda (e.g. quality education in early childhood, promotion of work-based adult learning, lifelong learning programmes, or digital competences).

The Member States are also more and more committed to advancing the education agenda in a more global sense. They promote equal access to learning opportunities for adolescents living in other countries.[10] France, for instance, invested around 1.5 million euros over the 2016–2018 period in different educational programmes in Cameroon, Senegal, and Togo. Or, in the context of EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, Hungary is funding an extended scholarship programme called *Stipendium Hungaricum*, which provides opportunity for thousands of students from developing countries to enrol in Hungarian universities.

However, in terms of global leadership and active SDG diplomacy, the EU's real dominant position can be found in connection to the 16th Sustainable Development Goal (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Since the signing of the Paris Treaty in 1951, European integration has served as the most successful peace project in recorded history. Through close supranational cooperation, it has created unprecedented wealth, high social standards, and unparalleled opportunities for the people inside its borders.

In contrast to this, many countries continue to face armed conflicts and violence across the world, and billions of people suffer from weak institutions, lack of access to justice, and breaches of fundamental freedoms. The principles of the EU's SDG-related global policies are deeply rooted in the belief in universal human rights and the respect for the rule of law. The Union is directed by those values when attempting to help other countries achieve the 16th Sustainable Development Goal (e.g. to establish accountable and transparent institutions, including independent and impartial judicial systems; promote the rule of law; ensure free and fair elections, etc.).

Despite the many successes, however, even EU Member States are facing great challenges in achieving all the established SDGs. As a matter of fact, all EU countries are still lagging behind in attaining all the 17 Sustainable

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9 The 4th SDG is Quality Education, which aims to ensure access to equitable and quality education through all stages of life.

10 It is crucial to launch similar education initiatives, as today around 58 per cent of children and adolescents worldwide (approximately 617 million people) are not achieving minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics (United Nations 2018, 6–7).

Development Goals by the year 2030. Additionally, the Union is also facing a specific challenge, notably that there are significant performance gaps among its Member States. Generally speaking, the countries in Southern and Eastern Europe underperform in most SDGs compared to their northern and western counterparts.

In order to improve its overall performance, the EU has moved towards a comprehensive sustainable development strategy over the past five years, which aims to transform its economy into a green, digital and circular economy. For that vision to be realised, three ambitious initiatives were adopted between 2015 and 2020: the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan, and a new European industrial and innovation strategy. We will take a closer look at all the three of them.

a. The European Green Deal

The *European Green Deal* constitutes the EU's most significant response to climate and environmental-related challenges so far.[11] The new green growth strategy aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy, where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases by the year 2050, the environment and the health of citizens are protected, and economic growth is decoupled from resource use.

The European Green Deal asserts that our current economic model must go through a transition to a climate-neutral, climate-resilient, and environmentally sustainable economy (European Commission 2019a, 6–24). It looks at this transition not only as a challenge, but also as an opportunity to make the new economy model just and inclusive for all by creating new opportunities for innovation and investment, creating jobs, addressing energy poverty, reducing external energy dependency, and improving citizens' health and well-being.

It is worth noting that the EU had already started to modernise and transform its economy with the aim of reaching a greener economy. Between 1990 and 2018, it reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 23 per cent, while the economy grew by 61 per cent. However, current policies would only reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 (European Commission 2019a, 4); thus, much remains to be done in the coming decades.

In order to set out the conditions for an effective and fair transition, to provide predictability, and to ensure that this transition is irreversible, in 2021 the EU reached an agreement on the first European climate law. This

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11 In December 2019, the Commission presented a Communication on the European Green Deal, and a month later, in January 2020, the European Parliament voted in support of the initiative (with a large majority of 482 votes in favour, 136 against, and 95 abstentions).

has entered into force and sets out the legal framework for a number of highly ambitious climate actions, such as a new target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, a legal objective for the Union to reach climate neutrality by 2050, a commitment to negative emission after 2050, a requirement for stronger provisions on adaptation to climate change, and stronger coherence across Union policies with regard to the climate neutrality objective (European Union 2021).

Reaching the 2030 climate targets[12] and, in a more general sense, the fundamental structural shift towards a more sustainable and inclusive future in Europe, will entail massive financial burdens and require significant investments across all the sectors in economy. The Sustainable Europe Investment Plan (the investment pillar of the European Green Deal) intends to mobilise sustainable development-related investments worth at least 1 trillion euros over the next decade through the EU budget (European Commission 2020d, 2–24).

b. Circular Economy Action Plan

The need for a *circular economy* has emerged over the past decade due to today's prevailing consumption culture leading to excessive resource extraction and growing pressures on natural capital and climate. In order to secure that the EU can continue to grow its economy in a sustainable way and improve the living standards of its citizens, a new approach towards materials and products is necessary: a mode of production that promotes the reuse, repair, and recycle of products. This will cut waste and reduce the need for new resources to be extracted at great financial and environmental costs.

The adoption of the EU's Circular Economy Action Plan in 2015 set the Union firmly on the path towards a circular economy, which ensures that most of its material values are preserved, so what was previously considered waste can be used again for making new products. As it reduces the EU's dependency on primary raw materials, it can serve as a foundation for future sustainability by decreasing the negative impacts of consumption.

In March 2020, a new Circular Economy Action Plan was adopted by the European Commission, introducing measures along the entire life cycle of products. The new Action Plan intends to regulate the production/ consumption of goods in many aspects, e.g. by introducing bans on the destruction of unsold durable goods, promoting remanufacturing processes, increasing recycled content in products, and rewarding various goods based on their sustainability performance (European Commission 2020a). Its

[12] The key targets for 2030 are: at least 55 per cent cuts compared to 1990 levels in greenhouse gas emissions, at least 32 per cent share for renewable energy, and at least 32.5 per cent improvement in energy efficiency.

proposals are fully aligned with the underlying principle of Europe's new growth strategy: give back more than extract.

c. A new European industrial and innovation strategy

The EU's new industrial strategy was born from the realisation that the emerging *digital revolution* stands as a defining opportunity for securing Europe's future prosperity in the coming decades. By creating new products, services, markets, and business models, as well as shaping new types of jobs and new set of skills, the emerging digital technologies are changing the face of the entire industrial sector (European Commission 2020b).

To establish the continent's leading position in the coming era, the *New Industrial Strategy for Europe* aims to create a world-leading digital industry. Due to the Union's strong innovation capacity, the European industry already enjoys a global competitive advantage on high value-added products and services. But to preserve that advantage, the EU intends to further increase its research- and innovation-related investments.

The Union strives not only to successfully adapt to the modern digital challenges, but also to become the accelerator and enabler of change and innovation in this field. Wisely utilising the potential of digital transformation could also strengthen the EU's geopolitical position and help reaffirm its voice, uphold its values, and fight for its long-lived achievements at an international level. As the new industrial strategy asserts: this is about Europe's sovereignty (European Commission 2020b, 1).

CONCLUSIONS: LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

More than two decades have passed since the Union officially declared sustainable development as one of its primary objectives. Even though the EU has succeeded in many aspects, there is no reason for celebration. Despite all the efforts made in the past period, humanity is still not on the right track to achieve its sustainable development-related objectives.

Moreover, the past two years have been marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on every aspect of life from health care and environmental awareness to economic, social, and political stability. It has created an unprecedented global challenge which, in addition to its significant social consequences, has also resulted in a major economic shock for both the European and global economies. It threatens to affect decades of progress made on sustainable development.

In order to alleviate the short-term damage in a way that supports and reinforces the already achieved results, in November 2020, the European Parliament and the Council reached an agreement on a historic recovery plan.

The financial package of 1.8 trillion euros constitutes the largest injection ever financed through the EU budget. It will help rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe in a greener, more digital, and more resilient fashion.

However, in order to permanently change the course of negative trends regarding sustainable development, additional and more impactful actions are needed at various levels. EU institutions, Member States, and regions will have to be involved together. All communities across Europe – from large cities to small towns, villages, and rural settlements – need to be part of this collective effort. Since isolated policy strategies have proven ineffective, more comprehensive and integrated approaches are necessary in the future (e.g. environmental-related threats cannot be solved with environmental policies alone if economic policies continue to promote fossil fuels or unsustainable production and consumption).

Education and innovation capacities should also be strengthened in order to accelerate the often too slow convergence across EU Member States. Europe has the brains, the skills, and creativity. It is crucial to ensure top-quality education, including lifelong learning, in order to raise new generations equipped with the necessary skills. Heavy investments in research and innovation are also essential. The deployment of smart technology (e.g. artificial intelligence, big-data analytics) can serve as vital tools in meeting the challenges ahead.

Last but not least, the EU and its Member States will have to work together with their international partners to achieve sustainability worldwide. Given the Union's relative stability and prosperity, it must set an example to other countries by leading the urgently needed transformation. "We must take action today in order to preserve for tomorrow the delicate economic, social and environmental balances governing the globe" (European Commission 2005, 38).

Key concepts and terms

2030 Agenda
Brundtland Report
Circular economy (EU Circular Economy Action Plan)
Digital revolution
Ecological debt
European Green Deal
New Industrial Strategy for Europe
Stockholm Declaration
Sustainable Development Goals
United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Conference, Rio de Janeiro 1992)

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Democracy and distrust

Anna Unger

The past period in European politics has often been labelled the 'decade of distrust', characterised by a growing dissatisfaction with democracy, rising populism, the weakening of liberal democracy, and increasing illiberalism. Many explain these turbulences with the impacts of the Great Recession of 2007–2008. However, in reality, present-day troubles can be traced back to the practice of global capitalism and liberal democracy since the 1990s. This chapter looks into the deeper reasons and dynamics behind the challenges that European democracies are facing today. It comes to the conclusion that liberal democracies are under the pressure of endogenous and exogenous problems alike, and have to deal with both dimensions in parallel therefore. It also offers the idea of a pluralist democracy, in which no actor, ideology, politician, or social group can be in a hegemonic position, as an alternative conceptual approach.

Keywords: liberal democracy, distrust, populism, technocracy, political polarisation

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that a citizen, let's call her Politeia Republica, had fallen into a coma somewhere in Europe, let's say in the middle of the year 2008, and only woke up thirteen years later. She probably did not notice dramatic political changes at first sight. Politics had not changed that much: *Angela Merkel* was still the Chancellor of Germany, Western European politicians led the most important EU institutions, *Vladimir Putin* still ruled Russia, mass-shooting was still a daily threat to security in the US, and China slowly but surely was becoming an unavoidable actor in global politics and economy.

However, when she began reading European newspapers, she realised that politics, both in Europe and around the world, had changed a lot indeed. From her perspective, the world looked like this: dozens of unknown politicians, who had been almost nowhere in 2008, were relevant actors and national leaders now, leading a number of unknown parties and movements, while many strong actors and parties of the millennium had disappeared from the news. Politeia probably had to google a lot when following current news: words like

Covid, fake news, post-truth, or Brexit could hardly be understood without help. She also needed some time and reading to understand why populism, identity, and migration became everyday references in our political vocabulary, what the AfD was, and why Hungary had such a negative media coverage.

The *Great Recession* of 2007–2008 is usually compared to the Great Depression of 1929–1933, both in their economic consequences and political impacts. However, unlike the political turmoil of the 1930s, the recent changes in politics are less sharp, brutal, and visible, but probably no less dramatic and fundamental. The past thirteen years are usually labelled as the decade of distrust characterised by the rise of populism, growing dissatisfaction with representative institutions, and the weakening of liberal democracy.

Populism has become the most fashionable word in political science since the mid-2010s. It seems to be explanatory for the political and social conflicts in the European Union, the changing landscape of party systems in European countries, and the rise of new social movements and political parties. Many scholars consider populism to be a threat to democracy, while others explain its rise as a logical and unavoidable reaction to the elitist neoliberal politics of the 1990s and the 2000s.

Another dramatic change is the dissatisfaction with, and distrust towards political representation. All around Europe, the classic political cleavages have been transformed. They did not disappear, but their weight and influence have changed. In almost all the European countries, new parties were born since 2008; and some of them achieved parliamentary representation and also government positions pretty quickly.

It seems that the age of big catch-all parties has come to its end, and more ideological cleavages are returning, like the issues of social and economic inequalities and redistribution, the environment, climate change and sustainability, nationalism, and religion, to mention just the most relevant ones. However, as new parties emerge, they challenge not only the old ones, but also the procedures and institutions through which these latter have governed their societies: namely, representative (or liberal) democracy.

The aim of this chapter is not to tell the political history of the past decade and a half, but to give an overview of the main causes of recent political tendencies in Europe – inside and outside the EU – with a strong focus on the state of democracy, understood both as political participation and representation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that many of the changes that have characterised this period are not rooted in the Great Recession, whose economic, social, and political crises have only accelerated and magnified them. Therefore, this chapter aims to look into the deeper political origins of these conflicts, which have been embedded in the practice of global capitalism and liberal democracy since the 1990s, but received much less or no attention as long as things seemed to be going well. In this respect, the Great Recession is not to be seen as the hypocentre, but the epicentre of the dramatic political changes in question.

Anti-democratic, authoritarian tendencies and turns in Eastern Europe; nationalist, far-right, and xenophobic trends in the west and the north of the continent; and left-wing activism and strong movement politics in the south – the buzzword of populism can be applied to each of these political dynamics. The second part of this chapter summarises the European perceptions of democracy in the 2010s and the rise of populism as the most relevant political trend of the past decade. The third part gives an insight into the academic debate about these trends, including their origins in the concept and practice of liberal democracy.

We are obviously not in a position to deliver country-by-country analyses here. Instead, I make an attempt to explain why and how these turmoils are logical and unavoidable consequences of liberal democracy, without necessarily offering solutions. The ongoing troubles of democracy cannot be cured by technocratic policy-based or constitutional reforms. In fact, in the concluding part of this chapter, I try to contribute to the academic and public debate about the future of democracy in Europe through promoting an alternative conceptual approach as food for thought.

THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY

Europe is neither unique nor different compared to other parts of the world. Our continent fits into the global trends of dissatisfaction with democracy. The 2010s can be seen as the decade of democratic backsliding and *democratic erosion* globally. While the first hardly characterises Europe (with the exceptions of some Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, or Serbia), the erosion of democratic values is present almost everywhere across Europe. In contrast to the flourishing literature of democratic transition and consolidation in the 1980s and the 1990s, the past decade produced hundreds and thousands of analyses, books, and articles about de-democratisation, illiberal trends, the rise of populism, and the so-called fourth wave of autocratisation.

Populism, polarisation, and the anti-democratic far-right represent a serious challenge to liberal democracy. But the past decade also shows that the prospects of democratic politics are not as dark as they look at first sight. Dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy does not only lead to the rise of the far-right and anti-democratic movements, but also contributes to reinvigorating civic participation and social movements. What is important to see is that the current attacks against liberal democracy are not necessarily aimed at destroying, but rather at rethinking and reforming it. Furthermore, as surveys show, criticism of the practice does not mean that the idea itself has failed.

a. Dissatisfaction with democracy

Though we are focusing on European tendencies here, it is important to note that weakening satisfaction and growing *dissatisfaction with democracy* is not something specific to Europe, but is a global trend (GSDR 2020, 9).

Before going into further details, two methodological comments are to be made. The first is that for measuring satisfaction with democracy, there is no single valid methodology available. Some methodologies put stronger emphasis on social life or political participation, while others also include economic, financial, and further policy factors (like social security, environment policy, and so on). At the same time, all the reports claim that the satisfaction with democracy is usually referred to by people as a satisfaction with both the functioning of their national democratic system, on the one hand, and democracy as an idea, i.e. the concept of right and just government, on the other.

The decade of the 2010s showed a growing dissatisfaction with democracy according to almost all the analyses. In a global context, this tendency was mirrored by the decreasing number of democracies, a phenomenon that scholars call democratic decline, or democratic recession (Diamond 2015; Diamond-Plattner 2015; Levitsky-Way 2015). The arguments of these studies, both the pros and the cons concerning this supposed decline, are built on the changing number of democracies across the world; the growing number of so-called grey-zone countries, or hybrid regimes, which are neither fully democratic nor autocratic; and the annual democracy and freedom indices, which show a decreasing relevance of democracy and freedom in the world.

However, surveys also reveal a different, more complex picture. For instance, the Pew Research Center (PRC) found in 2017 that people still supported democracy relatively strongly, even if they were increasingly critical of its representative system and open to other forms of popular government. Europeans preferred democracy to non-democratic systems, but it is important to note that the majority of them were only less than fully committed to representative democracy (PEW 2017, 5) – though a large majority found the idea of representative democracy 'good' or 'very good', at an average of 80 per cent (PEW 2017, 20).

