


PROGRESSIVE YEARBOOK 2023





**PROGRESSIVE
YEARBOOK 2023**





**PROGRESSIVE
YEARBOOK 2023**





Published by:

FEPS - Foundation for European Progressive Studies

Avenue des Arts, 46 – 1000 Brussels, Belgium

T: +32 2 234 69 00

Website: www.feps-europe.eu

Copyright © 2023 by Foundation for European Progressive Studies

Editors:

Dr. L. Andor

Dr. A. Skrzypek

Dr. H. Giusto

FEPS project coordinators:

Dr. H. Giusto

Dr. A. Skrzypek

C. Guedes

A. Nicaise

English language editors:

O. Bruns

N. Robinson

H. Johnston (of contributions by Izabela Surwillo, Eric Sundström, Maria João Rodrigues, Maciej Gdula and Hedwig Giusto)

Rosalynne Cowie (of contributions by László Andor, Ania Skrzypek and Katarína Klingová)

Design, layout and printing:

Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR

Logo and cover design:

Les Marquises (V. De Wolf)

Cover pictures: 1. Nicolas Economou/Shutterstock; 2. tilialucida/Shutterstock; 3. European Union, 2022 - Source: EC; 4. Alexandros Michailidis; 5. European Union 2022 - Source: EP; 6. rarrarorro/Shutterstock; 7. NATO; 8. lunopark/Shutterstock; 9. Viktoria Bykanova/Shutterstock; 10. The Party of European Socialists (PES); 11. UN Climate Change - Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0); 12. European Union 2022 - Source: EP.

This book was produced with the financial support of the European Parliament.

ISBN: 978-2-931233-01-6

This book reflects the opinions of the respective authors, not those of the European Parliament, or the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). The responsibility of FEPS is limited to the publication inasmuch as it is considered worthy of attention by the global progressive movement.



TABLE OF CONTENT

7 Foreword. From war to where?

LOOKING BACK

11 European Chronology 2022

21 European Progressive Observatory 2022

35 Europe in the shadow of war in Ukraine
László ANDOR

PROGRESS IN EUROPE

53 The progressive Europe we want
Ania SKRZYPEK

75 “Internationalism is the antidote to the myopic politics of trenches and borders”
Pedro SÁNCHEZ

83 Progressive Person of the Year
László ANDOR interviews Grzegorz PIETRUCZUK

BIG ISSUES

99 The cost-of-living crisis and poverty in Europe
Helen BARNARD

107 Reflections on the energy crisis in Europe
Izabela SURWILLO

115 The rise and success of the anti-gender movement in Europe and beyond
Roman KUHAR

123 Social inequalities in mental health in a post-pandemic Europe
Javier ÁLVAREZ-GÁLVEZ

131 Information operations
Katarína KLINGOVÁ

NATIONAL FOCUS

- 143** The shining city on the hill? A case study about Sweden
Eric SUNDSTRÖM
- 155** Greece and the EU: A turbulent love affair, now more mature?
Loukas TSOUKALIS

GLOBAL FOCUS

- 165** For a New Global Deal to transform the global order
Maria João RODRIGUES
- 171** Reshaping the global order
Pascal LAMY
- 177** Erratic ally: The US midterm elections and the consequences
of political dysfunction
Jack THOMPSON

PREDICTIONS 2023

- 189** How to transform the fear
Maciej GDULA
- 193** Challenges of EU economic governance for 2023
Joaquín ALMUNIA
- 197** Migration: In times of crisis, the EU must abandon crisis mode
Hedwig GIUSTO
- 201** The Western Balkan enlargement: Unfinished business
Ana CHUPESKA
- 205** Navigating the great power rivalries of the 2020s:
Exploring Southeast Asia's options
E Hun TAN

209 BIOGRAPHIES

FOREWORD

From war to where?

FEPS presents the fourth edition of the Progressive Yearbook after a year that was dominated by a single unexpected development: Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This war has not only pushed various EU policies onto a new track, from defence to energy, but has also sent shockwaves around the rest of the world.

The first reaction to a war next door is humanitarian support to the victims. It was therefore a very obvious choice for us to nominate as the FEPS Progressive Person of the Year someone who has been a leading actor in supporting Ukrainian refugees on the ground. This is of course just one example of solidarity, which must be replicated and multiplied, in economic as well as military fields, until a comprehensive and lasting settlement is reached in this conflict.

When we look back at 2022, the consequences of the major crises that took place still need to be assessed, including those of the Covid-19 pandemic. But it is already clear that there has been a major effect on global politics, where progressives have preserved principles and developed new concepts to defend international cooperation, reform multilateral institutions, and transform the world order so that effective solutions to the common problems of our societies are now found faster than in the past. For this, the conservative barriers to progress have to be dismantled in thinking as well as in political struggles.

As always in our Progressive Yearbook, we do not only look back but also forward. We therefore asked our contributors for predictions regarding some of the critical policies of the EU (economic governance, migration, the rule of law) and also regarding some of the dynamic regions far and near (the Western Balkans, South-East Asia). In addition, we continue our series on country case studies, this time with Sweden (holding the Council presidency in the first half of 2023) and with Greece (where economic instability then gave way to political instability, with extraordinary elections being scheduled for the coming summer).

Following a positive cycle of social democratic success in 2021, the dominant trend in 2022 became a shift to the right and significant gains for the far right. However, both the Party of European Socialists and the Socialist International have elected new leaders, which have now opened a new chapter in political action – a chapter of rebuilding our global movement and sharpening our messages in order to address the key concerns of humanity, from the cost-of-living crisis and social inequalities to climate change.

Social democrats in the EU institutions are not starting 2023 from an easy position. Yet we are confident that FEPS publications, starting with the Progressive Yearbook, will contribute to fresh thinking and to revitalise political activity, paving the way for successful European Parliament elections in 2023.

László Andor, Ania Skrzypek and Hedwig Giusto





LOOKING BACK



European Chronology 2022

January

- 1 January The European banknotes and coins celebrate their 20th anniversary
France takes up the Presidency of the Council of the EU
- 10 January Russia and the US begin a series of talks in Geneva to defuse tensions between both countries as well as tensions with Ukraine
- 11 January President of the European Parliament David Sassoli dies in Aviano, Italy
- 30 January Parliamentary elections are held in Portugal: the Socialist Party led by António Costa wins an absolute majority
Marks the two-year anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring a public health emergency of international concern regarding the Covid-19 pandemic

February

- 1 February Denmark is the first EU country to lift all Covid-19 restrictions
- 4 February The 2022 Winter Olympics are opened in Beijing, China
- 17-18 February After a long postponement, the African Union-EU summit is held in Brussels. The main focus is on the EU-Africa Investment Package
- 18-20 February The annual Munich Security Conference is held in Germany. Discussion mostly revolves around the Russia-Ukraine crisis
- 20 February French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian President Vladimir Putin announce they will work on a ceasefire agreement to avert the war in Ukraine
- 22 February Germany suspends the Nord Stream 2 project in response to Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as independent
- 23 February The European Commission proposes a new Data Act
- 24 February Russia invades Ukraine
President Putin orders a military operation in Ukraine to "demilitarise and denazify" the country. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky declares martial law across the country in response to the invasion and orders a general military mobilisation
A massive sell-off occurs on the Moscow stock exchange, making the Russian rouble's exchange rate fall to a record low of 89.98 roubles per US dollar

The European Union says that it will introduce the “strongest, harshest package” of sanctions on the Russian economy in response to the invasion

Various protests against the war take place around the world

- 24-28 February The EU agrees on the first three packages of sanctions against Russia
- 25 February NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announces that the NATO Response Force will be activated for the first time in history
- The Council of Europe announces the suspension of Russia’s membership
- 26 February In an official joint statement, the European Commission, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States agree to remove certain Russian banks from SWIFT
- Russia blocks access to Twitter for its citizens
- 28 February Ukraine applies for EU membership

March

- 3 March The EU bans two Russian state-sponsored news outlets
- Georgia and Moldova formally apply for EU membership
- The Council adopts a decision to authorise the opening of negotiations for an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response
- 4 March The European Union activates the Temporary Protection Directive to offer assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine
- Russian forces shell Europe’s biggest nuclear plant of Zaporizhzhia, raising fears of a Chernobyl-style disaster
- 8 March The European Commission adopts a proposal for a directive to combat violence against women
- 9 March All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Hungary
- 10-11 March EU heads of state and government issue the Versailles Declaration, calling on member states to strengthen defence spending, investment, research and coordination
- 15 March The EU issues its fourth package of sanctions
- Russia formally withdraws from the Council of Europe
- The US Senate declares Vladimir Putin a war criminal
- 21 March The Council of the EU adopts the Strategic Compass, setting a common vision of the EU’s role in security and defence and a wide range of objectives to be achieved by 2030
- 24 March The European Parliament and the Council reach an agreement on the Digital Markets Act

- 26 March Parliamentary elections are held in Malta: the Labour Party wins 55% of the vote
- 29 March The Ukrainian and Russian delegations hold face-to-face peace talks in Turkey

April

- 1 April President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola travels to Kyiv to meet Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, making her the first EU official to visit Ukraine since the start of the war
- 3 April Parliamentary elections are held in Hungary. The right-wing populist party Fidesz wins 54% of the vote, electing Viktor Orbán as prime minister. The democratic alliance United for Hungary, including centre-left, green, liberal and moderate nationalist forces, comes second with 37% of the vote
In Serbia, Alexander Vučić, from the Serbian Progressive Party, wins the elections with 60% of the vote
- 4 April €17 billion in EU funds is made available to help refugees from Ukraine
- 5 April Poland blocks the European Union's adoption of the 15% minimum corporate tax after previous holdouts abandon their opposition to the reform
- 8 April The EU agrees on a fifth package of sanctions against Russia
President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell travel to Kyiv to show unwavering support for Ukraine
The Food and Agriculture Organization releases its food price index, according to which food prices increase by 12.6% in March to an all-time record of 159.3 points amid the fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The price of vegetable oils increases by 23% and the price of cereals increases by 17%.
- 9 April All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in the Czech Republic
- 17 April For the first time since the beginning of the Russian invasion, more Ukrainians enter Ukraine from Poland than leave, according to the Polish Border Guard
- 23 April The European Parliament and the Council reach an agreement on the Digital Services Act
- 24 April Presidential elections are held in France: Emmanuel Macron, from the liberal party En Marche, is re-elected as president with 58% of the vote. The Socialist Party candidate stands far behind with 1.75% of the vote
- 28 April UN Secretary General António Guterres visits Ukraine (including Irpin and Bucha, locations of alleged Russian atrocities) after holding talks with Putin in Moscow

May

- 1 May All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Bulgaria, Croatia and Greece
- 3 May The European Commission launches the European Health Data Space (EHDS)
- 6 May The first case of the monkeypox virus is reported in London
- 9 May After one year of intensive deliberations and citizen-led debate, the Conference on the Future of Europe concludes its work
- 10-14 May The 2022 Eurovision Song Contest is held in Turin. The contest is won by the Ukrainian band Kalush Orchestra
- 11 May The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) announces plans to lift passenger facemask requirements at airports and for flights throughout the European Union in mid-May 2022
- 12 May Astronomers unveil the first image of the supermassive black hole at the centre of the Milky Way
- 12-15 May Finland and Sweden announce that they will apply for NATO membership
- 16 May All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Austria
- 18 May The European Commission presents the REPowerEU plan to reduce the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels
The EU presents its strategic partnership with the Gulf states
- 21 May The federal elections in Australia are won by the Labour Party, which manages to form a majority government for the first time since 2007
Russia announces it has full control of Mariupol
- 23 May All Covid-19 face mask requirements and travel restrictions are lifted in Belgium
- 30-31 May FEPS Day of Progressive Economic Policy is held in Berlin

June

- 1 June All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Italy
Citizens of Denmark vote to abolish the defence opt-out and to join the Common Security and Defence Policy
Albanian citizens vote to elect the president and Bajram Begajis is elected with 95.12% of the vote
- 3 June The EU agrees on a sixth package of sanctions against Russia
- 7 June The European Commission agrees to make USB Type-C the common charging port for all mobile phones, tablets and cameras in the European Union by autumn 2024
- 8 June In the Netherlands the PvdA and the GroenLinks agree on forming a joint Senate group

- 13 June The Council and the European Parliament agree on the extension of the regulation establishing the EU digital Covid certificate until June 2023
- 14 June All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Germany
- 15 June Russia cuts gas deliveries to Europe through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline to 40% of capacity
- 16 June French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and Romanian President Klaus Iohannis visit Kyiv and declare further support to Ukraine
All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Estonia
- 19 June Parliamentary elections in France: for the first time since 1997, the president does not have a majority in the parliament
Gustavo Petro is elected as the first left-wing president of Colombia
- 21 June EU Council adopts a framework for development of the EU Hybrid Toolbox to counter hybrid security threats
- 23 June EU leaders grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova (but not to Georgia, whose European perspective is nevertheless recognised)
EU-Western Balkan leaders meeting is held in Brussels ahead of European Council
- 27 June Fit for 55: EU ministers agree on new higher 2030 targets on energy efficiency and renewables
The G7 meeting is held in Schloss Elmau in the Bavarian Alps. World leaders issue a statement pledging more financial, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine
- 28 June Turkey lifts its veto over Finland and Sweden's application to join NATO, just before the beginning of the NATO summit in Madrid. The three countries sign a trilateral memorandum
- 28-30 June At the NATO summit in Madrid, leaders reiterate unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity
NATO leaders agree to invite Finland and Sweden to join the Alliance
The Madrid Summit Declaration mentions the People's Republic of China as a challenge to the Alliance's interests, security and values
- 30 June All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Finland
The EU and New Zealand announce the conclusion of negotiations for a comprehensive trade agreement

July

- 1 July The Czech Republic takes over the presidency of the Council of the EU
The new roaming regulation enters into force, extending 'Roam-like-at-home' for another ten years

- 5 July NATO ambassadors sign the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden
- 6-31 July UEFA Women's Euro 2022 is held in England. The host wins the tournament
- 7 July British Prime Minister Boris Johnson resigns as party leader
- 8 July The Constitutional Court of Slovenia rules that ban on same-sex marriage and adoption is unconstitutional
Shinzo Abe, former prime minister of Japan, is assassinated while delivering a campaign speech for a Liberal Democratic Party candidate
- 10 July The Uber Files scandal is exposed: more than 124,000 confidential documents are leaked from Uber, revealing the 'secret deal' with Emmanuel Macron to help Uber compete with the French Taxi industry
- 12 July The European Union formally accepts Croatia as the 20th member of the eurozone, leading Croatia to adopt the euro in January 2023
- 13 July The European Commission issues its 2022 Rule of Law report, which examines developments in the member states
- 15 July EU agrees on the seventh package of Russia sanctions
- 19 July The European Union starts accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia
- 20 July The European Commission presents the proposal 'Save gas for a safe winter' aiming to reduce gas usage
- 21 July Following the rise of inflation to 8.6% in the EU, the European Central Bank raises the interest rate by 0.5 percentage points for the first time since 2011
- 22 July Russia and Ukraine sign a UN-brokered agreement allowing the export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea
- 25 July All Covid-19 entry restrictions are lifted in Malta

August

- 1 August All Covid-19 restrictions are lifted in France
- 4 August China conducts its largest military exercise around Taiwan, following a controversial visit to Taiwan by Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives
- 5 August Vladimir Putin signs a decree banning investors from 'unfriendly countries' until 31 December 2022
- 11 August Estonia and Latvia formally withdraw from the cooperation group comprising China and Central and Eastern Europe over China's human rights record and its support of Russia's war on Ukraine

- 15 August France formally ends its military intervention in Mali (Operation Barkhane) after withdrawing its last remaining troops from a military base in Gao
- 16 August US Congress passes IRA (Inflation Reduction Act). It is considered the landmark federal law, part of the Biden' Administration's New Deal
- 18 August The European Union statistics office reports that inflation in the eurozone increased to a record 8.9% in July
- 30 August Mikhail Gorbachev, the eighth and final leader of the Soviet Union, dies after a long illness in Moscow