The same report also found that the strength of this commitment had probably structural reasons: "Countries that are classified as more fully democratic and that have a higher percentage of the public committed to representative democracy also tend to be wealthier" (PEW 2017, 7). Moreover, people's perception and assessment of democracy are strongly determined by their personal economic situation and future prospects.

This survey also showed that Europeans were less satisfied with the functioning of democracy, and even in those countries where this satisfaction was above 50 per cent, the trust in national government was relatively weak: only less than 20 per cent of the respondents said that they had a 'lot of trust'

in their government, while a large majority reported 'somewhat' trusting institutions (PEW 2017, 13, 16).

Finally, the PRC report also informed that the support for the non-representative form of popular government – direct democracy – was relatively high in Europe. While the support for the idea of representative democracy remained solid, Europeans supported direct democracy almost at an equal level, an average of 70 per cent (Pew 2017, 22). In contrast, they expressed a much weaker support for technocracy: 54 per cent called it wrong, while only 43 per cent supported it (Pew 2017, 25).[1]

Another research, conducted two years later, showed no major changes, but the shift was still clear: more people were less satisfied with the functioning of democracy than previously. Though the picture was mixed, the above-mentioned pattern of the interrelation between economic performance and support for democracy remains valid: a better welfare situation leads to stronger democratic support.

However, as the report says, "one factor that corresponds with democratic dissatisfaction and unites most EU nations – as well as the U.S., Russia and Ukraine – is a shared sense that elected officials do not care about their constituents" (PEW 2019, 46). This can be understood as a kind of disillusionment with representative politics, but again, we have to divide the practice from the idea, because "individuals may be strong believers in liberal democracy and yet dissatisfied with the performance of such institutions in practice" (GSDR 2020, 4).

While Europeans feel that they are hardly represented by their representatives, this does not mean that they do not see the merits of elections. In fact, they say that elections give them voice in shaping their future, and "some say in how government runs things" (PEW 2019, 50).[2] This report also found that the majority of them had a favourable opinion about the EU, among the youth in particular. Regarding the political trends of the late 2010s, when "Eurosceptic parties have gained political momentum and British voters passed the 2016 referendum to leave the EU", this support seems to be crucial and promising for the future of the Union (PEW 2019, 53).

Finally, the *Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020* also shows a complex picture: "Europe's average level of satisfaction masks a large and growing divide within the continent, between a "zone of despair" across France

[1] Interestingly, the support for technocracy as a form of government where "experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country" was the highest in Hungary (68%) and Poland (50%), and also the refusal of this idea was the lowest in the same countries (23 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively, compared to the European average of 54 per cent; PEW 2017, 25). Taking into account that all these data come from the same research, we can conclude that supporting representative democracy, direct democracy, and also technocracy are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as the same respondent can support all these forms at the same time.

[2] Interestingly, again: this number is even higher in Russia than in Hungary, 54 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively.

and Southern Europe, and a "zone of complacency" across Western Germany, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands" (GSDR 2020, 22), while dissatisfaction has decreased in Eastern Europe significantly over the past decade, with the exception of Romania (GSDR 2020, 25). The report finds that

> *[t]he length of the current malaise also explains why this time it has led to a wave of populism, a wave that began some five years after the onset of the eurozone sovereign debt crisis. At first, European publics were prepared to give established parties a chance to address the continent's mounting economic and migration challenges ... By the end of the decade, however, electorates had lost patience.* (GSDR 2020, 23)

Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe,

> *the first generation of liberal postcommunist elites has been swept aside by the election to high office of populist politicians and parties, often on a platform of nationalism, social welfare, and anti-immigration. The concurrence of populism and democratic satisfaction reminds us, perhaps, that satisfaction with democracy is not the same as a belief in liberal principles or values – but is as much due to congruence between popular sentiment and the attitudes expressed by the political class, whatever those sentiments may be.* (GSDR 2020, 25)

b. The rise of populism and the polarisation of politics

The literature of *populism* has become almost as wide as that of democracy. It is impossible to summarise how many different definitions and approaches to this subject co-exist in social sciences nowadays. While some scholars consider populism as an ideology that steps beyond the classic cleavages of the economic left–right and the cultural liberal–conservative axes (Mudde 2004, Canovan 2002), others define it as a political strategy, technic, or discourse style (Laclau 2005). Moreover, it is also widely discussed whether populism is only a pathology of democratic politics (Mudde 2004, Finchelstein 2014, Streeck 2017), or whether it is undemocratic (Mudde 2021, Müller 2016).

The aim of this subsection is not to widen this debate, or to explain the arguments in detail. Populism greatly varies by time periods and by regions, and also by its usage, whether as a self-identification of parties and politicians (as was the case, for example, in the late 1880s and the 1890s in the United States), or as a label given by others. Consequently, instead of discussing the many different streams of debates about populism, I only sum up here the most recent studies about the rise and influence of populist parties in contemporary European politics, while we shall return to the problem of definition later, in the third part of this chapter.

In their recent analysis, *Paul Taggart* and *Andre L. P. Pirro* claim that populism is widely present in Europe – however, this populism takes not one

but several different forms. They call this the "overall diversity of populism" when they differentiate between right-wing and left-wing populisms. This is a very important distinction, usually not made by other scholars, though both the overgeneralisation of the term and its mixing up with far-right extremism and post-fascism have been discussed elsewhere (Art 2020; Ziegler 2016).

Taggart and Pirro compare researches based on the 2019 European Parliament elections and on the roles of populist parties in national political systems. Their results show that "Europe has generally witnessed a growing tide of support for populist parties in recent years" and that

> *[t]here have always been significant variations in the fortunes of populist parties across the continent, but now they are almost ubiquitous and increasingly important to many of their respective party systems and institutions of supranational governance.* (Taggart and Pirro 2021, 291–292)

In their research, they also find that populist parties performed best and received the most votes in Central and Eastern Europe, but this does not mean that in other countries populism would not be relevant. On the contrary, "over one-third of European populist parties were in government at some point in 2019", which confirms "the trend that European populist parties have moved from being insurgent parties to being potential and existing parties of government" (Taggart-Pirro 2021, 289).

Right-wing populism seems to be stronger and the Europe-wide cooperation (both in the European Parliament and at other levels) of these actors has become now an everyday reality in European politics. However, they have not managed to create a strong pan-European alliance so far. One possible reason for this is that Euroscepticism is no longer commonly shared by right-wing populist parties.

Left-wing populism is less relevant at the European level, but these parties can also gain significant popular support at the national level, especially in Southern Europe, like in Greece (Syriza) or Spain (Podemos), even if "the populist left has not made anything like the same electoral inroads of the populist right into national party systems" (Taggart-Pirro 2021, 288).

Though the rise of populist parties is usually seen as a threat to democracy, *Marlene Mauk* claims that

> *despite previous findings evidencing a negative relationship between populist party support and political trust on the individual level, the electoral success of populist parties may still increase political trust among the general public. It argued that populist parties may be perceived as a corrective force finally giving voice to and tackling concerns about the political system that had long been prevalent among citizens.* (Mauk 2020, 54)

She also found, after analysing twenty-three European countries, that

> *populist party success had the most pronounced positive effect on political trust in countries with comparatively low levels of democratic quality, corruption control, and government performance. For countries with very high levels of democratic quality, corruption control, and government performance, populist parties gaining votes or parliamentary seats did not affect political trust at all.* (Mauk 2020, 55)

These findings highlight that, as in the case of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with democracy, our approach to populism must be more complex than simply stating that this threatens or destroys democracy.

Another aspect of, or reason behind the rise of populism in Europe is political *polarisation*. *Fernando Casal Bértoa* and *José Rama* claim that "party politics in the continent have never been so polarized … polarization has almost tripled to the point that in most countries, the election with the highest level of polarization since the Second World War has taken place in the last 10 years" (Casal Bértoa-Rama 2021, 2).

Political polarisation has economic, cultural, and institutional reasons. Great economic crises are usually followed by the rise of extreme or anti-establishment parties, as a response to the failure of mainstream parties in preventing and solving the storm. Cultural polarisation usually emerges around divisive issues like abortion, death penalty, LGBTI-rights, or migration. Institutional reasons can be the abovementioned feelings of unrepresented people, which strengthen anti-establishment parties on both the left and the right sides (Casal Bértoa and Rama 2021, 5–6).

All these are familiar to Europeans from the past fifteen years, and in this respect the increasing polarisation is not a surprise but a quite evident consequence of the previous decade and a half. However, populism does not necessarily emerge from polarisation. As *Sheri Berman* and *Hans Kundnami* observed, unlike in the US, where the polarisation has deepened partisanship and weakened democracy,

> *European parties were converging ideologically and partisanship was diminishing … mainstream center-left and center-right parties in many European countries began to converge to the point where they no longer offered voters clear alternatives on many of the most pressing issues of the day.* (Berman and Kundnami 2021, 23)

Wolfgang Streeck expresses similar views, claiming that

> *[b]y the end of the 1980s at the latest, neoliberalism had become the pensée unique of both the centre left and the centre right … Distributional conflict was replaced by a technocratic search for the economically necessary and uniquely possible; institutions, policies and ways of life were all to be adapted to this end. It follows that all this was accompanied by the attrition of political parties – their retreat into*

> *the machinery of the state as 'cartel parties' – with falling membership and declining electoral participation, disproportionately so at the lower end of the social scale.* (Streeck 2017, 6)

Consequently, according to Berman and Kundnami, what we can see in Europe since the millennium is that

> *[c]enter-left parties moved to the center on economic issues while some center-right parties moderated their positions on traditional values, immigration, and other concerns related to national identity. A gap developed between voters' preferences and what the traditional parties were offering. Old partisan allegiances lost their hold on voters; not a few drifted into apathy. Seeing an opportunity, right-wing populist parties reshaped their profiles to better meet disaffected voters' preferences. Such parties began picking up votes and did especially well when issues such as immigration and national identity came to the fore, highlighting the contrast between populists and traditional parties.* (Berman and Kundnami 2021, 23–24)

From this point of view, the rise of populism in Europe can be seen not as a response to the economic crisis of 2008, or the migration crisis of 2015, or the more and more problematised issues of gender equality, LGBTI-rights, and so on. On the contrary, the rise of populism is a reaction to the strong convergence of the other parties on these issues. Many Europeans simply feel that these parties are "all the same" – there is no difference between them, i.e. "no one represents us".

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY UNDER CONSIDERATION

The idea that *liberal democracy* is the ultimate, most developed, and most desired form of democracy became almost unquestionable after 1989. This kind of democracy is built on the merits of liberal constitutionalism, including the rule of law, the division of powers, and human rights, on the one hand, and on wide-range political representation based on universal suffrage, on the other (Hobson 2012). According to *Fareed Zakaria*, the balance between these two basic components of democracy (liberal constitutionalism and representative democracy) defines the nature of the system: one can function without the other, but democracy without liberal constitutionalism can only be an illiberal one (Zakaria 1997).

It took almost two decades after 1989 to begin the discussion about the problems and deficits of liberal democracy. This coincided with the economic crisis of 2008, but the crisis itself was only part of the overall problem. To understand the crisis of liberal democracy, it is important to highlight that these problems have at least two different origins. The worldwide financial and economic depression, rooted in the functioning of liberal democracy,

is only one of them. Liberal democracy also has to deal with its endogenous problems, which are related to representation and technocracy, and also with challenges from the outside (exogenous problems). In this regard, *distrust* and disillusionment, the two key phenomena that characterise our era and politics, are not the causes but the results of the problem. As *Pierre Rosanvallon* puts it:

> *The democratic ideal now reigns unchallenged, but regimes claiming to be democratic come in for vigorous criticism almost everywhere. In this paradox resides the major political problem of our time. Indeed, the erosion of citizens' confidence in political leaders and institutions is among the phenomena that political scientists have studied most intently over the past twenty years.* (Rosanvallon 2008, 1)

a. Endogenous problems of liberal democracy: the reasons for distrust and disillusionment

Though it was supposed to be a perfect system, liberal democracy has its own in-built internal *endogenous* controversies, which have been widely studied over the past decade, but hardly any solution has been proposed or practically implemented so far. These endogenous problems are distrust, technocracy, and consumerism in politics. They are not independent but interrelated phenomena in contemporary liberal democracies.

According to Rosanvallon, distrust is not necessarily a symptom of the *malaise* of democracy, but it is inherently part of democracy, in three different forms. The first, the "liberal distrust of power", is the distrust of strong state and strong government, which resulted in the separation of powers, constitutional checks and balances, and further controls and limits of state power, in order to avoid authoritarian politics and repression. The second is democratic distrust, which arises from the representative system itself, and "its purpose is to make sure that elected officials keep their promises and to find ways of maintaining pressure on the government to serve the common good" (Rosanvallon 2008, 8). The third is the distrust of society itself, which is embedded in the growing role of science and the feeling that "citizens have no alternative but to oblige scientists to explain their thinking and justify their actions" (Rosanvallon 2008, 9).

The first and second forms of distrust do not seem to be harmful to democracy, but the third leads to *technocracy* and *depoliticisation*. Depoliticisation is the core of technocracy: the complexity of governance requires expertise and knowledge, which does not necessarily respect or reflect people's will (Mounk 2018, 101–105). Both come from the modern idea of state, which is responsible for effective governance but should also be based on popular legitimacy.

These two requirements can be in contradiction. There must be a balance therefore: this is the Schumpeterian or Madisonian understanding of

democracy, where people are not actors but only reactors in politics. They elect those candidates from the competing elites who they think are the closest to their interests and will govern the state according to their own ideas and the people's will (and hopes). In this system, elites represent the expertise, while people represent the source of legitimacy.

This kind of balance is the basis of modern liberal democracy, but technocracy is also a constant challenge to democracy, because it tends to depoliticise governance (Caramani 2020, 1–4). As Hobson puts it, "liberal democracy is not meant to be so much about empowering people, as it is about protecting their liberties and allowing them to pursue their own interests unimpeded. As such, core civil and political rights are prioritized" (Hobson 2012, 444).[3] However, as we saw in the second part of this chapter, this kind of depoliticisation along with representative politics produce not only a gap between the political class and the people, but also raise dissatisfaction and distrust among the people towards the elites, claiming that people are not really represented any more.

Taggart explains another aspect of this through the example of European integration. This has produced a very complex, multilevel governance system, where people are represented in many different ways, and at many different levels, but has also created complex, opaque, and bureaucratic politics, and a "very indirect representation [that] emphasizes the distance between citizens and elites" (Taggart 2002, 75). The supposed victory of liberal democracy also meant the victory of this technocratic-elitist form of governance: people became only viewers, consumers of politics in "the age of political consumerism" (Rosanvallon 2008, 253–254). But while consumerism distanced people from politics, on the one hand, it also raised their expectations towards political institutions, on the other. In this system,

> *democracy restricts democracy: elected officials are reined in and lose their room to manoeuvre owing to pressure from the voters themselves. As a result, the dynamics of control take precedence over the appropriation of power. The citizen is transformed into an ever more demanding political consumer ... the "age of political consumerism" has been characterized by high expectations of political institutions and growing demands upon them. The problem stems from the way in which these demands are expressed, which tends to delegitimate the powers to which they are addressed. This is*

[3] Among the numerous and ever-growing variety of indices about democracy (Freedom House, The Economist Intelligence Unit, V-Dem, IDEA, and so on) one can hardly find any that has a strong focus on democracy as a political opportunity for taking part in politics, or making our voice heard. Instead, the biggest share of these indices focuses on civil liberties, the institutional set-up of constitutional liberalism, and the freedom of market and economy. Social rights, equality, chances and forms of real political participation (beyond general elections), inclusion – these are hardly, if at all, present in these reports. For a detailed criticism of these methods see Doorenslpeet 2015.

> *the source of the contemporary disenchantment with democracy. Disappointment is an almost inevitable consequence of a distrustful citizenry.* (Rosanvallon 2008, 254)

These endogenous problems of liberal democracy are excellently summarized by *Timothy Snyder* in his book *The Road to Unfreedom*. He explains that the then-fashionable idea of the end of history and the supposed ultimate victory of liberal democracy at the millennium also created

> *the politics of inevitability, a sense that the future is just more of the present, that the laws of the progress are known, that there are no alternatives, and therefore nothing really to be done. In the American capitalist version of this story, nature brought the market, which brought democracy, which brought happiness. In the European version, history brought the nation, which learned from war that peace was good, and hence chose integration and prosperity* (Snyder 2018, 7).

The politics of inevitability means that "there is no alternative" (Snyder 2018, 15), social and political development has a single way to proceed, and progress is literally inevitable. This echoes the idea and practice of technocracy, where the skilled and educated elites are responsible for the complex governance, but also points to its democratic deficit: there are no alternative means and there is no need for democracy, as there are no choices – options to vote for and against – anymore.

b. Exogenous challenges of liberal democracy: illiberalism and populism

As with populism, *illiberal* tendencies have also been widely studied in contemporary political science. The famous article *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy* by *Fareed Zakaria* has been followed by a huge number of writings about democratic decline, democratic backsliding, and the hybridisation and autocratisation of politics. Many different aspects of these tendencies have been elaborated on. Here, instead of summing up all of these, which would be mission impossible, we will focus on a single stream in this debate, which hopefully reveals the different aspects of the matter.

In his well-known article, Zakaria stated that "constitutional liberalism has led to democracy, but democracy does not seem to bring constitutional liberalism" (Zakaria 1997, 28). In his view, many developing democracies became illiberal, where liberties and the rule of law are less respected than in developed ones. Though he does not state that American-, or Western-style liberal democracy is the only possible democratic system, he claims that this is the most developed one, as no other system guarantees the same kind of balance between the people's will, which must be the platform of popular government, and securing civil liberties.

In his argument, as cited above, the evolution is clear and obvious: the consolidation of *constitutional liberalism*, namely the guaranteeing of basic rights and liberties, the rule of law, and the division of power, slowly but surely led to equality, and to universal suffrage. Therefore, after two centuries, democracy was finally established. The lesson is clear, newly democratised countries simply have to follow the same path without deviation. His famous quote that "if a democracy does not preserve liberty and law, that it is a democracy is a small consolation" (Zakaria 1997, 40) suggests that from these two elements, it is constitutional liberalism that matters the most, not democracy.[4]

Berman, however, corrects Zakaria's story about the evolution of democracy. In her article, which was published twenty years after Zakaria's, she claimed that the history of liberal democracy had happened otherwise. According to her, unlike Zakaria suggested, liberalism (and constitutional liberalism) developed together with democracy, not before it, and "rather than being the norm, liberal democracy has been the exception, even in the West" (Berman 2017, 30). Revising ups and downs in the history of democracy in Germany, France, the UK, and Italy, she concludes that "in most European countries, illiberal and failed democratic experiments turned out to be part of the long-term struggle to build liberal democracy" (Berman 2017, 34). Thus, her message is that current illiberal and populist tendencies in Europe and elsewhere, though they are very worrying, cannot be seen as arguments against democracy in favour of liberal constitutionalism.

On this basis, liberalism without democracy, the pipe dream of undemocratic liberalism, is no less dangerous than vice versa, as Zakaria stated. As Berman writes,

> *[i]n the past, liberalism without democracy often led to an oligarchic system dominated by a wealthy elite (such as Britain's landowning gentry) or a dominant ethnic or religious group (such as white Protestants in the United States). Elites are no less moved by passion and self-interest than anyone else. If allowed to dominate politics to the exclusion of other citizens, they are likely to restrict to themselves the enjoyment of liberal rights, as well as access to economic resources and social status.* (Berman 2017, 37)

In another work of hers, Berman offers a different evolution of the story of democracy. According to this, what we call today liberal democracy was established after the Second World War as a system called *social democracy*. In the many political changes that occurred after 1945, the most important

[4] *Cas Mudde* comes to the same conclusion, stating that current illiberal-populist trends "can only be overcome by more rather than less liberal democracy" (Mudde 2021, 578).

> *was a dramatic shift in understandings of what it would take to ensure democratic consolidation in Europe. Across the political spectrum people recognized that bringing stable, well functioning democracies to Europe would require much more than merely eliminating dictatorships and changing political institutions and procedures; it would necessitate revising the relationship that existed among states, markets and society as well.* (Berman 2011, 68)

This resulted in the recognition that European countries needed "a regime type which entails dramatic changes not merely in political arrangements, but in social and economic ones as well" (Berman 2011, 68).

The great merit of Berman's finding is that it reframes the whole debate about the current democratic *malaise* or backsliding. Instead of elaborating on which elements of liberal democracy are more important and deserve utmost protection against the other, she shows that the roots of contemporary liberal democracy are elsewhere. They are not to be found in liberal constitutionalism but in social democracy – namely that the policies aimed at achieving greater social inclusion and economic equality can protect both constitutional liberalism and democracy.

Therefore, one can also conclude that the recent rise of illiberalism and populism is almost inevitable for two reasons. On the one hand, these ups and downs of liberal democracy have always been present in history. On the other hand, the weakening of social inclusion and the extreme growth of economic inequalities among Europeans cannot lead to anywhere else other than to questioning the institutions of both constitutional liberalism and democracy.

This relationship is even clearer if one compares the yearly maps of the *Gini Index* – an indicator that shows the income inequalities within a given society – with the map of the rise of illiberal, populist forces around the world. Based on the above-mentioned logic, it is not a coincidence that the highest inequalities are present in those countries where illiberalism and/or populism are also rising. Thus, paraphrasing Zakaria's sentence cited above: if a liberal democracy does not preserve economic stability, welfare, and social inclusion, that it is a liberal democracy is a small consolation.

Streeck puts all this in the context of neoliberalism and *globalisation*, claiming that the rise of populism is rooted in the failure of neoliberal governance and the exposure of people to global markets, where they could hardly find any help and security when economic crises hit society. The criticism of liberal democracy from the people's perspective is called populism by the elites, including not only political but social, intellectual elites, as well. In his view,

> *'[p]opulism' is diagnosed in normal internationalist usage as a cognitive problem. Its supporters are supposed to be people who demand 'simple solutions' because they do not understand the necessarily complex solutions that are so indefatigably and successfully delivered by the tried and tested forces of internationalism; their*

> *representatives are cynics who promise 'the people' the 'simple solutions' they crave, even though they know that there are no alternatives to the complex solutions of the technocrats.* (Streeck 2017, 12)

He concludes that one important lesson from the politics of the past two or three decades is that

> *whoever puts a society under economic or moral pressure to the point of dissolution reaps resistance from its traditionalists. Today this is because all those who see themselves as exposed to the uncertainties of international markets, control of which has been promised but never delivered, will prefer a bird in their hand to two in the bush: they will choose the reality of national democracy, imperfect as it may be, over the fantasy of a democratic global society.* (Streeck 2017, 18)

CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A PLURALIST DEMOCRACY

The very idea of democracy is that it is the people who can decide about their own future, and it is the people who are the ultimate source of political power. This principle does not promise 'good' decisions, but mainly acceptable ones for the given electorate.

It is a quite fashionable idea nowadays, especially after a series of unexpected and astonishing results of popular votes in different European countries, that democracy can be dangerous and people cannot decide directly on important issues. Therefore, not only constitutional liberalism but also technocratic expertise must control and limit democratic decision-making – especially in the age of COVID-19, a global pandemic that shocked the whole world and raised again the question of technocracy over democracy. According to Mounk, this seems to be a trap:

> *This is one of the deepest—and most rarely heralded—dilemmas that developed democracies will have to face in the twenty-first century: Either they return power to the people in a manner that is liable both to violate some of the core liberal values of our political system and to lead to an even greater crisis of legitimacy when government performance suffers as a result. Or they maintain key technocratic institutions that both violate some of the core democratic values of our political system and are liable to make a populist rebellion even more likely.* (Mounk 2018, 111)

Berman also warns that "although it is certainly true that democracy unchecked by liberalism can slide into excessive majoritarianism or oppressive populism, liberalism unchecked by democracy can easily deteriorate into oligarchy or technocracy" (Berman 2017, 30).

I think that this dilemma is false. Some level of technocratic expertise has always been present in the daily mechanisms of human governments,

regardless of their democratic or autocratic nature, and also of their national or international levels. In fact, what could probably offer more promising prospects is to replace the idea of liberal democracy with the idea of *pluralist democracy*. The very nature of pluralist democracy is that no actor, ideology, politician, or social group (race, party, tribe, or class) can be in a hegemonic position. In this respect, pluralism refers to a constant competition among interests, values, ideologies, and people for adequate representation, for a given share of power, and access to political decision-making (Dahl 1971).

In my view, this kind of pluralist democracy is not built on the safeguards of constitutional liberalism and the key institutions of representative democracy, but also includes other popular ('by the people') processes in political decision-making and deliberations. Of course, we have to admit that this kind of democracy is probably less 'calm' and promises neither perpetual peace, nor ultimate victory to any actor, only some kind of equilibrium in politics and society. Nevertheless, it deserves to be given a chance.

Key concepts and terms

Constitutional liberalism
Democracy/liberal democracy/pluralist democracy
Democratic erosion
Depoliticisation
Dissatisfaction (with democracy)
Globalisation/neoliberalism
Illiberalism
Political polarisation
Populism
Technocracy

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Fear and securitisation

Beáta Kovács

It is not difficult to argue for the importance of emotions in politics in a period that is described as populist or post-truth. When measurable and verifiable facts become irrelevant, and people often rely on statements that 'felt' true but have no real (scientific) basis, we can safely say that the emotional dimension has become quite prominent in recent years' political practice. The 'emotional turn' of political science can be closely linked to the rise of fear to the political level since 2001. In addition, the diversification of identities and the prominence of identity politics have greatly contributed to this process. This chapter seeks to show the potential connection points between (political) identity and fear through the securitisation process. It is proven that the emotional dimension plays an important role in identity formation and maintenance. I argue that fear is a universal experience that in some way informs the identity of all and can have political relevance as well.

Keywords: emotions in politics, politics of fear, identity, security, securitisation

It is not difficult to argue for the importance of *emotions* in politics in a period that is described as populist or post-truth (Farkas and Schou 2020). When measurable and verifiable facts become irrelevant, and people often rely on statements which 'felt' true but have no real (scientific) basis, we can safely say that the emotional dimension has become quite prominent in recent years' political practice.

Emotions are not just present in politics as a side effect. In fact, politics can never be emotionless, as it is based on the clash of (political) values (Szanto and Slaby 2020). Emotions not only episodically disrupt the world of politics, but rather make an essential contribution to its functioning; for example, they amplify political mobilisation, or exist embedded in political institutions (Berezin 2002).

The 'emotional turn' of political science can be closely linked to the rise of fear to the political level since 2001 (9/11). In addition, the diversification of identities and the prominence of identity politics have greatly contributed to this process (Kiss 2013). This chapter seeks to show the potential connection points between (political) identity and fear through the securitisation process.

I argue that fear is a universal experience that in some way informs the identity of all and can have political relevance as well.

THE DUAL NATURE OF FEAR

Fear can most simply be described as an emotion caused by an unpleasant future event (Barbalet 1998; Ortony et al. 1988, 112). Most of our fears are not manifested in physical threats, and most of the time we are not afraid of certain events, but rather of their future possibility. Hence, we never fear the darkness, the water, or change itself, but rather that something bad may happen to us in the dark, in the water, or in the future (Barbalet 1998).

Fear has an essential evolutionary significance. As the world has always been a dangerous place, and survival is necessary for reproduction, fear has played a prominent role in evolutionary processes (Epstein 1972). In this approach, fear is linked to an impending catastrophe, so it refers to a strong urge to defend ourselves or escape from the given situation (Lader and Marks 1973). Fear can thus also function as a coping or avoidance strategy, if there are no obstacles to the 'escape route'.

However, when internal or external obstacles are present, fear becomes *anxiety* (Epstein 1972). While the relationship between animals and fear is very simple, that is they instinctively want to escape from danger or respond to fear by force, it is much more complicated in the case of humans. There are a wide variety of fears, from the anxieties that accompany birth and death to the different types of phobias (fears classified by their subjects), such as fear of spiders, fear of dark, fear of altitude, fear of drowning, fear of aliens, and the enumeration could go on indefinitely. In addition, we can talk about symbolic fears, such as anxiety caused by the potential loss of social status or prestige (Hankiss 2006). Finally, so-called indirect or derived fears also exist, which are mostly generated by the unpredictability and uncertainty of the future (Bauman 2006).

The universality of negative emotions is easier to prove, because they usually represent stronger experience than their positive peers. This can be explained by the phenomenon of negative bias. Negative events and conditions are always more effective, since we pay more attention to them, because they endanger our well-being and integrity. In addition, the biological significance of the negative and the positive pole is also asymmetric: the most negative event is death, but there is no comparable event on the positive side (Rozin and Royzman 2001).

It is proven that the idea of 'something bad can happen to me' and the symbolic system of negative emotions associated with it (fear, anger, shame) appear in human thinking regardless of culture, so it can be considered as emotional universalism (Wierzbicka 1999, 275). It has also been accepted since Ekman's experiment that fear is a basic emotion alongside joy, anger, sorrow, disgust, and surprise (Ekman 1973; Ekman and Friesen 1971).

Although some of our fears have proven to be universal and instinctive, cultural influence is not a negligible factor, as our emotions may be different in origin and appearance. The fear that we feel when an unknown figure emerges from the dark is hard to compare to the feeling experienced when we find out that a hazardous waste dump is being built near to our house, or to what we might feel during violent police abuse.

Jeff Goodwin argues that some emotions are more constructed than others, their formation involves more intense cognitive processes, and this is especially true in the case of politically relevant emotions (Goodwin et al. 2001, 13). The alarm caused by the sudden emergence of a shadow has little to do with the cognitive dimension, but the fear of certain World Bank policies is all the more so. Emotions associated with politics thus rest on moral intuitions, individual and social obligations and rights, and expected consequences that are historically and culturally determined.

For example, *James M. Jasper* argues that when fear does not function as a basic emotion (reflex emotion, according to his typology), it has got some kind of moral content. So, returning to our previous analogy, the alarm that we feel when a car suddenly approaches us on the zebra crossing is a visceral fear; however, climate anxiety is a much more complex emotional state with a strong moral content (Jasper 2006).

Fear, therefore, has a dual nature. Its universality is indisputable, since it is a general experience of mankind. At the same time, fear can be socially constructed and determined by norms, values, and culture. As a result, it can be shaped, intensified, and created, especially when we talk about politics.

FEAR AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Fear has always played an important role in the development of civilisation and *culture* (Hankiss 2006, 89), as culture provides us with some kind of protection against our most basic fear, the fear of death. Fear of death does not only appear when we are in imminent danger, but it is constantly lurking within us, and in order to maintain our mental health, we must stifle it. In the light of this, fundamental components of human life, such as aggression, sexuality, and the desire for power, are interpreted primarily as cultural projections of the desire for immortality (Becker 1973).

Through culture, the individual internalises a view that makes the world stable and permanent, thus providing him/her some kind of immortality. This is the reason why people organise themselves into communities and form religious, ideological, national, and political identities (Pyszczynski et al. 2002), since creating a positive self-image is a kind of survival mechanism for them.

Emotions can be imagined as building blocks or 'microfoundations' on which more complex social processes and outcomes rest (Jasper 2006). Fear is

not simply an individual emotion or a personal matter that only exists in the realm of privacy, but it is also visible at the group level, and it can therefore play a significant *social and political* role, such as in terrorism (Burkitt 2005), in unemployment (Barbalet 1998), in elite circulation (Barbalet 1998), in consumption (Miller 1998), in politics (Marcus 2000), in social movements (Jasper 2011), and in economic processes (Berezin 2009).

Although fear has mostly been studied as an individual emotion, recent years' research has altered this tradition and found that fear is fuelled politically and socially by the inadequacies of power structures and sheds light on individual vulnerabilities (Barbalet and Demertzis 2013). At the social level, therefore, the object of fear is not primarily manifested in imminent physical threats, but it is rather based on social inequalities. Fear appears to a greater extent in those social groups which are in subordinate or vulnerable positions. *David Kemper* (1978; 1987), for example, explains the appearance of fear with the overuse of power and the lack of power.

Emotions can also exist at the epochal level, that is their presence can define an entire era (Jasper 2006). Many social scientists argue that we live in an age of uncertainty and fear nowadays. The starting point of the sociology of risk and uncertainty is that everything which was thought to be secure and permanent once, lately has become eroded and lost its credit. Therefore, people have to live their lives without solid foundations and a stable social framework. *Zygmunt Bauman* uses the terms of 'liquid fear' and 'liquid modernity' to describe this phenomenon (Bauman 2005; 2006). According to him, in liquid modernity life changes faster than it can become a routine or habit, and because of this rapid change in our circumstances, we have no chance of making reliable calculations for the future.

The unpredictability of modernity and the diffuse nature of our fears are also described in the concept of risk society by *Ulrich Beck*. The risk society is not based on knowledge, but on ignorance. Our world is essentially post-rational, where the unforeseen side effect is the engine of change (Beck 1998). One of the symptoms of modernity is the emergence of the precariat social class, which is rooted in absolute uncertainty. The members of the precariat mostly try to support themselves from casual work and they do not own any form of job security that employees and working class have acquired for themselves in the welfare state era. They are essentially rootless, because they do not belong to any community and do not have any stable, permanent form of identity (Standing 2011).