September

- 2 September G7 countries agree to cap the price of Russian oil. Russia responds by cutting gas flows through Nord Stream 1 for an undetermined time
North Korea reportedly fires 23 missiles, a record number since it intensified its missile tests over Japanese territory at the start of 2022
- 6 September Liz Truss is elected leader of the Conservative Party and succeeds Boris Johnson as prime minister of the United Kingdom
Ukraine launches a successful counteroffensive on the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory of Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk
- 8 September Queen Elizabeth II dies at the age of 96 at Balmoral Castle in Scotland. She is succeeded as monarch by her son Charles III
- 11 September General elections are held in Sweden: even if the Social Democrats increase their vote share, the opposition right-wing bloc wins a narrow majority of seats in the parliament, electing Ulf Kristersson as prime minister in October
- 14 September Commission President Ursula von der Leyen delivers her annual State of the Union speech in which she illustrates the Commission's flagship initiatives and the focus on the challenge posed by the war in Ukraine
- 16 September Protest and civil unrest against the government in Iran emerge in response to the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini and Iran's mandatory hijab law
- 25 September General elections are held in Italy: Giorgia Meloni's right-wing populist party Brothers of Italy is the first party with 26% of the vote. Enrico Letta's Democratic Party comes second with 19% of the vote. Giorgia Meloni will lead a right-wing coalition government
- 30 September Vladimir Putin announces the annexation of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine, following staged referendums organised by Russian-installed officials in Ukraine
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky responds by requesting fast-track NATO membership

October

- 1 October In the parliamentary elections in Latvia, the centre-right party New Unity obtains 19%, followed by the Greens with 12.58%
- 2 October Parliamentary elections are held in Bulgaria: the conservative and populist party GERB comes first with 25.33% of the vote. The left-wing alliance, BSP for Bulgaria, obtains 9.3%
- General elections are held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the night of the elections, High Representative Christian Schmidt uses his authority to impose a set of measures to “improve Federation functionality”
- 4 October Slovenia becomes the first CEE country to legalise same-sex marriage
- 5 October The EU adopts the eighth package of sanctions against Russia
- 7 October The 2022 Nobel Prize is awarded to human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski from Belarus, the Russian human rights organisation Memorial, and the Ukrainian human rights organisation Center for Civil Liberties
- 10 October In the Senate elections in the Czech Republic the centre-right alliance Spolu wins the majority of seats
- 12-13 October Progressive Governance Summit takes place in Berlin
- 13-15 October The PES Congress 2022 takes place in Berlin: Stefan Löfven is elected the new PES president
- 16-23 October The 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party is held. Xi Jinping is elected as general secretary of the party, confirming his leadership
- 17 October The European Union establishes EUMAM Ukraine, a special military mission that will provide training for the Ukrainian Armed Forces in EU member states
- 20 October Liz Truss announces her resignation as prime minister of the UK
- 23-26 October FEPS fourth Annual Autumn Academy 2022 takes place in Brussels
- 25 October The EU directive on adequate minimum wages is adopted
- Rishi Sunak becomes the first British Asian and Hindu prime minister of the UK
- 27 October Elon Musk completes the acquisition of Twitter
- 30 October In the second round of the Brazilian presidential elections, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva defeats incumbent Jair Bolsonaro

November

- 1 November In Denmark’s general elections the governing Social Democrats obtain their best results in 20 years with 27.5% of the vote
- The legislative elections in Israel result in the victory of the right-wing camp of former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Meretz, a left-wing

- political party (and PES observer), does not win any seats missing the electoral threshold. It is the first time that the party does not retain Knesset seats in an election
- 6-18 November The COP27 on climate change mitigation takes place in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. At the end of the conference, an agreement is signed to establish a loss and damage fund for countries vulnerable to the effects of climate change
- 8 November Mid-term elections are held in the United States. Democrats preserve their majority in the Senate and Republicans take control of the House of Representatives
- 9 November The European Commission presents its proposal for the EU's economic governance reform
- 11 November Ukrainian troops enter the city of Kherson while Russian forces retreat
- 13 November Slovenia elects its first female president, Nataša Pirc Musar
- 15 November The world population reaches eight billion people
- During a Russian-led attack on Ukrainian cities, a missile strikes the territory of Poland near the border with Ukraine, which is later recognised as likely being an air defence missile fired by Ukraine
- 15-17 November The G20 summit meeting takes place in Bali, Indonesia
- 16 November The 2022 Silver Rose Awards are conferred on Women Political Leaders (WPL) and on Lee Cheuk-yan, who is currently serving over 20 months in prison for organising peaceful protests in Hong Kong in 2019
- 20 November The FIFA World Cup 2022 opens in Qatar
- 25-27 November XXVI Congress of Socialist International takes place in Madrid. Pedro Sánchez is elected the new president and Benedicta Lasi becomes the secretary general
- 28 November FEPS Call to Europe takes place in Prague
- 29 November In response to the gas crisis, Germany signs a 15-year deal with Qatar's state-owned petroleum company QatarEnergy to have its liquefied natural gas supplied by the company from 2026

December

- 6 December The EU-Western Balkans summit is held in Tirana
- 7 December The Congress of Peru removes President Pedro Castillo from office and arrests him after a coup attempt. Vice President Dina Boluarte succeeds him. She is the first woman to become president of the Latin American country
- 7-19 December The UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) is held in Montreal to discuss a new set of goals to halt and reverse nature loss

- 8 December In Iran, the first execution of a protester, Mohsen Shekari, is carried out
- 9 December The so-called Qatargate scandal erupts. Allegedly, Qatar has bribed current and former MEPs and parliamentary assistants belonging to the S&D family to influence political decisions and improve its reputation, particularly in the fields of labour rights. Four people are arrested by the Belgian police on suspicion of corruption
- The EU-Med summit (including Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) meets in Alicante
- 12 December The S&D Group expels Eva Kaili with immediate effect. Group membership of the MEPs who are subject to the Qatargate judicial investigation is suspended
- The Council strikes a deal with Hungary that settles financial aid for Ukraine in 2023 and gains Budapest's approval for a global minimum corporate tax, in exchange for EU flexibility about funds paid to Hungary
- 13 December The European Parliament removes Greek MEP Eva Kaili as a vice president of the assembly, following her arrest and involvement in Qatargate. Meanwhile, the scandal deepens and turns into one of the largest ever involving European institutions
- 14 December The European Parliament awards the 2022 Sakharov Prize to the Ukrainian people for their courage and sacrifices
- 15 December The leaders of the EU meet for the European summit and agree to provide financial relief to Ukraine and support its resilience and long-term reconstruction. The Council grants Bosnia and Herzegovina EU candidate status
- 17 December Leo Varadkar succeeds Micheál Martin as Taoiseach (head of government) of Ireland, as part of a rotation agreement made in 2020
- 18 December Argentina wins the FIFA World Cup 2022 by defeating France in the penalty shootout by 4-2
- 25 December Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury call for the end of the war in Ukraine during their Christmas sermons
- 29 December Brazilian footballer Pelé dies at 82
- 31 December Former Pope Benedict XVI dies at 95

European Progressive Observatory 2022¹

Portugal, 30 January: A Socialist landslide victory

The Portuguese Socialist Party (PS) achieved a landslide election victory that was impressive and surprising. Impressive, as it resulted in an absolute PS majority in the Portuguese parliament, something that had happened only once before in the party's long history. Surprising, as it was won against the odds of the polls before the elections – especially those very close to election day.

This victory was as much a collective one for the party, as it was a personal one for Prime Minister António Costa, whose leadership is clearly appreciated and rewarded by Portuguese voters. In his speech during the election night, Costa strongly underlined the essence of democracy when he said that an "absolute majority is not absolute power", embodying the pledge of the PS to move on towards the future in dialogue with all democratic forces in the country.

Ana Catarina Mendes: "In 2015, the PS assumed the destiny of the country's governance and we still haven't forgotten the situation we found when taking over: a country buffeted by four years of right-wing governance, during which we had constantly been told that there was no alternative to austerity policies, no hope. Despite all odds, however, our government managed to turn the page on austerity and to prove that left-wing policies can not only instil hope again but that they can also set the country on a path towards social justice, equality, and progress".