The *moral* dimension is also an important aspect of fear studied as a social phenomenon. Until the First World War, fear was fundamentally based on the moral perception of good and bad things. In other words, people feared primarily the negative consequences of their inappropriate actions. This belief was also generated by the fact that the laws of human survival were mostly embedded in religious stories at that time. However, from the 1920s, the way of thinking about fear has completely changed, as the intellectual

dominance of psychology and the process of secularisation weakened its moral dimension. Fear became a health and public welfare issue and it was pushed back into the field of psychology (Füredi 2018).

In contrast, according to *Anthony Giddens* (1994), the world underwent a moral renewal in the 20th century, and for the first time in history we can speak about universal values. These so-called universal values rest on the heuristics of fear, on the perceived or real threats that humanity has created for itself. Therefore, we can witness a negative utopia, which is based upon the perception of bad things. The lack of positive emotions, such as courage, perseverance, hope, love, and solidarity, created a fear-based, negative authority concept.

Based on the above, we can argue that the *politics of fear* has become dominant in recent years and the difference between left and right have almost completely faded. *Frank Füredi* explains this phenomenon with the decline of political rhetoric, which reflects the current state of society: its inability to form a comprehensive, positive vision of its future.

At the same time, left and right as ideological categories have also eroded, as the modern society is 'frozen' into the present. People have often moved away from the values and traditions of the past, and this deprives the political right from those elements which would actually be its essence. However, the political left is not in a better condition, either. The left should be the engine of progression and change, but since it has simply lost its faith in a better future, it cannot provide the positive image for it.

In fact, according to Füredi, the political spectrum as a whole speaks the same language. It essentially predetermines for society what and how to fear. Although the subject of fear may change – while the right scares mainly with refugees, immigrants, and crime, the left uses unemployment rates, environmental disasters, and the right itself as means for creating fear – the basic intention remains the same (Füredi 2005).

FEAR AND IDENTITY FORMATION

When fears become self-sufficient and self-fulfilling, they define the entire *emotional climate* (De Rivera 1992; De Rivera and Páez 2007). Emotional climate is a long-lasting condition that shows not only how the members of society feel or behave, but also how people relate to each other, e.g. they care about each other, or they are afraid of each other.

Emotional climate therefore is not simply the sum of individual emotions. The concept can include all of those emotional components that can shape and maintain group identity and the rules of group behaviour. Just as personal emotions help preserve one's personal identity and value system, the emotional climate of fear can contribute to maintaining the cultural identity and the political unity of the nation.

In his book *Creating Fear*, *David Altheide* (2002) argues that fear has played a prominent role in shaping public opinion lately. He does not primarily write about criminal threats when he claims that the discourse of fear has become prevalent. Fear is an omnipotent element of shaping identities and participating in social life nowadays. The media offers millions of stories that we can identify with, and the common component of these stories is often the sense of fear. Fear provides an explanation and solution, it is an important part of social control, and we can become part of the community by being afraid of what others are.

The role of fear in identity formation can be better understood through the phenomenon of *populism*. In their article, *Ronald Inglehart* and *Pippa Norris* examined the popularity of right-wing populist parties. The authors see the success of these parties in the economic and cultural uncertainties. According to them, material risks have come to the fore again, making individuals feel vulnerable due to the precarious labour market situation and growing social inequalities. Class-based politics has disappeared and instead of problematising economic issues, the focus has been on identity politics. Economic uncertainties combined with the erosion of perceived traditional values provide fertile ground for the advancement of right-wing populist parties (Inglehart and Norris 2016).

A very similar argumentation can be found in *Edgar Grande*'s and *Hanspeter Kriesi*'s thesis of losers of globalisation (2012). According to this theory, the increased economic competition, cultural diversity, political integration, and the process of globalisation have created their winners and losers. It is important how globalisation has affected the sense of danger and the subjective experience of different types of grievances. The losers are simultaneously feeling economic insecurity, a threat from groups with different cultural backgrounds, and the loss of national autonomy. The support for populist parties is high, especially among those who have been left behind: those who are insecure about their identities, and often about their entire lives; who experience alienation and disintegration in their social relations; and those who feel frustrated and distrustful about politics and democracy.

Left-wing populist parties usually blame neoliberal ideologies and various supranational institutions (International Monetary Fund, European Union) that they support policies which increase injustice, inequality, and insecurity. This process evokes the sense of anger and outrage in individuals, which rest primarily on moral ground. In contrast, the right mostly blames refugees, immigrants, the unemployed, and ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. They also bring to the surface emotions that are based on the rejection of immoral and inappropriate behaviour, but these emotions are fuelled by repressed shame, as the targets in this case are the 'uncertain self', the enemies of the questioned identity (Salmela and Von Scheve 2017; 2018).

For example, during the economic crisis, the Greek Golden Dawn blamed the corrupt political elite, immigrants, and the phenomenon of

multiculturalism, and interpreted the crisis as the humiliation of the nation. In contrast, the local indignation movement and the radical left Syriza party saw the crisis as a structural malfunction of capitalism, and considered austerity policies as morally outrageous, hence many Greeks were pushed into poverty and hopeless situations by them (Davou and Demertzis 2013; Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos 2013).

Left-wing populist movements and parties have been more successful in those countries that were more deeply affected by the economic crisis. Because many in society have experienced the hardships of austerity politics, this common experience liberated them from blaming themselves for losing their jobs or for their difficult (economic) situation, so they mostly felt that they were humiliated and destroyed by politics (Simiti 2016). In contrast, in those countries that were less affected by the economic crisis, people faced its effects on the individual level, so they accepted more the possibility that they might have been responsible for their bad situation.

The populist parties on the right transform this kind of shame into anger, resentment, and general hatred towards the 'Other'. On the other hand, leftists interpret these negative feelings and shame as a shared burden, which similarly can be transformed into anger and resentment towards the Other. However, they can be converted into positive emotions, too, such as pride, joy, or hope, which later can become the basis for civil rights and identity politics movements (Salmela and Von Scheve 2017).

DISCOURSE OF FEAR

The connection between populism and fear is clearly shown in the literature. The ideology of populism finds fertile breeding ground in the uncertainty of postmodernism. Most populists' emotional repertoire is fundamentally based on who poses a threat to voters, who is in danger, and whom we should blame for all this (Bericat 2016, 99).

The gaining ground of right-wing populist parties can be explained by the successful construction and maintenance of the *discourse of fear*. The most important tool in this is the phenomenon of *othering* (Wodak 2015). Othering is a broadly inclusive conceptual framework in which individuals or groups are defined and labelled different from the in-group (Riggins 1997, 3). The dominant group has the opportunity to identify those traits, practices, and patterns that are supposed to be followed in society.

At the same time, we do not only speak about a demarcation line between 'We' and 'Them', but about a value judgement formed over the habits and the lifestyle of the Other (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1972). The out-group is often associated with negative qualities, which make it suitable to appear in the role of the enemy. These negative characteristics tend to become stereotypes and

so-called 'frozen images' (Petersson 2003, 88), which also play an important role in the formation of group identity.

Othering is like a reversed mirror, since 'good', 'virtuous', or 'beautiful' cannot exist without 'evil', 'sinful', and 'ugly'. These negative stereotypes associated with the Other are key elements in the formation of enemy images and in the social process of scapegoating (Petersson 2003). In the end, everything that is immoral and bad is outside of the dominant social group (Tsoukala 2008, 142). Finally, the Other is not only something that is inherently sinful, but also a potential threat to the existing social order and to the values of society.

Right-wing populist parties use social tensions as a tool and they instrumentalise the use of different (ethnic/linguistic/religious) minorities as scapegoats. The nationalist and xenophobic discourse has become a part of our everyday lives, so fear dominates public discourse. And the object of fear can be nearly anything: globalisation or climate change can be perceived as a threat as much as change in traditional gender roles or deterioration in our financial situation (Wodak 2015).

The discourse of fear can also be understood through the concept of *securitisation*. Securitisation has become a remarkable term in the field of critical security studies (CSS), which broaden the concept of security and emphasise that the feelings of insecurity and the perception of threat are not limited to interstate wars. Securitisation refers to a communication process in which a topic is defined as a security threat.

According to the constructivist logic, security is not given or objective. Instead, it is socially constructed through discourse, actions, and interactions. Security, therefore, is a site of negotiation between actors claiming to speak on behalf of a particular group and members of that group. Successful securitisation depends on the effective presentation of issues as existential threats (McDonald, 2008). As *Berry Buzan* et al. explain, to present an issue as an existential threat is to say that "if we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way)" (Buzan et al. 1998, 24).

Therefore, securitisation of an issue or object, calls for extraordinary measures beyond the routines and norms of everyday politics. This type of security extension can be dangerous, because security can itself become a security policy threat, as it may authorise the implementation of inadequate, extraordinary state measures (Buzan and Hansen 2009). Buzan et al. also note that in some cases the discourse of securitisation has been so entrenched, established, and institutionalised that the threat does not even have to be present.

The Copenhagen School introduced societies, their functioning and identity, as possible objects of security through the concept of 'societal security'. In the societal sector, the object is large-scale collective identities that can function independently of the state. In terms of threats to societal security, the "abilities to maintain a language, a set of behavioural customs,

or a conception of ethnic purity can all be cast in terms of survival" (Buzan et al. 1998, 23).

A more sociological approach of securitisation focuses mainly on the role of power relations and bureaucratic politics. Securitisation processes, in this view, are about controlling populations through bureaucratic procedures and surveillance, with the possibility of these becoming a tool for strengthening the bonds between insiders. The securitisation of identity in this case will end up casting refugees and migrants as security threats because they can become an existential threat to the cohesion of the host community (Hammerstad 2014, 267–268).

The securitisation of identity leads to the securitisation of subjectivity – the intensified search for and/or attribution of a single, stable identity "regardless of its actual existence" (Kinnvall 2004 quoted in Croft 2012, 73). When identity becomes the object of security, it inherently involves the issue of immigration. The next section seeks to show the securitisation of identities through migration-related fears.

MIGRATION-RELATED FEARS

The nation-state can be the so-called 'safe state', creating a sense of security among its population. If a country is going through a crisis and its environment becomes uncertain, it offers an opportunity to focus on the emotionally driven political practice (Berezin 2002). A good example of this is the refugee crisis in 2015.

Migration as a threat can be seen as a result of a construction mechanism determined by the given historical, social, and political context (Chebel d'Appolonia 2012; Fekete 2009; Tsoukala 2008). Securitisation of the migration process has played an important role in both the academic and the public discourse since the end of the Cold War (Hammerstad 2014), and has become even more emphasised since 9/11 (Kinnvall 2013). This phenomenon is connected to the widening concept of security, which contributed to a sociological approach. In this context, security includes the terms of culture and identity (Leonard 2010), so that identity itself becomes its most important object.

The securitisation of identity has led to refugees and immigrants being considered as a security threat to their host communities (Hammerstad 2014, 267–268). Buzan et al. (2009) point out that the development of the concept of security is by no means a neutral process, but rather a moral one with very serious consequences.

The politics of fear in many cases is based on migration policy. Nowadays, for many, the concept of immigrant encompasses all the external and internal threats that can endanger the core values of their society. In this context, the presence of the immigrant always warns of some kind of internal confusion.

Unlike *Georg Simmel*'s stranger, the immigrant is no longer the one who comes today and goes away tomorrow, but rather the person who arrives today and stays here tomorrow (Bigo 2002, 63–64). Immigrants are thus 'hybrid aliens' constructed by various local/global factors, personal experience, and the media.

Migration may also have become such a significant (political) topic because it can be presented as a collection of several social problems at the same time. On the one hand, from a socio-economic point of view, immigration is in many cases connected to rising unemployment rates, a crisis of the welfare state, and a deteriorating environment. The feeling of insecurity often fuels the ideology of exclusion: in times when resources are scarce, there is no guarantee that the immigrants will not use the help of the welfare state to the "detriment of the majority" (Flecker et al. 2007, 57).

On the other hand, migration can be associated with security problems, such as everyday crimes, organised crime, or terrorism. Also, in the eyes of many, immigrants should be feared regarding (national) identity, as they can pose a threat to the demographic composition of society and can endanger European traditions and values. Overall, migration has become an umbrella term for contemporary social problems (Tsoukala 2005).

Migration-related fears are therefore complex fears that can affect multiple dimensions of our lives. Integrated threat theory (Stephan and Stephan 1996) attempts to respond to this complexity by distinguishing between three types of fears. In the case of realistic fears, the in-group feels its own existence or physical survival threatened by the out-group. In contrast, the so-called symbolic fears are most simply summed up by the sentence: "immigrants endanger our way of life and our culture." This one includes various moral considerations, beliefs, attitudes, and all the values that the group professes to own. Last but not least, intergroup anxiety involves those tensions and frustrations that arise during the interaction with a member of the out-group.

CONNECTION POINTS

Although there are many ways to argue for the omnipotent nature of fear, if we seek to explain its political relevance, we have to explore in depth the possible links between *identity* and fear. Fear is basically an individual emotion, but it can easily appear at the societal level as well. It is a universal emotion, but it has a constructed nature, too. At the same time, although identities are not essential, they are not one hundred per cent constructed either. They are also schizophrenic, as they are both multiple and complex (Calhoun 1993), and we shape our identities in relation to many communities.

If we study the connection points between identity and fear at the individual level, we can argue that fear is an integral part of the basic nature of human beings, and becoming an adult is about nothing more than learning what

to fear and why to be careful. Thus, in our socialisation, we internalise different types of fears, which become one of the defining pillars of our (personal) identity. Different childhood experiences and socialisation attitudes may eventually result in different political orientations in adulthood from conservatism to communism (Andrews 1991; Smith et al. 1956).

The developmental psychology literature introduced the concept of internal threat, which includes factors of the self (self-image) that we do not like or that we fear will be realised in the future. The concept of internal threat manifests in the so-called 'feared-for-self'. The feared-for-self develops in every social context, such as the fear of failing an exam or a job interview, for instance.

In addition, the feared-for-self can be interpreted as one of the possible selves of the individual. In the case of possible selves, the person sees role models: he/she may want to become a famous cancer researcher, for example, which is his/her 'ideal future self'. In contrast, an unsuccessful model (homeless, unemployed) may be a model for a person's feared-for-self. The feared-for-self can also become socially and politically relevant: the individual easily projects these inner fears onto others, and often creates an enemy by them (Oppenheimer, 2001).

We cannot ignore the fact that our identity is in any case the result of social construction processes. According to Calhoun (1993), identity is highly constructed in modern societies, and according to Giddens (1991), in late modernity identity is not a fixed factor at all. In Gidden's theory, the individual forms his or her own identity by constantly reflecting on the changes that take place in his/her life, so identity is nothing more than a reflective interpretation of various life events and the maintenance of the narrative created about them. And the former process can be influenced and manipulated, especially when our political identity comes to the fore, since it is often based on ideals and moral considerations of which we are not really aware (Calhoun 1993).

Regarding the individual and societal levels, it is a key factor that people constantly switch back and forth between their personal and social identities (Turner 2008). The unique life stories of group members – which are shared with each other – create a group identity, while the social identity of the group creates the individual's personal identity. Thereby the personal and societal levels are organically linked, which is also explained by the fact that culture is always available to people through some kind of microculture. Participation in social groups is thus essential for the formation of personal identities (Bruner and Feldman 1996). Social identities often target our subconscious, that is our deepest fears (which were already part of our personality) can be transformed into politically relevant emotions, amplified, and elevated to the societal level.

Moreover, the emotions experienced at the societal level may be stronger and more pervasive than the feelings experienced at the individual level (Mercer 2014). In other words, group-level emotions are more controlled by

the outside and therefore perceived as more 'objective' than their individual peers, which in many cases may appear subjective and individually constructed in our eyes (Smith et al. 2008). Group members share and regulate each other's feelings (Mercer 2014), and interactions within the group allow us to accept emotions as valid and justified without any doubts.

In addition, the existence of symbolic and realistic threats towards the group contributes to its (political) cohesion (Huddy 2013). The feeling of being threatened (typically by some kind of external threat by an out-group) strengthens the unity of the in-group, as well as the hostility towards the out-group (Stephan and Stephan 2000). For example, a reminder of the possibility of death increases the intensity of attachment to the group and the rejection of the out-group (Greenberg et al. 1990).

Based on the above, we can argue that the formation of (political) identities inherently includes the dimension of fear. Although the desire for belonging somewhere is a very important factor, we can only define identity boundaries if we distinguish ourselves from others. In the formation and maintenance of group identities, negative emotions can be more important than their positive peers, that is 'being afraid together' is often a stronger experience than the empathy or appreciation felt for the members of our group.

In addition, when we speak about political identities, we emphasise the constructed nature of fear. By this I do not mean that our fears are completely irrational and manipulated, but rather that they are highly dependent on processes of social interaction and interpretation.

Nevertheless, uncertainty itself is the most important motivating factor in identifying with certain social groups, as "individuals need to feel secure in who they are, as identities or selves. Some, deep forms of uncertainty threaten this identity security" (Mitzen 2006, 342). *Jennifer Mitzen* distinguishes between physical security and ontological security (the need to preserve a stable sense of identity).[1] According to her, ontological security concerns often outweigh concerns about physical security in the motivations of individual behaviour.

Group identification is one of the best ways to reduce feelings of insecurity in a given socio-political context. In general, people like to know who they are, how to behave, and what to think. Group identity prescribes what we should think, feel, and act on, and validates our worldview and self-image (Hogg 2007), because "a clear sense of identity is often viewed as the central means through which actors are able to generate a sense of certainty about the world and their position within it" (Browning and Joenniemi 2016, 7). Most of the time, we vote for an identity that stands on solid ground, increases our self-esteem, and evokes a sense of efficiency (Salmela and Von Scheve 2018).

[1] "Ontological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time – as being rather than constantly changing – in order to realize a sense of agency" (Mitzen 2006, 342).

In this context, securitised identities become sources of ontological security. One way of dealing with uncertainties and anxieties is to convert them into "manageable certainties of objects of fear" through securitisation (Browning and Joenniemi 2016, 8). Securitisation thereby can be identified as a tool which generates ontological security. Moreover, one of the main aspirations of the states is to try to avoid those forms of behaviour that might disrupt their sense of identity.

Key concepts and terms

Basic emotion vs socio-cultural context
Discourse of fear
Emotional turn (of political science)
Identity formation/politics
Migration-related fears
Othering
Political identities
Politics of fear
Populism
Securitisation (of identities)

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Political communication and populism

Norbert Merkovity and Büşra Özyüksel

The scholarship of political communication has a long tradition in European academic research, and distinguishes different periods in the evolution of political communication in Europe. The first period is shaped by the party logic. The second acknowledges the emergence of television and the alienation of voters from politics. The third period witnesses the rise of the media logic, while the fourth period – that of present times – points out the self-mediatised nature of political behaviour and the importance of social media channels in the process of political communication. Distinguishing these periods also allows us to give a historical perspective to the concepts of media logic, network logic, and mediatisation. It also grants stable grounds for examining the recent successes of populist political communication in European countries, the role of media in the spread of populism, and citizens' reactions. Populism is indeed shaping the patterns of political communication across Europe. Therefore, understanding the motives of different actors' communication is of essential importance.

Keywords: political communication, media logic, network logic, self-mediatisation, populism

The research on political communication in Europe started in the 1960s and has evolved into a significant area in political science and media studies, which delivered lots of important and relevant results on, for instance, election campaigns, political actors' attitudes and behaviours, the role of media in political issues, or electoral behaviour. The fall of socialist regimes in 1989/90 has also resulted in an important contribution to the field from Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, most of the findings presented in this chapter will reflect comments by Western European scholars on contemporary European democracies, as a more detailed overview of regional divergences in the existing literature would go beyond the scope of our text.

This chapter will not attempt to introduce all research directions of political communication. However, it will highlight those tendencies through which political actors' communication could be understood and explained. After the introduction to the periods of political communication, and into the media and the network logic, mediatisation and self-mediatisation will be

elaborated on in order to analyse populist political communication in Europe. All the mentioned occurrences consider political communication as a study of communication in the political process.

FOUR PERIODS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE

Jay Blumler and *Dennis Kavanagh* described different stages in the evolution of modern political communication in Europe. The first period was the two decades after World War II, as the golden age of parties, characterised by long-term commitment of voters to political parties, and the party logic dominating the communication of political actors. The crucial features of the party logic are fact-based political speeches, the mediatory nature of media, and selective and confirmative responses from the voters (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999, 211–212). The critical communication technique of the age was programme-based rhetoric shaped to the given medium by the politician.

Restricted media channels define the second period starting from the 1960s. National radio and television channels became dominant, affecting the voters' perception of political messages. The voters' commitment to parties started to fade, and the group of non-committed voters became more prominent. Objectivity regarding news replaced the mediatory nature. The media became an actor in the political communication process.

To control the message, politicians and parties learnt new techniques to influence the agenda selection performed by the media. Press conferences, interviews, and debates broadcast by media outlets emphasised the political actors' communication, setting the base for modern campaigns. The politicians' communication was less reliant on their intuitions than on consultants because they wanted to match the supposed opinions of media consumers in the process of persuasion (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999, 212–213). Party logic changed into media logic, which meant that political content was adjusted to the media code, and mediatisation became prevalent (Strömbäck 2008, 234).

The third period started in the 1990s, when media became multichannelled and the 24-hour news broadcast appeared. All this happened globally and was accompanied by the revolution of computers. In the end, social media also took shape. Citizens' news consumption patterns changed. They were facing information abundance by getting news from a multitude of sources. The competition among the mediums got fiercer, speed became critical, and the news flow accelerated (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999, 213). Politicians' and parties' voices weakened, as they had to compete with other political actors beyond political parties (e.g. experts or civil groups) for media attention (Blumler 2006, 207).

The change in media resulted in political actors leaving the party logic behind in their communication, and learning the media logic – thus stepping into a new phase of mediatisation, where media itself makes the agenda

selection that politics is trying to influence (Brants and van Praag 2006, 31; Strömbäck 2008, 234–235). The first three periods can be interpreted as how media gradually replaced party logic. Political behaviour became characterised by mediatisation, and more actors appeared from outside parties in political communication.

These processes led to the fourth period of political communication, which started in the mid-2000s. In this period, the fragmentation of media accelerated. The different channels available on the Internet create information overflow, rooted in the information abundance of the third period. The illusion of making people consume the information that they want is ultimately created. In this era, the relationship between politicians and journalists loosens, as political actors can convey their messages directly through social networking sites (Blumler 2016, 25–26).

In this fourth period, mediums will be the mediators of political messages, not as institutional actors that shape the news according to editorial standards, but as platform providers. The importance of the media logic and mediatisation is questioned in the world of politics. Besides, non-political actors' (celebrities, etc.) communication is blooming as community sites offer the same opportunities for them. There is an exceptionally vivid communication environment resulting from mixing political with non-political information.

Another consequence is that politicians have to pursue multidimensional information management. All that we used to know as interpersonal communication is now a globally spread, incredibly diverse, and time-synchronous communication network. Nevertheless, political elites still handle traditional media as an important channel. In the enhanced competition for users' attention, political actors concentrate more on the image of their messages than on their content (Blumler 2016). The fourth period of political communication offers politicians the opportunity of directing attention to themselves. However, there is a need for them to be able to sense the actual trends, as well as to know the features of key communication channels and their effects on users and the traditional media.

POLITICIANS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN EUROPE

The previous subsection gave a general overview of the evolution of political communication in Europe in the past decades. However, the implications mentioned regarding the fourth period anticipate that social media is a more complex phenomenon. Television can convey reality, or how the news narrates events. We can also see that different technologies mark the borders within a coherent political project or campaign. All mediums have inner rules that work to keep the integrity of the contents while the audience can easily interpret them. The presence of rules can be read from two directions.

On the one hand, we find technological restrictions that are inevitable. For example, in the case of the press, the number of columns, the lack of visuals in radio, the angle of the camera on TV, the available number of characters on community sites (see Twitter), or content filters, are barriers that users can influence. On the other hand, we find the standards of content creators, typically those of social media platforms, or journalists in traditional media. Suppose the content is created to create prestige or make financial profit. In that case, the aspects of consumability are shaped by the followers' presumed taste and supplemented by forms that are already in the medium's toolbox.

a. Media logic and network logic

Media logic and network logic have distinct features. Still, the transition from one to the other does not mean an absolute paradigm shift. Network logic often complements media logic, but it inevitably entails the adaptation of communicators to new technology (West and Orman 2003). Network logic is rooted in the fact that social media works differently to traditional media. Content-making (manufacturing), distribution, and media consumption are organised along different network logic lines than in the media logic. Nevertheless, the theory of network logic is a direct consequence of the theory of media logic.

Based on the studies by *David Altheide* and *Robert Snow*, *media logic* describes the process where media transmits and communicates information (Altheide 1985; Altheide and Snow, 1979; 1988). The exact process in political communication is about the political actors' use of media, or in other words, the way political actors understand and instrumentalise media's communication and message transmission mechanisms. By possessing such knowledge, politicians' communication also changes, which affects political communication at large. The *network logic* acknowledges the importance of information transmission and of media use, but it is rather focused on political and popular culture.

The *political culture* component refers to the values and political behaviour of individuals and collective groups. Political culture is defined in the classic concept of *Gabriel Almond* and *Sidney Verba* through three different subtypes of citizens' (political) culture. In the participants' culture, citizens are active, supportive, or dismissive in political processes. These are the citizens of modern democracies. In the subject culture, citizens comply with and trust the legality of the state. Feudal societies are typical examples of this culture, where the subjects had few rights (they did not have political rights, for example) as opposed to their obligations (e.g. paying taxes). In a parochial political culture, there are no distinct political functions. States falling apart and ruled by warlords are prime examples (Almond and Verba 1989).

The significance of the theory of political culture is mirrored by the fact that longer-term social surveys originate their theoretical framework from this concept – for instance, the Eurobarometer used in the European Union (since 1973), the General Social Survey in the US (since 1972), or the Latinobarómetro and Afrobarometer, specialised in South America and Africa. These surveys were inspired by Almond and Verba, but they cannot inform us about how democratic the conditions are, or what political culture looks like in the given country based on people's value and political choices. Therefore, the theory had to be renewed.

New political culture claims that the classic division of right-left has been replaced by preferences related to global challenges, and social and economic questions have departed from each other. Matters of gender, morals, or lifestyle have become important (Clark and Inglehart 1998). The attitude towards political parties is different, as well, which partly changes the traditional (left-centre-right, conservative-liberal-social democrat, etc.) political differentiations. Thus, these will also generate a different political interpretation among citizens.

These new values refer to controversies already defining our present-day reality, and all citizens shape the political culture in some way when they discuss globalisation, immigration, emigration, or unemployment, for instance. However, it differs at the level of each individual how active they are in these exchanges, and also how much of this discourse turns into action.

Another vital component of the network logic is popular culture. In fact, the emergence of the concept of popular culture well preceded that of network logic. Cultural publicity appears in political communication through popular culture, and that is how politicians can reach out to citizens. However, we must not forget that political communication, as a practice, and especially as a research field, has always been interested in understanding the *popular* in Europe and elsewhere. Elections can be regarded as popularity races when the voters decide on the winners (popular) and losers (unpopular).

The specific features of popular culture, therefore, have always been present in political communication. However, not only political culture tends to move towards popular culture. This is a two-way road: popular culture also penetrates politics (Street 1997, 14). Think about those events when representatives from popular culture are involved in political action, or organise movements.[1] The two sides mutually enter each other's field.

The discussion about popular culture brings us closer to celebrity or influencer politicians. There are two types of such personalities. One is a popular person who is not an elected politician, not even a politician, but is well known and has something to say about political matters. Examples are

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[1] A reoccurring example for similar events is Live Aid organised by *Bob Geldof* in 1985, a pop music event for the aid of starving people in Africa and in continuation of that Live 8, a series of concerts in 2005 with Geldof as the main organiser to raise attention to poverty.

popular personalities like *Bono*, *Elton John*, *Bob Geldof*, or *Greta Thunberg*. Another is the elected politician, whose publicity and popularity are based on political identity and receive similar attention to other well-known people (e.g. *Boris Johnson*, *Emmanuel Macron*, *Nigel Farage*, etc.). This way, we can differentiate two types of *political celebrities*. Nevertheless, not all celebrities will show interest in political matters, and not all politicians will become celebrities, of course.

Image has always been part of modern-day politics. Nowadays, the image of a competent politician is not attractive enough in itself for the voters. There is a need for more by which people can feel the given politician is closer to them. Being a celebrity helps achieve this. A celebrity politician is neither good, nor bad *per se* in today's political culture, but a phenomenon that is all over the place (West and Orman, 2003). At the same time, public expectations towards the politicians are close to that of a celebrity entertainer (Inthorn and Street 2011, 486–487).

In essence, the theory of network logic implies that politics grasps the regularities of social media. Scholars separated three processes where the *mass* media logic and the *network* media logic can be detected. These are production, content distribution, and media usage (Klinger and Svensson 2015, 1247–1251). In the logic of mass media, production is costly, as it must meet traditional ethical and moral standards. Professional journalists work on news sorting and content production. Their primary task is content-making. When journalists sort out specific content details, they decide what is to be brought to the public's attention and what remains outside the media. The determining powers are the audience's interests, profit expectations, and the owner's intentions in this process.

In network logic, production is not costly. In fact, it is close to zero, as news sorting and content production is performed by the users who are not professionals. Their central aim is to distribute the content to as many users as possible in order to become well known and popular. Content distribution is done by professionals in the logic of mass media that implies content sorting as well. The organising principle is based on evolving standards, such as determining the news value.

At the end of the distribution chain, we find the audience that subscribes to services (buy the magazine, subscribe to the cable TV package, pay for TV subscription, or devote time to commercial blocks). In the network logic, the role of users is similar to intermediates regarding content distribution. They try to share contents that are thought to be popular and build networks that are kept in fluid unity by similar fields of interest and common principles, or the image of opinion leaders. This unity is fluid because the elements of the networks can continuously change according to actual trends.

b. Mediatisation and the logics

The concepts of media logic and mediatisation (and mediation) are often used as synonyms in the literature of political communication (Hepp 2011; Livingstone 2009). Some scholars regard it as an all-encompassing, collective term (Deacon and Stanyer 2014), while others approach it as a continuously "unfolding historical process" (Livingstone 2009, 7). A related term is mediation. Mediation is a natural, pre-ordered mission of media where communicators denote meanings to happenings for their audience (Mazzoleni 2015, 378). Despite all this, in the European literature of political communication, the phenomenon of mediation is regarded as more valuable than mediatisation, and is used – in a broader sense than transmission – as a collective term (Couldry 2008; Livingstone 2009).

Aside from the inconsistencies in the literature, we will look at the two concepts as two different phenomena, though similar in their effects. As described above, media logic means adaptation to the work of media. In contrast, *mediatisation* means a political system greatly influenced by the media and adapted to the mediation of politics (Asp 1986, 359 quoted in Hjavard 2008, 106.). Other scholars claim that politics has lost its autonomy against media with mediatisation, as it communicates to the public from the ground of media regularities (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999).

The case is different on social media sites, where other regularities prevail as well. Political actors do not only get mediatised by the media, but they intend to raise their potential audience's attention effectively. That is how we find self-mediatisation or reflexive mediatisation describing the process of how political actors make traditional media react to their communication via social networking sites (Marcinkowski and Steiner 2009; Meyer 2002).

Jesper Strömbäck describes mediatisation as a process through which the independence of politics from media can be studied. The mediatisation of politics can be examined by the degree of constraints, on which basis four phases can be differentiated. The first phase is when politics takes notes of the transmission role of media, and politics gets mediated. In the second phase of mediatisation, media becomes more independent and the media logic, rather than any political logic, prevails, with the need for political actors to develop their public relations and news management skills and capacities. In the third phase, media logic becomes dominant, to which politicians have to adapt, including by further increasing their news management and spinning competences. By doing so, they ultimately put party logic aside. In the fourth phase of mediatisation, politicians internalise the media logic and use it not only during the campaigns, but also between two political or election campaigns, leading to a colonisation of politics by media (Strömbäck 2008, 235–241).

Mediatisation and self-mediatisation are not a linear but a multidirectional and multidimensional compelling force in social networking sites. Also,

consequences do not depend on normative aspects (Strömbäck and Esser 2014, 251–252). In other words, mediatisation does not have a starting or end point, but is influenced by the events to which politicians adapt for the sake of their success. Politicians use this compelling force, which eventually ends in self-representation, as "self-initiated stage management and media friendly packaging" (Esser 2013, 162). Self-mediatisation is one of the main features in populist politicians' communication throughout Europe today.