Bruno Gonçalves: "Coming back to the obvious winner of the election, the Socialist Party, one can only say that its success reaffirms António Costa's approval in Portugal and his importance for the social democratic family in Europe and the world, through the Portuguese Republic's dedication to a just multilateralism and international cooperation. [...] More than just the second-ever absolute majority for the PS, this has been the most

¹ This text was prepared with the great help of Alice Nicaise, FEPS Trainee. The EPO is coordinated by Ania Skrzypek, FEPS Director for Research and Training, and realised with the support of Hedwig Giusto, Progressive Post Editor-in-Chief and the Progressive Post team.

extraordinary election since the party's foundation. From the *geringonça*-solution in 2015 to an election victory in 2019 that made a minority government possible, the path of the PS has been steady and growing – a remarkable feat given the natural wear and tear of six years of government action. For now, the most thrilling and demanding times begin with the exclusive opportunity of restructuring and reforming the country under the EU Resilience and Recovery Plan (RRP) for a just and fair transition on digital and climate action”.

Maria João Rodrigues: “This new absolute majority seems also to be based on trust and on recognition of the hard work delivered by the PS over the last difficult years, with special merit for its leader Costa: overcoming the austerity paradigm which almost destroyed the country during the eurozone crisis with intensive and creative political action in Portugal and in Europe; leading the presidency of the EU Council to coordinate the European response to the pandemic and the recession; implementing the European Social Pillar with an action plan to fight against worsening social inequalities”.

Pedro Silva Pereira: “The message was clear: when we are heading to a post-pandemic scenario and beginning the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience funds, the Portuguese people wanted stability and the continuation of a progressive agenda to move the country forward. For that, no one better than António Costa [...] After a very successful Portuguese presidency, António Costa was already an important voice on the European political landscape, always trying to build progressive compromises for the future of Europe. For sure, he will be even more so after this remarkable victory. For the socialist family, this is a moment of joy and celebration, but it is, above all, another strong reason to believe that a socialist victory is possible in the upcoming 2024 European elections”.

Tomas Vieira Silva: “The snap elections were called after the defeat of the 2022 budget. In the parliamentary vote, the left-wing parties that had supported past budgets (BE, PCP and PEV), voted with the right-wing parties and rejected the budget proposal, triggering a political crisis. In the midst of a global pandemic and with the implementation of the Recovery Plan ahead, the rejection of the budget and the political crisis that followed created great instability. After six years of stability and several parliamentary agreements, the Portuguese people saw an uncertain future. By conferring an absolute majority onto the PS, the Portuguese showed a ‘red card’ to the political crisis and to those who contributed to creating the instability it caused”.

Malta, 26 March: Third consecutive victory for the Labour Party. What makes social democrats govern better in turbulent times?

The incumbent Labour Party emerged as a strong winner among six parties competing for the 67 seats of the House of Representatives. It won with 55.11%. These votes translated into a clear majority of 38 Members of Parliament. The turnout was 85.3%. But only four women were directly elected to the House.

Having already governed two legislative terms, including through the challenging Covid-19 period, the Labour Party approached the campaign being perceived by the voters as a reliable and responsible political force. It was considered to be distinctive because of its coherent, traditionally social democratic, yet also very modern programme. This programme was also the reference point for the open consultations about a vision for Malta, which resulted in connecting with many individuals, opening the party structures, and drafting an agenda of 1,000 ideas. The mobilisation of women and young people, who largely contributed to this process, was therefore particularly relevant.

Nikita Alamango: “The Labour Party keeps regenerating itself, pushing for a more progressive society, tackling issues such as divorce legislation, sexual health, the personal use of cannabis and the need to create more gender equality in parliament and beyond. At the forefront of these discussions were Labour Youth and Labour Women. They helped bring about much needed legislative changes in these areas, including the gender corrective mechanism, designed to end the male dominance of parliament, which was used for the first time in this election. [...] While this election is one for the books for the Labour Party, the party should not get too comfortable. Labour must remain sensitive, humble, and welcome the public’s opinion, whether it is praise or criticism. But one thing is clear: progressive politics works. A vibrant economy, social reform, equal opportunity and a caring society can be easy bedfellows. A third term of Labour needs to be just as inventive and creative as the previous two, because it is the way to advance society and win approval at the ballot box”.

Aaron Farrugia: “While I would have wished to see a stronger opposition for the sake of the health of our democracy, I am glad that the progressive party is back in government, with a strong mandate to continue improving our country and making bold decisions towards a brighter future for all”.

Hungary, 3 April: Hungary’s bogus election

If you thought Hungarian politics could not surprise you anymore, you would have to think again. Despite abysmal management of the Covid-19 crisis, the experience of runaway inflation, and teachers organising nationwide strikes due to poor salaries and working conditions, Viktor Orbán managed to increase the vote share of his party and retain a constitutional majority in parliament. Outside the capital city Budapest, the one-party state is practically complete, and after four years of right-wing assaults against institutions of culture and higher education, Orbán is now expected to turn his guns on local governments where the democratic opposition still holds positions.

This outcome is based on a decade-long distortion of the Hungarian constitutional system, the elimination of checks and balances over the executive branch of state power, and the subordination of the vast majority of public and private media to the will of

just one person. Nevertheless, the European Union institutions just continued in their tranquillised state until this sinister stage of autocratisation was reached, and it was only a few days *after* the election result was made public, that the European Commission finally came out with the launch of the rule of law mechanism and another cluster of infringement procedures.

However, it is also important to explain why and how the new way to organise the democratic opposition in Hungary worked out, and in what ways it did not in 2022. Nevertheless, in the end the Russia-Ukraine war made a decisive impact on voters' choices, allowing the incumbent party to deploy the full force of its media superiority to present a deceptive picture. Lessons must be drawn again for the reconstruction of progressive politics in Hungary by correcting the mistakes of its past strategies and entering a period of comprehensive renewal with regard to its content, style and organisation.

Attila Ágh: "The EU has neglected the Orbán regime's constant undermining of democracy and the similar situation taking place in some of the other 'new' member states. It is now no longer just Hungary that is paying a high price for this neglect, but the EU too – the whole situation having been brought about by the ill-famed policy of Angela Merkel, with its dangerous mixture of benign neglect and soft support for the emerging autocracy in the Orbán regime. [...] Orbán's turning an emerging democracy into a well-organised autocracy needs to sound alarm bells for the EU too, because this regime is not only a big burden for the Hungarian population but also threatens EU integration and EU crisis management. The European bloc must clearly give up its decision-delaying and conflict-avoiding strategy with regard to its new member states, because with his 'successful' autocratic regime Orbán has presented himself as the biggest enemy of European integration. The EU is currently financing systemic corruption in an undemocratic regime. It is high time, therefore, that the European Union switched from 'dialogue' to 'decisions'".

András Bíró-Nagy: "Studies on the values of Hungarian society not only reject the idea that left-wing politics cannot have a majority in Hungary today, but also confirm that only left-wing politics can potentially defeat Fidesz. Although the majority of Hungarian society is conservative on cultural issues, the majority expects left-wing answers on economic and social issues. For the progressive political forces, it is time to announce as dead the strategy of appealing to 'centrist' and 'disappointed Fidesz voters'".

Ágnes Kunhalmi: "The most immediate task is to maintain the unity of the democratic opposition, while we also have to reckon with the transformation of the fragmented party structure. Regaining the confidence of voters that was lost by Jobbik on the moderately conservative plank, and by Momentum on the liberal plank, seems to be a key task, while on the left the unification and strengthening of the socialist, social democratic and green political planks is the most important goal".

France, 24 April: In the end, it's still mais, non

The incumbent president Emmanuel Macron received 58.8% of the vote and became the second president to accomplish re-election in the 21st century. His contender, Marine Le Pen, ended up with 41.5%. This put an end to the anxiety that a representative of the far-right Rassemblement National could take over the Palais de l'Élysée.

Although no words have been spared to celebrate this victory, several aspects of this election suggest that the outcome is far from black and white. There was a large abstention of almost one third of the voters. The far-right decisively gained strength. And half of the votes cast in the second round in favour of the president were an expression of the opposition to his competitor. This does not amount to a strong mandate and indicates how unwelcome the policies of the previous five years have been, leading to protest movements such as the yellow vests.