POPULIST POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE

Notwithstanding country differences, European democracies seem to be generally affected by political populism (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). Two approaches towards populism can be distinguished here. The first one defines the identity of populist political actors and identifies elements that may explain their existence and influence through the way they communicate. The other explores populist political communication's core features and how political actors utilise populist political communication. The first perspective focuses on populist political actors, while the second on populist communication techniques, tactics, styles, and rhetoric. The extent to which specific political players participate in populist communication makes inferences regarding the prevalence and pervasiveness of populist political communication, and with regard to which political actors are considered to be populist (Stanyer et al. 2017).

Populist political actors in Europe are often equated with far-right, anti-immigration behaviours and nationalism. Examples include the Austrian Freedom Party, Vlaams Belang (Belgium), the National Rally (France), Golden Dawn (Greece), Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance (Hungary), the Party for Freedom (the Netherlands), the Progress Party (Norway), Law and Justice (Poland), the Democratic Renewal Party (Portugal), or the Swedish Democrats. Some of them are regionalists, too, such as Lega Nord (Italy) or the Platform for Catalonia (Spain, dissolved in 2019).

Although these parties are easily identified as populists in Europe, they are not the only political actors characterised as such. Several parties and movements, including ANO (previously Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) in the Czech Republic, the Five Star Movement in Italy, the 12th of March Movement in Portugal, or Podemos in Spain, have capitalised in similar ways on widespread discontent generated by corruption scandals and the implementation of unpopular policies. These parties and movements frequently promise the revitalisation of political processes and more direct forms of democracy (Stanyer et al. 2017, 356). As a result, consistent ideology is not a distinguishing trait of populist political actors in Europe. Some are extreme right, others are far left, and some are in the middle of the political spectrum. Several populist actors combine right-wing and populist elements

in their speeches and programmes. Some, such as Podemos, profess to be ideologically *empty*, like an empty shell waiting to be filled with whatever the people's demands are.

Except for populist appeals (direct or indirect appeals to the people – empty populism – and further possible attributes like the exclusion of various out-groups or anti-elitism), no policy or political programme can be identified as shared by a wide range of populist political parties in Europe. The populist label encompasses many elements, including nationalism, regionalism, Euroscepticism, opposition to immigration, anti-multiculturalism, anti-corruption, and calls for greater citizen participation and more direct forms of democracy (Stanyer et al. 2017, 357).

Here the role of media should be mentioned in terms of a vehicle transmitting political messages to citizens. European media networks have undergone significant changes over the past decades, leading to expanded opportunity structures for disseminating populist themes. The loss of traditional party press, increased media ownership concentration, reliance on advertising, and a stronger emphasis on news values have all contributed to the rise of populist rhetoric (Esser et al. 2017). With the emergence of political communication's fourth period, and with the rise of social media (network logic, self-mediatisation), a new kind of populism appeared: *media populism* (Mazzoleni 2003).

The term 'media populism' refers to three separate viewpoints: populism by the media, populism via the media, and populist citizen journalism (Esser et al. 2017, 367). The first point of view is the populism of the media, which refers to media companies actively engaged in their form of populism through the use of a rhetorical style in order to inject themselves, as supposed public representatives, into the political process. Populism fuelled by the media exists in several European states.

The second viewpoint on media populism is populism through the media. According to *Gianpietro Mazzoleni*, the media's major problem is not the spread of media-specific populism, but rather the reinforcement of politicians' populist rhetoric. Populist parties and movements depend on media support. Media reports on these actors' slogans, arguments, and ideological views increase their public exposure and perceived validity. Mazzoleni argues that political malaise is a common essential condition for the growth of anti-political sentiments: "the media play a role in disseminating it, either by simply keeping it on a country's public agenda or by spreading political mistrust and a mood of fatalistic disengagement – all of which populist politicians can easily and quickly exploit" (Mazzoleni 2008, 50).

Populist citizen journalism is the third and final approach to media populism. It happens when media companies create channels for the dissemination of populist messages originating from their audiences – typically, but not only, in the form of reader comments on their websites (Esser 2017).

a. Populist political communication and citizens

Populism requires an understanding of communication mechanisms. Despite ongoing disagreements about the concept, a growing consensus views populism through the lens of communication and media. This approach offers unique and essential insights into how populism works in Europe, particularly considering a rapidly changing high-choice media environment that may have transformed the very foundations of mainstream populist success (Van Aelst et al. 2017; Vreese et al. 2018).

References to, and a focus on, a *homogeneous people* can be perceived as a crucial component of the populist style (e.g. Canovan 1999; Mudde 2004; Taggart 2004). 'Homogeneous people' indicates that the major distinguishing element of populism is the formation of an in-group of the 'people'. However, because 'the people' is a vague term and concept, it has various implications and multiple interpretations – e.g. the people as sovereign, class, ethnic group, nation, ordinary people, etc. (Reinemann et al. 2019, 3). These various meanings of the people might be communicated openly or implicitly in populist messaging.

Populist communication has significant impact on citizens' political attitudes, emotions, and behaviours. Some academics even believe that media's attention to populist leaders and its transmission of populist ideas is one of the primary factors in populism's political success (Hameleers et al. 2019). It is critical to analyse the congruence, the source, and the sensitivity of populist messages in order to contextualise demand-side characteristics of voters and comprehend the impacts of populist communication.

For example, Matthes and Schmuck (2017) determined that populist communication was more compelling to individuals with lower levels of education. According to Bos et al. (2013), populist appeals are successful among the politically sceptical. The empirical findings of Hameleers and Schmuck (2017) claim that the support of the source is crucial in adopting populist messages: only citizens who feel connected to, or support the source are favourably impacted by populist communication. Populist communication is most compelling to a selected segment of citizens whose pre-existing convictions are consistent with the message.

Another critical element to consider is the resonance of populist communication with real-life opportunity structures. At a national level, this indicates that populist communication blaming economic elites may have the most significant impact in countries that experienced the most severe economic crisis in 2008/09, or refugee crisis in 2015. Messages that blame immigrants for everyday challenges that citizens are facing may have the most significant impact in nations that have recently dealt with a large inflow of immigrants, such as Germany.

The success of populist political parties in diverse countries may also be used to explain resonance. As a result, individuals in societies where populist

parties have a more substantial presence should be more familiar with the populist rhetoric. The populist messages may trigger widely available schemes of populist framing among these individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, populism has been on the rise across Europe despite consolidated and strong democracies on the continent. As a distinct communication style, populism aims to reach out to people. Media is the most significant vehicle for populist leaders and news about them. The *anti-hero* nature of populist politicians resonates with the public. These politicians gain status with fundamental changes of the media environment and the toolbox of political communication, as described through the four periods above. Therefore, one can claim that the relationship between populism and the media points to much more than the skilful use of this latter by populist actors.

We get a more nuanced perception of political communication in Europe if we start to examine actors' communication. Connections are hidden in the details of the communication process. The advent of social networking sites has made it possible for politicians to communicate directly to a broader audience. However, when they do so, they use the codes of other successful actors, opening the ground for celebrity politicians. The logic in social media reaffirmed citizens' need for simplified messages, which, in turn, has opened up new vistas for populist politics. Therefore, it is likely that populist political communication may dominate European political discourse in the period to come.

Key concepts and terms

Celebrity politicians
Media logic
Mediation
Mediatisation
Network logic
Party logic
Periods of political communication
Political culture
Populist political communication
Self-mediatisation

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Global Europe and strategic sovereignty[1]

Zsolt Nagy, Zoltán Simon, Viktor Szép, and Tamás Dezső Ziegler[2]

Strategic autonomy and strategic sovereignty are popular buzzwords in EU politics and studies nowadays. This is the combined consequence of our rapidly changing multipolar world of increasing great power rivalry externally, and several fear factors within Europe internally. The concept of strategic autonomy – as the ability to act together with partners when possible and alone when needed – emerged from the realm of security and defence, but has now evolved into the comprehensive idea of strategic sovereignty, which also covers a number of other areas, such as trade, health, digital, energy, agriculture, or foreign policies, to name but a few. Nevertheless, EU autonomy in the field of security and defence remains a core issue, as a more autonomous Union in the political, operational, and industrial dimensions of this policy is in the interest of Europe and its allies alike. In the broader context, two significant areas of strategic sovereignty – along with others – are the EU's trade and sanctions policies. Trade has traditionally been a key external policy for the Union, while its free-trade-oriented paradigm is facing growing criticism and pressure. Member States also have to decide whether they let business actors shape and steer this policy, or enhance political leadership in this field, and whether they wish to use trade, more than is the case today, as a toolbox for strengthening the EU's global stance and supporting its geopolitical objectives. Last but not least, the Union's sanctions policy has grown into a genuine foreign policy instrument in the EU's external relations, opening up new vistas for more autonomous action without endangering core alliances and partnerships. Nevertheless, the ways these sanction mechanisms are used and their efficiency continue to be challenged by many.

Keywords: strategic autonomy, strategic sovereignty, security and defence, trade, restrictive measures

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[2] The views and comments presented in this book chapter are part of the authors' individual research and publication activities, and do not represent in any way or to any extent the positions of the institutions they are an official of, or employed by.

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND STRATEGIC SOVEREIGNTY

— Zoltán Simon —

The European political *malaise* discussed in the Introduction and across the various chapters of this book is also present in the EU's global relations and external action, and in the public debates surrounding them. The Union remains in quest of its single voice, strategic objectives, international profile, and efficient external policy instruments in the global arena. This is not new. Nevertheless, what were regrettable but tolerable shortcomings in a relatively benign international environment in the past, have now become dangerous deficiencies in a rapidly changing multipolar world of intensifying great power rivalry. The concept of *strategic sovereignty* is closely related to all the four above-mentioned challenges, while it is not identical to any of them.

New dynamics in the EU's external and internal environment seem to accelerate the emergence of a new foreign policy attitude, or even a new foreign policy paradigm in the Union. As observed by *Daniel Fiott*,

> *strategic sovereignty is increasingly being held up as the ideal against which EU international action should be measured. Perfection in economic and strategic matters does not exist. It is, nonetheless, curious that an ill-defined and contested concept such as strategic sovereignty is increasingly becoming the basis on which the EU's political actions are promoted, questioned or even belittled.* (Fiott 2021c, 12)

The Union's weakening power of attraction and self-confidence in the world on the one hand, and its parallel ambitions to achieve strategic sovereignty on the other, may be perceived as paradoxical developments contradicting each other. In fact, they are strongly intertwined, with the second rooted in the first as a response to a decades-long identity crisis of the EU on the international scene. This identity crisis is becoming more pronounced in "an increasingly hostile world that is largely uninterested in European values and interests" (Fiott 2021c, 5).

The desire for European strategic sovereignty can be traced back to several *fear* factors. One is the shaking world order, threatening the Union of becoming irrelevant, at best, or a field of geopolitical competition (Franke and Varma 2019, 3), as a "playground for global powers" (EPRS 2020, I), at worst. Or, put a different way, the "fear that the EU is being shaped by geopolitical forces rather than shaping them" (Fiott 2021d, 38). This is mirrored in *Ursula von der Leyen*'s 'geopolitical Commission', or the repeated calls for the EU "to learn to speak the language of power" by High Representative *Josep Borrell* (see e.g. Borrell 2021, 13), who also portrays European strategic sovereignty as an existential matter, a "process of political survival" for the Union in an increasingly transactional world (Borrell 2020).

Another fear factor is the decreasing European trust in the United States as a reliable partner, aggravated by the Trump presidency, but also some unilateral actions by the Biden administration, in the cases of the painful experience of the August 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan or the Aukus security deal deal, for instance. Though some European leaders tend to downplay this factor, *Nathalie Tocci*, the penholder of the EU's 2016 Global Strategy, refers to it as a main driver, suggesting that the EU cannot rely on the US as it once did because "the wounds in US democracy are deep" and "the US will be preoccupied principally with itself for some time and will invariably look to Asia as its main area of foreign policy interests" (Tocci 2021, 12–13).

A third fear factor involves the internal political troubles within the Union itself. This internal–external link makes *Giovanni Grevi* claim that a failure to substantially advance its strategic autonomy "would be a symptom and a multiplier of centrifugal forces within the EU" (Grevi 2019, 4). Domestic turbulences undermine the Union's global self-confidence and reduce its appetite for external adventures beyond its territory, with a significant impact on its external action. As *Richard Youngs* also notices: the ethos in EU foreign policy has become one of protecting internal European security and stability as opposed to the Union remoulding conditions outside its borders with a view to longer-term and more diffuse benefits (Youngs 2021a, 32).

Against this backdrop, even if the concept of strategic sovereignty is gaining ground in the EU's external relations discourse – which we can consider a welcome development – it remains an essentially *defensive* idea in many ways. For this reason, it also remains limited to an essentially conservative idea for the time being, aimed more at preserving the global status quo, and Europe's place in it, than generating a genuine transformation in EU external policies (see also Youngs 2021b). This defensive character – and the conflicting desires of continuing to benefit from the existing world order and leading global change at the same time – contributes to an *elusive* concept of strategic sovereignty, resulting in a persistent lack of clarity.

The current journey of the concept in European public discourse started with the speech delivered by French President *Emmanuel Macron* at the Sorbonne in September 2017 (Macron 2017), followed by an expanding debate about *strategic autonomy* in the field of security and defence. So much so that, in his speech at the Bruegel Institute in September 2020, President of the European Council *Charles Michel* referred to European strategic autonomy as "the aim of our generation" (Michel 2020).

Debates have led to a multitude of diverging interpretations of strategic autonomy. A commonly used definition is the formula established by the Council, referring to the EU's "capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible" (Council of the EU 2017), or in a slightly different way: "the ability to act, together with partners when possible, alone when needed" (Zandee et al. 2020, 1).

Subsequently, the idea of strategic autonomy has evolved into the concept of strategic sovereignty as a result of an obvious need to broaden its scope beyond the context of security and defence, and to discuss European autonomy in a number of other areas as well, from economy to energy and digital technology, and from public health to foreign policy. Nevertheless, this new formula seems to give the same hard time to politicians, practitioners, and academics. While some of them claim that "strategic sovereignty and strategic autonomy are different animals" (Fiott 2021a, 2), the arguments presented to distinguish the two are not always convincing.

In the light of this sometimes confusing – and often unproductive – terminology debate, we may fix three basic views as our platform for this chapter: first, that as a main rule we use the term 'strategic sovereignty' (when we go beyond the area of security and defence); second, that in today's world the Union is facing a pressing need for the "ability to act autonomously, to rely on one's own resources in key strategic areas and to cooperate with partners whenever needed" (Anghel 2020, 1); and third, that strategic sovereignty does not equal autarky. Finally, we consider the key questions highlighted by Fiott as the ones that still need to be answered:

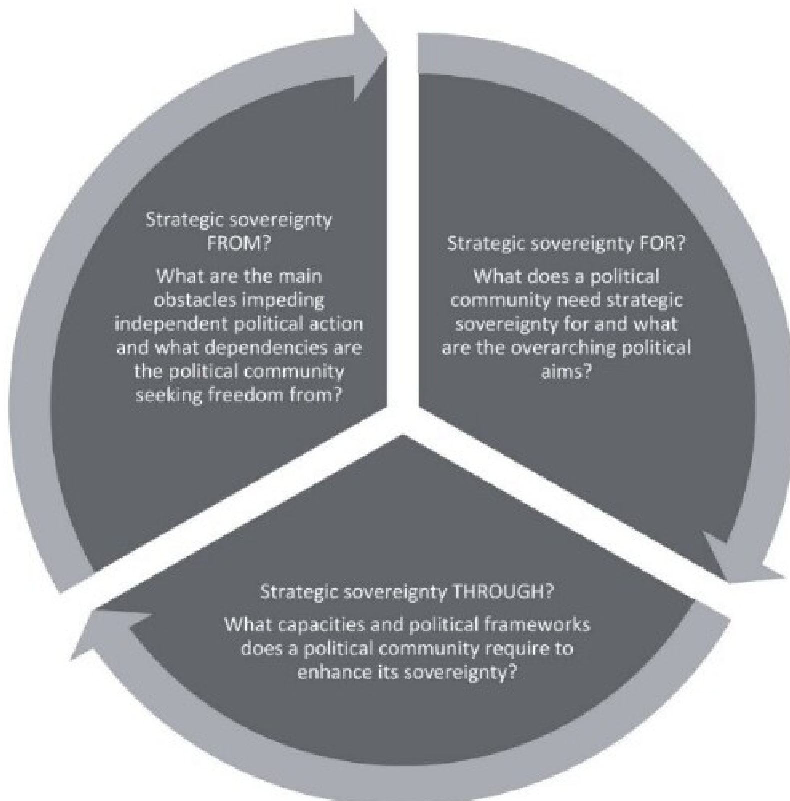

Figure 10: Strategic sovereignty – three points of departure
Source: Fiott 2021c, 9

Some argue that the ideas of European strategic autonomy and sovereignty are vague partly by design, as they are meant to inspire, while deliberately leaving room for interpretation (Franke and Varma 2019, 10–11). Others see their ambiguity as allowing national governments – and citizens, we should add – to "project their hopes and fears" into these concepts (Tamma 2020).