The final duel among two people who had already faced each other in the presidential elections in 2017, alongside the results that the other candidates obtained, suggests that there is a profound tectonic shift inside the French political-party landscape. The Republicans and the Socialist Party, which, until only two decades ago, dominated the stage and were the reason for speaking about France as a 'two-party system plus', saw their candidates obtaining together less than 10%. With Jean-Luc Mélenchon coming third in the first round, and being by far the most preferred among the first-time voters, there was a valid question of how and in which constellation Progressives could hope to return as a viable alternative in the future.

Mathieu Fulla: "While several social democratic and socialist parties are regaining a certain electoral audience in Western Europe, in the French presidential race, the socialist candidate Anne Hidalgo won 1.75% – the lowest for the Socialist Party since the beginning of the Fifth Republic. [...] The marginalisation of intermediaries between the political Left and the popular milieux contributes to explaining why an increasing number of workers progressively broke with the PS and the French Communist Party. [...] Most of them expressed their distrust towards representative democracy by regularly opting to abstain in elections, with some deciding to vote for the radical right party Front National (FN), which started to gain support in the 1984 European elections. Only a minority rallied behind radical left organisations. Above all, an increasing majority among the new generations of blue-collar workers, employees, and craftspeople, stopped voting or chose to vote for the right or radical right parties".

Philippe Marlière: "The reshaping of the French party system has also been achieved by triangulating themes and policies of the far right. This has further normalised Le Pen's party and legitimised the candidacy of Zemmour, a man who has already been condemned twice by French justice for incitement to racial hatred. [...] Under Macron, traditional opposition on socio-economic issues has been supplanted by endless culture wars on Islam, immigration and national identity. This has put off the young and pushed many of them to support Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a radical-left candidate who came third in the first round".

Sweden, 11 September: 176-173 – the big issues behind the result

On 11 September, Sweden went to the polls to choose the 349 members of the Rikstag. The election came after a tough and turbulent period. It was marked by the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which saw the country moving away from neutrality and applying for NATO membership. What is more, it was a demanding legislative period during which social democrats led the government with a steady hand, despite the withdrawal of the support from coalition partners and the challenge posed by a no-confidence vote against Stefan Löfven. Then, in November 2021, Magdalena Andersson, who had served as a finance minister, took over, becoming the first female prime minister of Sweden.

The campaign had been intense, spinning around issues that show how much polarisation, divisions, and anxiety there is in Swedish society. Migration, crime and the emerging cost-of-living crisis were the main themes. The Social Democrats worked hard, conducting a record number of conversations, calls and rallies. Even though in the end they gained an additional 7 seats, reaching 107 in total, the block around them came behind the block around the Moderate Party (173 to 176). Evidently most worrying is the result of Sweden Democrats, a party with nazi-roots and a neo-fascist ideology, which made the biggest gain (in terms of support as well as in seat numbers). They became the second-largest party, with 73 seats (five more than the Moderates), having won an unprecedented number of workers' votes.

Jenny Marika Lindgren Åsbrink: “With the SD (Sweden Democrats) being the most disliked party of all among the electorate and without previous experience in governing, it seems unlikely that the SD party leader Jimmie Åkesson could gather enough support in the obligatory parliamentary vote to become prime minister. The party will, however, have a considerable influence over a right-wing government, which will not be able to form a majority in parliament without the SD. This means a dramatic change in the political landscape in Sweden, where right-wing populists for a long time had difficulties in gaining political momentum. Not so anymore. [...] SAP has been clear in stressing the threat the SD poses to humanism, to equality and also to national security, since there have been numerous incidents where SD activists and politicians have taken sides with Putin, Orbán and the like. The strategy of reminding the public of the party's roots in racist and Nazi movements (in this election as well as in 2018) is in all probability the explanation for the growth of support for SAP among the demographic group with which we usually have not been strong: well educated urban men and women”.

Anders Lindberg: “The big winners are the Sweden Democrats, a party founded in 1988 by neo-Nazis and neofascists from movements that are directly rooted in the extreme right that survived the second world war. One of its founders, SS-Rottenführer Gustaf Ekström, even served in the SS-Hauptamt in Berlin during the war as a propaganda specialist for the Waffen-SS. [...] The conservatives attacked Magdalena Andersson for completely fictional political proposals, they lied, and they smeared in a Trumpian fashion. They used attack-ads (a relatively new phenomenon here). It worked. And the right also used the internet

effectively – especially TikTok and Youtube – meaning that first-time voters massively turned out in support of the right. It looks like Cambridge Analytica from the Trump campaign all over again. Why the left was unprepared for these tactics is an enigma. But they have some homework to do”.

Lisa Pelling: “To win back the voters lost to the Sweden Democrats, the progressive parties have to offer truly progressive politics. According to detailed exit polls, the Sweden Democrats have now almost as much support among workers as the Social Democrats (32% vs 29%). But according to a recently published study, another factor might be even more important in explaining the success of the Sweden Democrats: they are the largest party among the unemployed, and the second largest party among those on sick leave. The living conditions of these groups deteriorated dramatically under the previous right-wing government (2006-2014). It made massive cuts to the social insurance system: lowering unemployment benefits, making it much harder to receive sick leave, and increasing the income gaps between people at work and people on pension. During the past eight years, the Social Democrats have done very little to improve the situation of these groups, and Swedish discontent has kept growing. Still, (with the exception of a long overdue increase of the lowest pensions under pressure from the Left Party) the Social Democrats did not campaign on making improvements either – unlike the Sweden Democrats”.

Eric Sundström: “This was the darkest election campaign in living memory. The conservative Moderate Party proposed compulsory tests for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) for all five-year-olds in immigrant-heavy suburbs (to counter crime later in life). The Liberal Party suggested mandatory language tests for two-year-olds “who are not enrolled in preschool” (code for children of immigrants). The Social Democrats talked about a cap on residents with “non-Nordic background” in immigrant neighbourhoods, and Magdalena Andersson promised a Sweden without any ‘Somali-towns’. [...] As in the rest of Europe, the overriding challenge for Social Democrats is to find bold reforms that can reverse the strong trends that divide our country and allow populists to grow. Ideally, this should be done while building sustainable societies at the same time. However, there has been a lack of progress in this regard over the last eight years of governing with a very divided parliament. The divide kept growing, and voters on the wrong side took notice. The working class decided the outcome of the election, and the Social Democrats lost: Among ‘workers’, the Social Democratic Party won 31.8%, while the Sweden Democrats won 28.8%”.

Italy, 25 September: The eclipse after the ‘night of pride’ – Georgia Meloni’s quest for power and beyond

The snap election followed this summer’s crisis that saw the fall of the coalition government led by Mario Draghi. This was the first time that citizens would choose their representatives after the 2020 constitutional reform, cutting the number of members of parliament to 400 in the Chamber and 200 in the Senate (from 630 and 315 respectively).

The emotional, polarising campaign did not boost mobilisation, and the vote had an unprecedentedly low turnout of 63.7%. The centre-left bloc (including the Democratic Party, Civic Commitment, Greens and Left Alliance, and More Europe) obtained 26.13% of the vote – falling far behind the right wing (composed of the Brothers of Italy, Lega, Forza Italia and ‘Us Moderates’). The bitter outcome led to the resignation of PD Secretary Enrico Letta and to the decision to summon a party Congress, where the PD will need to answer the call for self-reflection regarding its own identity and organisation, and consider how to regain ground in the predominantly blue map.

The absolute majority that Georgia Meloni commands is reason for serious concern. Her party takes pride in evoking a neo-fascist (or post-fascist) narrative. And while she speaks about her readiness to revive Italy, she spurs a sense of injustice among voters. Today, the enemies are migrants, but whom she picks next is yet to be seen. The European Union and several EU national governments have warned that they will watch her moves closely. Others – including the Polish PiS and the Hungarian Fidesz – joined the Italian prime minister in her joy. It seems that Meloni’s ‘night of pride’ may turn into a serious eclipse for Italy and the EU, which will make the dire winter even more severe.

Anna Colombo: “The warning lights are all flashing. The new government, according to the vast majority of its composition, is anti-European, sovereignist, inspired by Orbán’s bravery to ‘defend his national interests’, anti-vax and therefore against a ‘Europe of health’. The vast majority of it (Brothers of Italy and Lega) voted against the NextGenerationEU and the Italian Recovery Plan (by far the most substantial one) and would have preferred, as Meloni said, a “direct intervention of the IMF” in Italy. [...] The Italian centre-left must be ready for a serious discussion about identity, values, goals and leading principles. And about unity, including also what is left of the 5 Stars Movement. But also what is left of the PES with its allies. On one hand, there is nationalism, the end of the EU as we know it, no new international multilateral order to promote peace, equality, financial and energy market rules, and ecological change. No social protection. No just and progressive tax system, no tax for the rich. Privatisation of public services. Fossil fuels proliferation. And on the other hand, there is a very strong international movement, that goes back to basic and courageous social democracy, that builds on international, democratic political movements and parties capable of generating a new positive hegemony in our societies. That gives real, sustainable answers to our people. It is a choice. There is no choice in between”.

Fortunato Musella: “The latest parliamentary election is a turning point for the Italian Republic. Giorgia Meloni reached a historical victory, paving the way for her post-fascist formation. There are no serious consequences for the future of democracy to be expected. Yet electoral results showed strong elements of fluidity within the party system that could provide new lessons for the largely defeated centre-left coalition. [...] In a context of economic crisis and war, it is not easy, even for experienced politicians, to govern. But as former prime minister Giulio Andreotti used to say, from the height of his long Christian Democratic experience, in the end, power wears out those who do not have it. For the progressive electorate an element of consolation – and a lesson again!

– could be the fact that, for the first time, this sentence can be pronounced by a female prime minister also in Italy”.

Michele Prospero: “Now that the right has triumphed (in terms of parliamentary seats won, not in the number of votes, since the non-coalition centre-left parties received a clear majority of votes), there is a question still hanging in the air: what about the lack of a culture of governance, the fragility of the ruling class, the true stature of Giorgia Meloni? External constraints, the predictable reactions of the markets, will hamper the creative finance strategies that have been promised to miraculously reduce the fiscal burden. Once the path of tax cuts is no longer viable, the government will lurch onto the favourite right-wing ground, where vigilance from Brussels or international investors is far more accommodating. Symbolic policies (civil rights, abortion, historical revisionism) will then remain the only weapons available to polarise the nation. The working people who voted for the right in the belief that the future government’s enemies would be others (migrants, ‘deviants’, creatives, slackers claiming the basic income), and felt reassured by the silence of the trade unions signalling a calm period of social harmony, will have to think again. For the ultra-right government, lashing out at sexual preferences won’t suffice. The financial crisis, the recovery, the generous renovation subsidies for homeowners will have to be paid for somehow. And as always, the workforce is the most reliable cash machine for government coalitions”.

Eleonora Poli: “Italians are mainly asking for three simple things: to have a job, to have a decent salary and to live in a secure environment. Meloni used simple rhetoric based on nationalism, identity and tradition to appear close to the people, and to appear as the leader whom Italians could trust the most to fight their battles. [...] Moreover, she led the only party in parliament that opposed Mario Draghi’s coalition government. She claimed this was in order to remain coherent with her party’s ideas, but conveniently it made her appear as an authentic leader, and it allowed her to start campaigning long before Draghi’s previous government fell”.

Latvia, 1 October: War at the doorstep defines the outcomes

On Saturday, 1 October 2022, Latvian citizens went to the polls to elect 100 members of the Saeima. The preceding campaign was incredibly tough and exposed two underpinning processes. First, it evolved around the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its consequences. Despite the country’s straightforward standpoint in solidarity with the victim of the aggression, the discussions about sanctions and European involvement were more divisive. Almost a quarter of the 1.2 million Latvian population belongs to the Russian ethnic minority. Many of them have relatives on the other side of the border. Second, the impact of the conflict has been a polarising factor and resulted in a tectonic shift: four of the five largest parties of 2018 fell below the parliamentary threshold of 5%, this time. One of them was the PES member ‘Saskaņa’ (‘Harmony’). At the same, four new parties made it into

parliament, taking place on both the right and left sides of the aisle. The winner, with 19% of the vote, was the 'New Unity Party' of the incumbent Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš, who had pledged to continue the current governmental coalition.

Jānis Urbanovičs: "For several decades, 'Saskaņa', the Social Democratic Party, had received the unequivocal support of the Russian-speakers in elections, which has allowed us to be regularly the biggest party in parliament. When we woke up in a completely different world on the morning of 24 February, we faced a dilemma: to fundamentally condemn the war started by Russia or remain silent about it, which would have meant morally supporting the aggressor".

Bulgaria, 2 October: It was complex, it is complicated

Bulgaria faced another electoral attempt, the fourth in just 18 months. The low turnout of not even 40% indicates both exhaustion and disappointment among the citizens. Indeed, disappointment echoed strongly in the campaign, which was dominated by the question of the war, and also by the issues of the quality of public politics and the accountability of the institutions. Following the parliamentary vote of no-confidence initiated by the conservative GERB ('Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria') against the four parties of the government of Kiril Petkov (from the 'We continue the Change' party), 24 parties and six coalitions competed to get into the 240-seat chamber. GERB managed to take first place on the podium, with a quarter of the votes cast and 67 seats. That is very far short of the majority of 121 seats that are needed to form a government. The PES member, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), which had been part of the incumbent government and ran in a coalition with the green 'Ecoglasnost' and the 'Trakiya Political Club', noted yet another low point, falling to the level of 9.31% and losing one of its previous 25 mandates. The landscape looks complicated enough not to rule out a fifth snap election, which may increase citizens' worries even more about the costs and effectiveness of yet another round.

Ildiko Otova: "Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought back to relevance one of the biggest cleavages in Bulgarian Society: Russophiles vs Russophobes. In the following months, the centrifugal forces within the already complicated coalition intensified. In June, the government was overturned in a no-confidence vote, occasioned by the decision of 'There is such a people' to withdraw support from the cabinet".

Georgi Pirinski: "The upshot has been a fundamental decoupling of politics from citizens' preoccupations, resulting in an almost complete collapse of trust in elections, institutions and the overall democratic political process. [...] What follows now is the constitution of the new 48th National Assembly with parallel efforts to reach some sort of shared approach to forming a cabinet. As things stand now, the hopes to succeed are dwindling markedly. The most disturbing prospect for the immediate future is therefore

another aborted legislature, one more caretaker cabinet and a new fifth round of elections in early 2023! All this entails a high risk of the virtual collapse of basic democratic processes and institutions“.

Denmark, 1 November: The Danish gambit – snap elections reconfirm the lead for Social Democrats

Danish voters were called to choose the 179 members of the Folketing in snap elections. The preceding campaign proved to be very challenging, both because of the international and European contexts, and because of the domestic situation. As many as 14 parties competed, a political fragmentation which additionally induced the already high volatility of the Danish electorate, seeing, this time, 50% of voters changing their political preferences.

In the end, the electoral night saw the incumbent prime minister Mette Frederiksen achieve the best result for the Social Democrats in two decades with 27.6% and 50 MPs. The ‘red block’ managed to secure 90 seats, which is a majority – even if a slim one. The result leaves Social Democrats with a question on how to build bridges, consolidating the various political stakeholders behind tough challenges that the new government will undoubtedly continue to face, especially in the combined energy and cost-of-living crises.

Peter Koch Palshøj: “The question after the elections is if the Social Democrats will be able to continue a progressive agenda or if the overall election result will push a new Social Democratic lead government into a more liberal centrist agenda. The Social Democrats are now by far the largest party in Denmark. [...] They won the last elections in 2019 on a traditional Social Democratic platform of more robust welfare, not least improving a new right to early pension for workers who started their working life early, and better-balanced development in smaller cities and the countryside vis-a-vis the biggest cities plus a tighter policy on refugees and immigrants. This strategy improved its standing amongst its traditional voter group of workers outside the bigger cities. That reversed the trend over the last 20 years, where a significant part of this voter group moved to the right-wing Liberals and the right-wing Danish Peoples Party“.