Indeed, it might be fair to claim that European strategic sovereignty is, in many ways, more a matter of *imagination* than of hard facts and reality today. The problem with this is that in times of political *malaise*, public imagination tends to move into pessimistic, reactive, defensive, isolationist, and protectionist, instead of optimistic, proactive, constructive, and cooperative directions, increasing the risks of internal and external tensions and conflicts.

Vagueness also paves the way for confusion. A recent survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations shows that core components of the concept of European strategic autonomy remain unclear and contentious across the Member States (Franke and Varma 2019, 4). This haziness reinforces existing fears, and even creates new ones, such as the concerns about weakening transatlantic ties – felt and voiced in Central and Eastern Europe in particular – or Young's 'strategic autonomy trap', for example.

This, in turn, reminds us that EU strategic sovereignty requires strong internal (social) and external political legitimacy alike (Lippert et al. 2019, 14–15), with these two conditions being closely intertwined. Therefore, we may also agree with Fiott that the concept of strategic sovereignty is inherently linked to matters of political authority and to the relations between citizens, states, and institutions (Fiott 2021c). In the same spirit, we may share Grevi's conclusion that the debate about strategic sovereignty is ultimately one about the EU's political cohesion (Grevi 2019, 9), with a direct impact on its external status and behaviour.

This chapter does not aim to deliver another comprehensive account of the idea of European strategic sovereignty. Its authors are fully conscious that the scope of this concept extends much beyond the realm of EU external policies – including, for instance, economic, energy, digital, industrial, agricultural, or public health issues (see e.g. Council of the EU 2021; Tocci 2021). However, our focus remains limited to the main theme of this book, as described in its Introduction, from three specific external policy perspectives – the viewpoints of the Union's security and defence, international trade, and sanctions policies – as three distinctive angles of different nature in these debates.

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN SECURITY AND DEFENCE

— Zsolt Nagy —

References to the need for a strengthening of the EU's strategic autonomy have become recurring elements of practically all documents adopted by either the European Council, the Council, or the European Commission on *security and defence* matters today. Although the exact meaning of the concept remains largely undefined, and therefore controversial, these two words have mobilised a great deal of intellectual reflection and, more importantly, point to the heart of the question of what role Europe should play in its own security and defence.

The security environment of Europe is becoming increasingly complex with unresolved and long-standing risks, as well as emerging new challenges, and even threats in both the eastern and southern flanks of the continent. At the same time, major geopolitical shifts can be witnessed in our post-Cold War world, with a weakening rules-based international order, the relative decline of the US, a rising and more assertive China, and an increasingly aggressive and unpredictable Russia. Europe cannot ignore these dynamics: it needs to redefine its place and role in this unfolding new world. The debate about European strategic autonomy has emerged in this context; while the COVID-19 pandemic has only reinforced it.

The notion of strategic autonomy is rooted in French strategic thinking. The first appearance of the concept dates back to 1994, when France's *White Paper on Defence* referred to strategic autonomy as an objective to be guaranteed by the defence forces. This nationally oriented approach was gradually elevated to the European level, first in 1998, when France and the United Kingdom agreed upon deepening European-level defence cooperation.

Through a carefully balanced compromise, the *Franco–British Joint Declaration* signed in Saint-Malo embraced the aspect of autonomy, without qualifying it as strategic, although: "the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises". It was in this spirit that the UK agreed to develop autonomous European capacities to execute crisis management operations, while France accepted that this should remain compatible with NATO policies.

More than a decade later, in 2013, the European Commission's communication on defence industry brought the concept back into the limelight by claiming that

> *Europe must be able to assume its responsibilities for its own security and for international peace and stability in general. This necessitates a certain degree of strategic autonomy: to be a credible and reliable partner, Europe must be able to*

decide and to act without depending on the capabilities of third parties. (European Commission 2013)

The same year, the European Council also highlighted this term by declaring that strengthening Europe's industrial and technological potential in the field of defence would enhance its strategic autonomy (European Council 2013).

The next and a decisive milestone in the evolution of the concept was the publication, in 2016, of the EU's new Global Strategy (EUGS). The EUGS painted a rather dire picture and raised existential questions about the Union's future. This was not only because the document was brought out by High Representative *Federica Mogherini* in the wake of the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum, but also because it reflected fundamental changes in Europe's security environment, which called for a realistic reassessment of the EU's interests and priorities.

One of the key statements in the document emphasised that "an appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders" (European Union 2016, 9). This placed the term in the centre of debates about the EU's role in the world. In parallel, alternative terminologies also started to proliferate, such as strategic independence, open strategic autonomy, strategic sovereignty, or European sovereignty, to mention just a few.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that a dynamically growing literature attempts to shed light on the *meaning*, purpose, and perspectives of European strategic autonomy. As we have seen, the concept derived from the security and defence domain, and has filtered into other policy areas. Nevertheless, as security and defence still remain critical elements to strengthen the EU's the EU's strategic autonomy, the development of adequate military capabilities by European states continues to be perceived by many as the most pressing need (e.g. Zandee et al. 2020). *Frédéric Mauro* goes even further by stating that strategic autonomy should explicitly be confined to the military sphere, otherwise it will only lead to confusion. In his view, this concept is no more and no less than the ability "to wage a war alone" (Mauro 2018).

When it comes to the definition of strategic autonomy, one of the most compelling definitions claims that it is "the ability of European states to set their own priorities and make their own decisions in matters of foreign policy, security and defence, and have the means to implement these decisions alone, or with partners if they so choose" (Järvenpää et al. 2019). This interpretation contains all the elements that are common in many analyses describing the concept as an "ability", which is linked to "own decisions and means" and the possibility to act in "partnership" when necessary.

One may also notice that the standard terminology is 'European' strategic autonomy, while EU documents refer to 'EU' strategic autonomy. It is obvious that European strategic autonomy, if we understand it literally, is broader

than the Union's strategic autonomy, while lacking the institutional aspect of the term. For some, the "EU option is the most logical", as the Union provides the best institutional framework for pursuing European strategic autonomy (Biscop 2019, 124). Others, however, do not see a reason for linking this objective to any specific institutional setting (e.g. Järvenpää et al. 2019).

The challenges and pitfalls of strategic autonomy are also highlighted in the academic discourse. One of the standard counterarguments is that European strategic autonomy would weaken, or even undermine, the transatlantic alliance. In Tocci's view, a more pertinent problem is that Europeans' quest for autonomy will lead to power concentration and protectionism within the Union, going against the very core values of the integration project (Tocci 2021). Others criticise the lack of clarity of the term; or argue that it has a French flavour, which raises suspicions in some EU countries. Dismissive opinions also point to various in-built contradictions in the idea, or even call it a "toxic debate" that lacks any concrete political programme (Major and Mölling 2020).

Beyond the academic polemics, EU Member States also maintain diverging approaches towards strategic autonomy in security and defence – even if cleavages have somewhat diminished recently due to a growing number of voices supporting the orientation towards more autonomous actions. Several studies have been devoted to analysing Member States' attitudes in this regard, showing that conflicting national positions are mainly driven by a diversity of *strategic cultures* and threat perceptions.

Not surprisingly, the idea of strategic autonomy is the most elaborated in the Union's sole nuclear power, France, as the sense of autonomy is deeply rooted in the country's strategic thinking. While there is an ever-present suspicion towards the French position, Paris has regularly underlined that she was bound to her commitments in NATO, whose alliance shall remain responsible for European territorial defence.

In the case of Germany, the notion of strategic autonomy cannot be detected in official documents. Nevertheless, a paradigm shift can be noticed in Berlin's approach towards European security and defence cooperation through taking more responsibility, including in the EU framework. However, the rift between the German and French views persists, as also mirrored explicitly in the former German Minister of Defence *Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer*'s call for an "end to illusions of European strategic autonomy."

Intra-EU divergences about the need for strategic autonomy are linked in many ways to the relations with the *United States* and with NATO. The doubters – most prominently the Baltic States and Poland – fear that more European autonomy will lead to less American involvement in, and commitment to, Europe's security. This sentiment has also been reinforced by American concerns about recent EU defence initiatives – notably the launch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF) – which were considered by many in Washington as

protectionist measures discriminating against the US defence industry and diverting resources from NATO.

Ironically, the opposite effect was also true: the Trump administration's wavering commitment to the Atlantic alliance gave renewed impetus to the quest for European strategic autonomy, and generated broader support for it among EU Member States than ever before. Over time, a more constructive attitude has also emerged in Washington, not least with the incoming Biden-administration, suggesting that the US should rather support, instead of criticising, EU defence initiatives as long as they strengthen the transatlantic bond and the European pillar of the alliance in the spirit of more burden-sharing.

It should not be forgotten either that the EU's renewed effort to enhance its security and defence cooperation is taking place in the context of Brexit. The UK, one of the largest and most potent European military forces, has left the Union, which undoubtedly has an impact on European aspirations for strategic autonomy, and for the time being it is an open question as to how future defence cooperation between the EU and the UK will evolve.

Three aspects of strategic autonomy are usually considered as the most relevant for a more European approach to defence: notably the political, operational, and industrial dimensions. Regarding the *political* aspect, EU institutions and procedures needed for acting autonomously if and when necessary do exist. Often asked questions concern more the political will for using these instruments in practice. It might also be worth recalling that the Lisbon Treaty's full potential, which allows for constructive abstention in decision-making or the possibility to act in smaller groups of willing Member States, remains to be explored.

Another – somewhat underestimated – aspect of political autonomy and the underlying need for greater impact is the issue of leadership. It is a widely shared view that the Franco–German relationship is crucial with regard to European security and defence cooperation, and consequently strategic autonomy. We have seen, however, that despite declarations and some renewed efforts, this convergence between Berlin and Paris is not a given at all.

In the *operational* dimension, the objective is to underpin political ambitions with adequate military capabilities. The EUGS refers to the need for developing high-end capabilities, or hard power in other words. The aspiration of President von der Leyen and other EU leaders to make the Union a geopolitical actor mirrors the objective of going beyond the Union's traditional soft power profile. Recent defence initiatives, such as PESCO, or the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, have been important steps in this direction, as they aim to further deepen cooperation among Member States and render the European capability landscape more consistent.

Another pertinent question is how the EU shall translate the Lisbon Treaty's mutual assistance clause into military capabilities, and what role the Union should play in its territorial defence in the light of its overlapping membership

and commitments to collective defence with NATO. The debate over European strategic autonomy also touches upon other sensitive issues, such as the role of nuclear deterrence. Although France has suggested a strategic dialogue on her possible contribution to a European nuclear deterrence capacity, this offer has not been taken up by other Member States, as several capitals consider the US nuclear umbrella irreplaceable.

Last but not least, the idea of a European army, in the sense of a genuine common military force, should also be mentioned here, as this has raised hopes and concerns alike within and beyond the Union. In fact, no formal talks have taken place on this subject, as no formal initiative has been put on the negotiating table. It is worth noting that neither existing nor any future European multinational rapid response forces can be considered an EU army in classical terms.

As to the *industrial* aspect of European strategic autonomy, this is the least controversial and disputed component of the concept. It has been gradually realised by Member States that the security of production capacities, technologies, and supply chains is essential for the freedom of action of militaries, which can be hampered by limited access to products, spare parts, or raw materials in crisis situations. Of course, it would be unnecessary and too costly to produce everything in Europe.

However, after decades of deindustrialisation, a sustained effort is needed to reduce acute dependencies on external markets through different measures, like the diversification of supply chains, materials substitution, or creating technology alliances. The European Commission is taking an active role in addressing technological dependencies at the EU level: the European Defence Fund has been launched with the precise purpose of operationalising the concept of enhanced autonomy through a 7.9-billion-euro budget aimed at financing defence research and development actions between 2021 and 2027.

The meaning and scope of European strategic autonomy is still lacking a consensus among EU Member States. Nevertheless, the fact that this concept, despite its ambiguity, is high on the Union's political and policy agendas shows that it can provide a positive theoretical framework and generate positive dynamics to promote European security and defence.

Autonomy is not an absolute objective, rather a direction in which the EU should gradually move. The Strategic Compass, to be adopted in March 2022, should deepen and sharpen the Union's vision along these objectives. A stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defence is in the interest of not only its Member States and citizens, but also its partners, as it will lead to a stronger European pillar within NATO and a fairer transatlantic burden-sharing.

THE FREE TRADE DEBATE

— Tamás Dezső Ziegler —

As already mentioned, the initial debate over European strategic autonomy has evolved into a broader discussion, beyond security and defence, and is now about the EU's strategic sovereignty. As *Riccardo Alcaro* underlines:

> *Initially anchored in security and defence, the concept of strategic autonomy has grown in scope and now encompasses any policy domain with an external dimension such as the promotion of the euro as a reserve currency, trade, climate and energy, and digital and technology regulation.* (Alcaro 2021, 31)

There is no doubt that *trade* remains a key EU external policy. A crucial fact to be kept in mind when analysing strategic sovereignty regarding the Union's trade relations is that the Western world is projected to lose its dominant share in world GDP in thirty years' time. By 2050, the EU's share in global GDP will have sunk from 15 to 9 per cent, while China's GDP will have risen to 20 per cent, and India will have reached 15 per cent (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2017). This is a landslide change, which has the potential to restructure the balance of world powers, especially as Europe's global influence has been based on its economic performance and extensive trade relations.

Nevertheless, the EU seems to follow an unchanged trade approach in its external relations: unlike the US in the past years (Ziegler 2020), it keeps promoting the further *liberalisation* of international trade. The Union is one of the leading forces behind free trade worldwide and has concluded trade agreements with many countries across the globe, including some far-away partners in Central America, South America, or Africa.[3]

[3] To mention just some of the recent deals, the EU signed an economic partnership agreement with the Southern African Development Community (SADC: Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Mozambique) in 2016; created the EU–Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area as part of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement in 2017; concluded a free trade agreement with Mercosur (Hartmann 2021), the EU–Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, and the EU–Singapore Trade and Investment Agreements in 2019; renegotiated the Cotonou Agreement (Dreyer, 2021); and is currently working on the EU–China Comprehensive Investment Agreement (CAI).

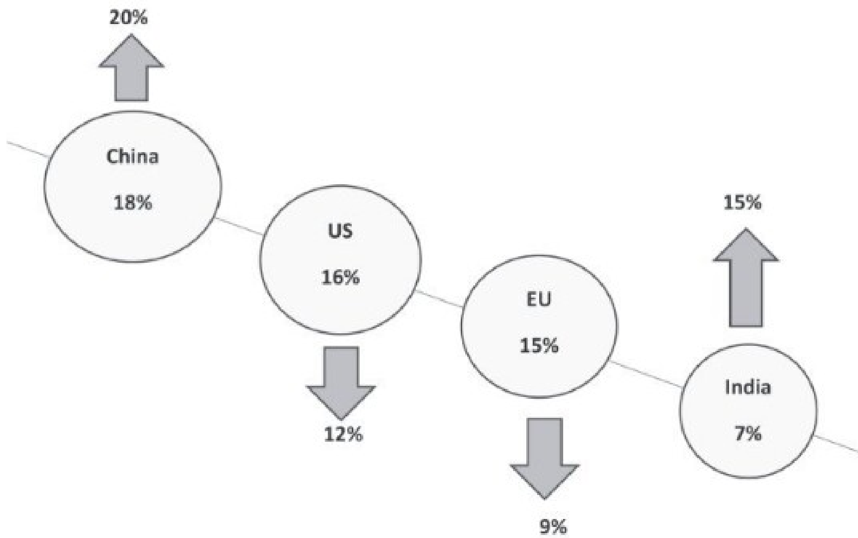

Figure 11: Share of world GDP (PPP) from 2016 to 2050
Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017

Two recent key initiatives were the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which was supposed to create closer economic cooperation with the US, and the EU–Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). While the CETA deal was signed, after long negotiations, and ratified, the TTIP was never concluded due to the opposition by President Trump and his administration in particular. However, both TTIP and CETA provoked extensive criticism in Europe.[4] Still, despite the fact that 250,000 people protested against the TTIP, the CETA, and the further liberalising of trade in 2015 in Berlin, to name this single case, the European Commission's policy to propagate free trade agreements remains nearly uncontested at the Union's upper political levels.

Free trade and investor protection agreements are being criticised from at least three different angles, which deserve our attention. First, even from a *liberal* perspective, there is criticism of the extensive use of bilateral trade agreements, as this method establishes preferences and exclusivist regional trade areas, which are often unfair vis-à-vis third countries that are not part of them (Bhagwati 2008; 2013). Even though regional cooperation and bilateral trade agreements have become standard instruments in international trade regulation over the past decades, they often undermine multilateral World Trade Organisation (WTO) arrangements and discriminate against third countries. So, while the new norm – preferential treatment – sounds

4 Especially regarding TTIP, critics claimed that such agreements had the potential to force nations to lower their environmental standards, allow the infiltration of GMO products onto European markets, and outsource decision-making to special investor-state courts, limiting state power in important matters (Ziegler 2016).

preferential towards some countries, it is not preferential from the perspective of the whole international trade system at large.

Second, there exist several streams of *left-wing* criticism of free trade agreements. One of them highlights that through trade regimes that connect more and more countries, people lose control of their own country's trade system. The larger and the broader our trade regimes that we create grow, the less democratic their functioning seems to be (Rodrik 1997; 2012). In Europe, public support for the TTIP – and other international trade deals – has proven to be very fragile and volatile in a number of countries (Ziegler 2016, 23), which mirrors a general legitimacy crisis of free trade policies across the continent. It seems that the more we push for open trade, the less citizens have influence on its terms, alienating many of them.

Outsourcing dispute resolution to special courts is also criticised from a legitimacy-democracy perspective. To a certain degree, opposition to free trade could be interpreted as the citizens' voice to reclaim power and control over an area of crucial importance which has direct effect on their lives. Free trade is not beneficial for everyone, but trade regimes do not take this into real consideration. Free trade does have the potential to harm domestic producers, and the free movement of persons (social dumping) can harm those who are in competition for employment. While limiting free trade is not the only possible answer to these challenges, it is definitely one of them; or otherwise, the losers of globalisation should be compensated.

Another stream of left-wing criticism is voiced from a more radical perspective. According to *József Böröcz*, EU countries remain in a post-colonial state, where they combine violence (military action) with trade to gain influence over third countries (Böröcz 2010). This is also present in the Union's trade regime, which merges protectionism and free trade for the sake of its own interests. In this approach, the EU functions as a major world empire: it exploits third countries through trade policies, or slows down their development for the sake of its own benefits.[5]

A still different track of left-wing criticism is presented by *Noam Chomsky*, who claims that the market is not free as long as we only grant the opportunity to companies to move freely, but not to private persons. This means that while companies may move freely, peoples' movement remains restricted. In relation to third countries and the EU, following Chomsky's logic would mean abolishing the policies that make a difference between third country nationals and EU citizens, except some of the citizens' rights vis-à-vis their state.

[5] According to this approach, the international (trade) system was built in a way that grants incentives for Western powers. As a result of colonisation, and later the EU, which aggregates Member States' GDP and influence in the world, European countries can balance China's and India's role in world production. However, this balance will slowly but surely change. Also, many theorists of world systems or dependency theory would highlight that trade regimes in which a more developed and a less developed country or region get connected are not necessarily beneficial for both sides, which is often ignored by drafters of trade deals.

Third, there also exist several streams of *right-wing* conservative and nationalistic criticism of the Union's trade regime. While most of the major conservative parties in Europe support free trade, there seems to be a growing aversion towards such policies among right-wing constituencies. Some would argue that sovereignty pooling has reached its limits (Fekete 2018), and that this is also true in free trade. From a more nationalistic perspective, this means that nations should support their own domestic producers, and that this is exactly what free trade policies are preventing.

These views also consider the strict EU policies on state aid and the ultra-liberalised open borders within the Union as measures that hinder nation-states in reacting to international developments and supporting their own interests and producers, by ignoring or denying that these nation-states remain the fundamental building blocks of the international system. From this perspective, the EU's free trade policies are criticised from an empirical perspective as well, and are often presented as the main cause of the collapse of certain economic sectors within the Union due to their dislocation to other countries, mostly in Asia.

We may not share and accept these critical viewpoints, but it would be a mistake to ignore them. In the light of the changing world order, the EU needs to invest in a genuine rethinking of its trade system with the aim of enhancing its legitimacy and efficiency. In this process, citizens' voices and demands should be listened to and paid special attention.

Furthermore, it is now high time to engage in a broader reflection on the Union's trade policy objectives. It should be asked what the aims to achieve through free trade agreements exactly are, and whether these aims are achievable through such deals at all.

Market-bias in EU policies has been well documented, and this bias should be kept in balance. Consequently, it is crucial to compensate the losers of free trade. Right now, this only happens in the field of agricultural products via the Union's Common Agricultural Policy. There is a need to restructure other sectors as well. Otherwise, the EU will lose on both the competitiveness and legitimacy sides.

All in all, while free trade shall be maintained as a cornerstone of contemporary European and global systems and order, an honest and democratic public debate about its downsides should also be encouraged. In this context, some important questions regarding the trade–strategic sovereignty nexus are to be answered as well. First of all, how much will the EU let its trade preferences be shaped and steered by business actors, or how much will it consider this to be the role and prerogative of political decision-makers? And even if the Union decides to consolidate its political control over trade policies, another dilemma is whether, and in which way, it aims and is ready to use trade as an instrument for enhancing its stance in the global arena and achieving its geopolitical objectives.

INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS

— Viktor Szép —

Coming back to the realm of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Union has now become a major sanctions actor in the world, while *restrictive measures* – which is its official term for sanctions – have grown into one of the most important instruments in its foreign policy toolbox to pursue its distinct foreign and security policy objectives.

In the past couple of years, the EU addressed a number of international crises through sanctions, like in Syria, Nicaragua, or Myanmar, and also established sanctions in reaction to non-traditional security threats, such as cyber-attacks (Portela 2020a, 24). So far, the evolution of its sanctions regime peaked during the crisis in Ukraine, which was unprecedented in the sense that no state of Russia's size and posture had ever been subject to major EU sanctions with such economic and financial repercussions before (Gould-Davies 2018, 5; Portela 2016, 36–39; Szép 2021, 11).

Given the Union's growing willingness to apply restrictive measures, EU external relations experts are now, more than ever, interested in how this increased use of sanctions has changed the CFSP. As *Paul James Cardwell* convincingly argues: "[t]he extent to which sanctions have been imposed, or at the very least discussed in the Council, means that it is little exaggeration to say that the CFSP has become oriented towards sanctions as an appropriate response to global or regional problems" (Cardwell 2015, 288).

We can also approach the use of EU sanctions from a statistical viewpoint. *Ramses A. Wessel* and others have found that 47 per cent of CFSP decisions – except those that cover Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) actions – are based on Article 29 TEU, the legal basis for establishing EU sanction regimes. Interestingly, this is followed by so-called implementing decisions based on Article 31(2) TEU (29.8%), which are mostly used to amend existing sanctions. Based on these results, the authors conclude that "sanctions are by far the most used instruments in the Union's foreign policy" (Wessel et al. 2022; see also Wouters 2017, 78–80).

However, despite this increased use of sanctions, EU official documents reveal little about how they fit into the Union's broader foreign and security policy *strategy*. A relatively old but still key policy document on sanctions is the two-page-long *Basic Principles on the Use of Restrictive measures* of 2004, according to which the EU "will impose autonomous … sanctions in support of efforts to fight terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and … to uphold respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance" (Council of the EU 2004, 2). The more recent 2016 EU Global Strategy considers sanctions as "key tools to bring about peaceful change", which "can play a pivotal role in deterrence, conflict prevention and resolution" (European Union 2016, 32).

Nowadays, scholars increasingly return to fundamental questions related to this policy area. Below, Figure 12 shows how the EU has progressively enlarged its sanctions portfolio over time. The average time of a sanctions episode has lasted for 4.5 years (55 months), but different sanctions cases show significant *variation*: while restrictive measures against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were only in force for a single month in 2000, sanctions against Myanmar have now lasted for 275 months.

Time frame is not the only variable that shows significant differences: EU policymakers always need to decide carefully which type of sanction is the best for advancing their foreign and security policy objectives. Statistics show that the EU mostly relies on travel bans (75%) and asset freezes (62%), followed by arms embargoes (46%), as well as trade (18%), financial (16%), and diplomatic (11%) restrictions (Giumelli et al. 2021, 10–11)

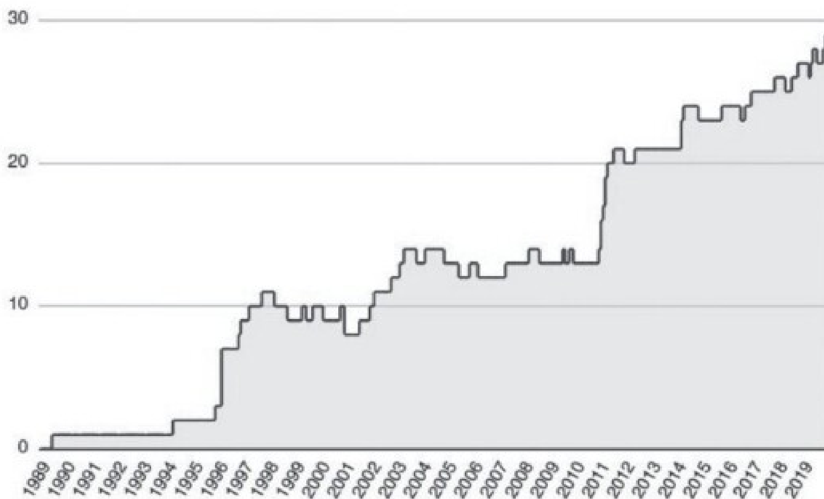

Figure 12: The number of EU sanctions regimes in force over time
Source: Giumelli et al. 2021, 9

In the field of sanctions, the EU has become a truly international actor in the sense that it has been targeting states from all around the world. The Union has so far designated individuals and entities from Asia (33%), Africa (26%), and Europe (25%), followed by the Americas (6%), on its sanctions lists (Giumelli et al. 2021, 12). Interestingly enough, this latter is the region where most divergence can be observed in the transatlantic space: while Washington has traditionally targeted Latin American individuals and entities more frequently, Brussels has refrained from joining these measures and, for example, only blacklisted its first Venezuelan targets in 2017 (Portela 2020b, 122).

Usually, the EU imposes sanctions for different reasons. Amongst them, the three most important ones have been: the promotion of democracy (44%),

crisis management (33%), and post-conflict management (27%). These are followed by the EU's willingness to uphold certain international norms (15%), interests' promotion (13%), non-proliferation (9%), and finally terrorism (7%) (Giumelli et al. 2021, 12–13).

Despite the increased political willingness to pay the price for implementing sanctions, scholars have rightly pointed to *inconsistencies* with regard to their practice. The Union, for instance, imposed sanctions against Myanmar for violations of minimum labour rights, whereas it failed to adopt similar measures against Pakistan for the same violations in the same year. Similarly, the EU used sanctions against Zimbabwe for violating fundamental principles of democracy, but adopted no measures against Nigeria for the same behaviour in the subsequent year (Fürrutter 2020). This lack of consistency, at least in the area of sanctions, can often be explained by "considerable commercial or strategic EU interests … at stake in the target countries" (Portela and Orbie 2014, 72).

Whenever the Union decides to impose sanctions, it rarely does it alone. There is a long tradition of cooperating with like-minded third countries, such as the United States or Canada. Recently, the EU–US summit of 2021 also underlined the importance of enhancing coordination in sanctions matters. This cooperation between the EU and US proved to be beneficial for both sides on various occasions, such as in the cases of Iran or Russia. The case of Belarus also demonstrates the importance of transatlantic cooperation when it comes to enhancing the effectiveness of international sanctions mechanisms (Van Elsuwege and Szép 2022).

The EU's neighbouring states, in most of the cases, have also proven to be reliable partners in this field: enlargement candidate and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries tend to implement almost all EU sanctions. Although with more fluctuations, potential candidate and Eastern Partnership countries cooperate with the Union on sanctions matters as well, although rather on a case-by-case basis (Szép and Van Elsuwege 2020, 229).

a. Extraterritorial sanctions

Nevertheless, the United States is not only a partner in sanctions matters but, as the past few years clearly demonstrated, can also harm EU interests. Today, an important question in the Union's sanctions policy is how to reduce the *extraterritorial* impact of certain US sanctions. The prominent role of the dollar in global finances allows Washington to threaten non-US actors, including European entities, to restrict their access to American markets if they engage with partners that are subject to US sanctions. In particular, recent American measures against Russia and Iran discouraged EU operators to do business with US targets.

Clearly, the limitations imposed by these extraterritorial sanctions are at odds with the EU's ambition to strengthen its strategic sovereignty. In fact,

European banks and firms fear the enforcement mechanisms managed by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). This concern of European companies is especially acute at times when OFAC, as part of its strategic choice, is increasingly focusing on foreign agents: between 2003 and 2018, OFAC enforcement actions against foreign entities increased from 4 per cent to 43 per cent.[6]

In response, the EU has taken a number of actions to tackle the extraterritorial effects of US sanctions, including in the recent case of US sanctions against Iran (Early and Preble 2020; Portela 2021). This time the European Commission reactivated its Blocking Statute of 1996 to mitigate impact by allowing EU operators to recover their related losses and damages, and nullifying the effects within the Union of any related foreign court rulings (European Commission 2018). Nevertheless, EU firms have been facing the hard choice between excluding themselves from US markets, or breaching EU law.

At the same time, in 2019, France, Germany, and the UK established the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), later joined by a number of other European states, which kept open a channel for transactions with Iran. Still, while the first transaction was successfully made in early 2020, the mitigating impact of INSTEX has proven to be modest after all, given that EU firms seek to avoid OFAC fines. As *Pierre Vimont*, former Secretary-General of the European External Action Service (EEAS), emphasised, "INSTEX was never thought of as economically efficient" but rather as "a political answer to underline to Iran that we … are still committed to the nuclear deal" (Portela 2021, 4).

In the light of this geopolitical factor, it is not surprising that the new European Commission, elected in 2019, made some important decisions to tackle extraterritorial sanctions. Its ambitions to strengthen the Union's global economic posture has also been demonstrated by moving the preparation of EU sanctions from the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) to the Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union (DG FISMA) at the European Commission (Dall 2019). As DG FISMA is also responsible for fostering the international role of the euro in commercial transactions, this move is expected to mitigate the impact of extraterritorial sanctions on EU operators (European Commission 2021).

There are also a number of proposals floated by EU policymakers on how to deal with extraterritorial sanctions in the future. Apart from the need to reform the Union's Blocking Statute and strengthen the role of the euro in global commercial transactions, there is an initiative to create, under the supervision of the European Commission, a compensation fund for EU companies and

[6] One consequence of this is that banks, even if they could accept certain transactions, often over-comply with the sanctions in place and reject transactions that would otherwise be legally possible.

citizens. And even more importantly, it has also been suggested to establish a 'European Office of Foreign Assets Control', an agency similar to OFAC.

The aim would be to merge and create further synergies among different existing services in the European Commission by placing experts in this unified structure, which would be composed of officials from different Commission Directorates-General and the EEAS. Its mandate would be to manage information on sanctions and the compensation fund, as well as to assess the legality of any extraterritorial sanction and give legal assistance before foreign courts (Bébard et al. 2021). Finally, it might also be worth mentioning that at the 2021 EU–US summit, both sides made a (vague) commitment to avoid "possible unintended consequences for European and US interests" in sanctions matters, which can be considered a positive move (European Council 2021).

Last but not least, another key challenge is *Brexit*: the decision of the UK to leave the Union has clearly affected the EU's sanctions policy. The UK was a key actor in this policy area given its leadership and expertise, as well as its active role in initiating several sanctions regimes and proposing individual designations to sanctions lists (Moret 2016; Moret and Pothier 2018; Portela 2020a). In the case of the rigged Belarus elections in 2020, the UK – along with Canada – adopted sanctions against the Lukashenka regime even faster than the EU, whose actions were (once again) delayed due to a Member State unwilling to compromise. Certainly, Brexit affects the UK negatively as well, as she can hardly influence the EU's internal decision-making procedures, including with regard to sanctions. There is thus an increasing risk of cleavages between these two sanctions regimes (Szép and Van Elsuwege 2020), and a need for cooperation and collaboration for the sake of avoiding counterproductive actions and tensions.

Key concepts and terms

Extraterritorial sanctions
Free trade (agreements)
Geopolitical interests
Industrial autonomy (security and defence)
Operational autonomy (security and defence)
Political autonomy (security and defence)
Restrictive measures (sanctions)
Strategic autonomy
Strategic sovereignty
Transatlantic partnership

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