Britta Thomsen: “For the first time in 20 years, immigration was not the core theme in a Danish election because the Social Democrats have vowed to remain tough on migration, depriving right-leaning parties of a possible rallying point. Instead, hospitals, healthcare and social care have been highlighted as the main concern of the voters. Thousands of posts in the public sector are vacant, partly due to low salaries, which also has a very important gender dimension. The government therefore promised to raise salaries in some sectors after the election. [...] For the first time in Danish history, women constitute 44.5% of the MPs, without gender quotas as there is great resistance to these quotas in almost all Danish parties. Some of the parties elected more women than others. The Social Democrats are represented by 34.5% of female MPs“.

Slovenia, 13 November: Something borrowed, something new and still some blues

Even though more than one third of the electorate was still undecided just a few days before the elections, in the end the turnout reached almost 70%. The outcome was a bold rejection of the prime minister Janez Janša and his authoritarian ideas, many of which he seems to have gladly borrowed from illiberal democracies in Poland and Hungary. To see his project's defeat was more than a relief. It was seen as a catalyst of new hope in the future of democracy.

But, as always, there is more to the story. The victory went to the liberal 'Freedom Movement' of Robert Golob, the newly established liberal party that won 41 out of 90 seats. Such a result had never been achieved before in Slovenia. But it also meant that the so-called traditional parties could only count on meagre support and, in the end, the future of the system of political parties in Slovenia is in question.

Finally, the Social Democrats (SD) under the leadership of Tanja Fajon received 6.6%. This placed it as the second force on the centre-left with seven MPs. Though the SD is anticipating playing an important role in a new governmental coalition with the 'Freedom Movement', it will need to further digest the result. Especially as it had run such a fierce and energetic campaign, with a real alternative offered by the visionary programme that was developed in a remarkably inclusive and participatory process.

Neva Grašič: "The SD programme – a plan for a new decade of development – was recognised as the most thorough political programme, containing exhaustive measures to help overcome the inequalities within our society, which the policies of the current government had further exacerbated. A reform of the healthcare system, a guarantee of decent wages and pensions, free kindergartens and free meals for pupils, and an affordable housing policy were some of the measures firmly anchored in the Social Democratic vision of society. [...] With a more consolidated parliament of five parties, a new government under the 'Freedom Movement' leader, Robert Golob, is expected to be formed before the summer. The SD is likely to become part of the new coalition. Nevertheless, the political challenges lying ahead are great: the effects of the energy crisis and rising prices, the post-pandemic recovery and the reform of the health system, deepening inequalities, a depleted budget and record debt, unstable international relations, and the urgent responses to climate change. It is the task of Social Democrats to be a strong counterweight to the liberal policies expected by the 'Freedom Movement', and to make sure Slovenia returns to a socially just, progressive society, based on solidarity and equality for all people".

Matjaz Nachtigal: "During the Slovene EU Council presidency, too many conflicts took place, such as the conflict with the national press agency STA and a conflict with the European Prosecutor's office to appoint the Slovene prosecutors. Support of the SDS by the EPP and its leader Manfred Weber only a few days before the election was understood by a large segment of the Slovene electorate as a blank cheque for further undermining independent institutions in Slovenia. [...] In the longer run, the hope remains that Social

Democracy at the national level – as well as at the EU level – will find coherent structural, institutional and policy proposals to reconnect with the voters and to enable more inclusive and sustainable democratic development at all levels of the international polity”.

Blaž Zgaga: “The landslide victory of the recently founded ‘Freedom Movement’ at the last Slovenian elections confirms the Slovenian people’s commitment to western values, and it corrected the political shift the country had experienced since 2020. [...] Despite a significant majority in the Slovenian parliament, the new coalition [Freedom Movement, a social liberal and green liberal party] will face many challenges in a period of health and security crises. Many institutions, particularly the police, the army, security and intelligence agencies, tax administration, public media and others have been seriously damaged during the vast political purges of the far-right government”.

◦ ◦ ◦

FEPS European Progressive Observatory is a platform and a newsletter, which constitutes part of the Progressive Post publications family. It offers analyses regarding the national elections, insights into the post-electoral negotiations, and predictions regarding the socio-political impact of the votes. The quotes below were extracted from the respective articles, which can be found via <https://progressivepost.eu/election-observatory/>.



LÁSZLÓ ANDOR

Europe in the shadow of war in Ukraine

“There’s no such thing as a winnable war
It’s a lie we don’t believe anymore”
Sting: *Russians* (1985)

In 2001, three weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks against New York and Washington DC, British Prime Minister Tony Blair addressed the Labour Party Conference with these words: “This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder this world around us”.

Two decades later, and just three days after Vladimir Putin launched the invasion of Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, when speaking before the members of the Bundestag, condensed a similar message into one word: *Zeitenwende*. Everything changes, but, when history turns around so much and so fast, it takes effort for governments to get a grip on the events. As we saw, it also takes time.

The war has shaken up the EU, which turned itself into an economic division in support of the defensive effort of a neighbour with whom four EU member states share a border. From the point of view of country size, Europe’s largest country invaded the second largest one. The effects have been not only European but global. It is primarily the population of Ukraine to whom Putin’s war has caused incredible suffering, but the indirect effects have been felt worldwide.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine, with its manifold consequences, have determined life and politics in Europe in 2022 and will continue to do so in 2023. It is very difficult to count in just how many ways Europe has suffered setbacks as a result, although, after a while, European leaders started to see more clearly the global dimensions of this tragic clash between two Slavic nations. European solidarity with Ukraine – in a military, as well as a humanitarian, sense – has been remarkable, but, for a long time, it remained a rather difficult task to reconcile the backing of Ukraine with the economic interests of the EU itself.

Variety of war aims

The Russia-Ukraine war of 2022 took the majority of Europeans by surprise. Very few expected Russia to launch a military invasion, even after 200,000 troops were concentrated around Ukraine's northern, eastern and southern borders. Also, very few expected that, if Russia attacked, Ukraine would manage to defend itself. And finally, very few expected that the defensive efforts of Ukraine could be so remarkably successful. The Russian forces were not only beaten outside Kyiv, but they failed to take over Kharkiv in the north, Zaporizhzhya in the centre and did not even get close to Odesa in the south. They took control of Kherson, but had to withdraw from there after seven months. From September onwards, Russian forces have been on the back foot, and sometimes on the run.

Why Moscow unleashed its armies to brutalise Ukraine and its population was, and remains, beyond comprehension for many outside observers. It became a major trend to personalise the question and sometimes focus just on the state of mind of Vladimir Putin, irrespective of the dynamics of US-Russia relations and the recent history of Ukrainian politics itself. Kremlinology was the pseudo-science of the cold war times; now it has been replaced with Putinology. But Putin himself often rephrased his policy, adding or deleting specific elements and metaphors. Within the fog of shifting Kremlin narratives, there has been one steady and consistent element: the objection to the eastward expansion of NATO. Requiring control, or at least influence over Ukraine, became a pivotal element in Putin's long-term strategy to stop, somehow, the US from pushing NATO into what they considered Russia's sphere of influence, especially after 2007.

However, Russia's war aims shifted in 2022 in response to its success or failure (more often the latter) on the Ukrainian battlefield. Instead of declaring war, Putin announced a 'special military operation', and aimed at regime change in Ukraine by storming the centre of the state. Once this failed, Putin gave up his hegemonic goals, and the campaign took a more territorial character, until the annexation of four Ukrainian counties after sham referenda. Finally, Russian attacks aimed at destroying infrastructure and terrorising the population into submission by rocket attacks. However, partial mobilisation in the autumn raised speculations about Russia's war aims and military strategy shifting again.

The war aims of Ukraine have been simpler, but, to some extent, also elastic. Restoring the pre-24 February status quo (including the continuation of an ethno-nationalist state building) was the original demand, and this also seemed to dominate the peace negotiations conducted with Russia in Turkey in March. However, as decisions were made on substantial arms deliveries (notably, 27 April in Ramstein), Ukraine started to voice a bolder aim to restore Kyiv's control over the entire territory of the country, including Crimea and 100% of the Donbas.

Given its supporting role and the great diversity of member states, the EU defined a war aim in an indirect and minimalist way, which was to ensure that Putin should not win the war he launched against Ukraine, which is also seen as a war against the peaceful European order in which borders cannot be redrawn through unilateral violence. This minimalist approach, however, allowed for different ambitions to co-exist. Some might have

assumed that the common goal was to help Ukraine win the war, and to allow the West to dictate the terms of post-war settlement; for others, Putin not winning may mean that he is forced to find some kind of negotiated solution with the Ukrainian leaders. European citizens probably remain very divided if asked about how long the war should last: until 1) the status quo before 23 February is restored; 2) Russia is pushed back to its boundaries prevailing before 2014; 3) Vladimir Putin is removed from office, and a regime change is implemented; or 4) the Russian Federation is partitioned into smaller entities, all without nuclear weapons and none being permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The absence of an own will of the EU was covered up by references to the intentions of the Ukrainian government, while it has been evident that the latter has not been an autonomous decision-maker. Especially since April, when the western military and financial aid to Ukraine was stepped up, Ukraine became even more dependent on US policy and Washington's war aims. And those are less difficult to figure out. The US (with the UK on its side) primarily wanted to use this conflict to weaken Russia, not only to reduce its capacity and make it less likely that it would terrorise its neighbours again, but also to make it less likely that in other parts of the world Russia would appear with military goals and interventions that contradict those of the US. The White House also wanted to line up western and central Europe into a genuine global conflict 'between democracy and autocracy', in which China and Russia are designated as main adversaries of the liberal West (which, in reality, is a northwest, given the divergence of views in the southwest in terms of political economy, in general, but, more importantly, regarding the judgment on Putin's war and the role of the US in Ukraine and other conflict zones).

The Russia-Ukraine war also became instrumental for the US to introduce a sanctions regime that will ensure, in a new international economic order, western Europe will be disconnected from Russia's markets and from its energy and raw-material resources. It has been a long-term preoccupation of Washington to unplug Germany, in particular, from the cheap oil and gas supply of Russia, but the moral suasion efforts of previous years have not been successful. Ahead of the invasion, about which the White House had reliable and unequivocal intelligence for about six months before it happened, the US was ready with a list of economic sanctions, starting with the cancellation of Nord Stream 2, that would implement the grand strategy to reorder economic relations much faster than with the list of arms supplies that would be needed by Ukraine to expel the aggressor. The latter effort was only made in a serious way in the second half of April, after the Ukrainians proved that their state was not about to collapse and the shambolic invasion army could be repelled.

Western responsibility?

When a war begins with an act of aggression, it is obvious, at least from a legal point of view, that the aggressor is fully responsible. Nevertheless, once this war broke out, in a variety of discussions, it was argued that western actors, governments and organisations might also bear at least some partial responsibility.

Since the outbreak of the war of aggression, a large amount of superficial talk highlighted the responsibility of Germany and a few other European countries because of their policy to trade with and invest in Russia, and in particular for purchasing natural gas and oil from the state headed by Vladimir Putin. From an accountancy point of view, this is not an incorrect observation, but from a long-term policy perspective, it is not really a substantial one. Russian oil and gas could have found markets elsewhere in the long run, which is the relevant time frame to be applied here.

It is like suggesting that those who saw *Saving Private Ryan* in the cinemas 20 years ago were responsible for the Iraq war, which was launched by the US, UK and Poland without a genuine justification and legal basis. And what matters in reality is not the revenues from one specific commodity, but the overall economic strength of the country, and the relative power of the would-be aggressor and would-be target.

Even without selling gas to Germany, Russia would have grown its economy faster than Ukraine. From the much-criticised Nord Stream 2 pipeline, not a single molecule of gas has arrived in Germany and, consequently, not a single penny was gained by Russia. Since the end of the cold war, and especially since Russia's World Trade Organization membership in 2012, the whole world developed trade and investment relations with Russia, and countries geographically close to Russia found it economically rational to buy sources of energy. Germany, which is particularly criticised for building the Nord Stream pipelines, was actually right to diversify routes, while, on the other hand, it failed to diversify the sources of energy, especially of natural gas.¹

More interesting is what US experts John Mearsheimer and Jeffrey Sachs highlight all the time, which is the responsibility of NATO, and the United States in particular. Russia was not attacked by the US, but growing US military presence and influence through NATO cooperation and otherwise in its neighbourhood, together with the US meddling in Ukrainian domestic politics and the civil war in the Donbas, which became a major irritation, threatening, among other things, the Russian naval positions in the Black Sea region.

Although the NATO factor cannot be considered irrelevant, Mearsheimer is probably wrong to suggest that the US government misunderstood the situation. It might be more accurate to speak about strategic ambiguity: offering NATO enlargement but not meaning it beyond a certain point, insisting on an 'open door' policy, but freezing the eastern frontier of NATO in practice. This strategic ambiguity became particularly striking in 2021 with the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan (which might have signalled to Russia, as to the rest of the world, that the Biden administration aimed to cut costs of foreign military engagements). Altogether, floating NATO membership for Ukraine for over a decade was a strong enough message to infuriate Moscow, but it did not do much to deter an invasion, even if some thought that amassing troops around the border was just a bluff.

1 Germany's dependence on Russian energy was almost inevitably increased by the hysteria following the Fukushima disaster in Japan and the destruction of energy-exporting Iraq and Libya by the Atlantic powers; the overestimation of the potential in renewables and the long-lasting stagnation of the eastern (formerly German Democratic Republic) regions, which would have been the primary beneficiaries of Nord Stream 2 delivering cheap natural gas.

It was not at all obvious because of the fuzzy communication on this matter for years, but, in reality, the invasion of 24 February found Ukraine without actual military allies. The only point of reference for protecting Ukraine was the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, which was violated by one of the signatories (Russia), and while the western signatories (US and UK) immediately started to deliver more weapons and training to soldiers, the results were only visible in the autumn, that is, six months after the invasion. France and Germany were not signatories of this Memorandum, but they were also expected to act as if they were. At the end of the day, while it is not irrelevant to speculate about what exactly various western actors could have done to reduce the risk of Russian aggression against Ukraine, nothing compares to the fundamental responsibility of Russia itself, and more specifically of Putin and his acolytes, who took the decision on the invasion within a rather narrow circle.

Europe infantilised

In a staff meeting on 13 October, the EU's High Representative and Vice-President (HRVP) of the Commission (aka foreign policy chief), Josep Borrell, stopped beating around the bush and exposed the long-term underperformance of the External Action Service. He said he was supposed to be the best-informed foreign policymaker, by having such an extensive diplomatic staff, but he did not think he actually was. Borrell's frustration was surely justified, although the problems experienced in 2022 had much deeper roots than just a lack of information and underperforming diplomats.

It was not so much the question that the services of the European actors were lacking, but the political level at which, throughout 2021, these were missing from negotiations with Russia on Ukraine. These were practically monopolised by Washington, even after the US had already briefed its NATO partners about the certainty of the Russian invasion. And once the war began, the EU found itself at a low level of the command chain.

For years, the EU has been working on the concept, and policy, of strategic autonomy. This dossier suddenly disappeared into a deep drawer in February 2022. Europe suddenly switched to security mode, which also meant following the leadership of the US. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg decided to postpone his long-awaited transfer to the central bank of Norway. All three functions of NATO ('to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down') were exercised in full, although then NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay was referring to the Soviet Union, this time it was the Russian Federation whose power and influence had to be cut.

The EU had to change speed or direction (or both) on many issues. Climate policy is an important example. For two years, even at the time of the pandemic, the EU's number one policy was the Green Deal. After February 2022, the EU mantra was that Europe could double down on climate goals thanks to the war. However, the reality has been much grimmer. Since the EU's announcement to shift to non-Russian supplies resulted in an immediate skyrocketing of natural gas prices, Europeans started to import shale gas, which is environmentally much more harmful, and some countries saw the opportunity to

return to coal. Others made it easier to chop down trees, as the only option for the rural population to cope with the rising risk of energy poverty.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emerged as a lead coordinator of the European support effort, but her strategy was not without risks. In order to provide moral support to Ukraine's war effort, she started to overstate the chances of Ukraine joining the EU. She used bogus language (e.g., about Ukraine belonging to the European family) to make Ukrainians believe that somehow their country could naturally fit into the EU structures, as we know them today. When speaking publicly with Ukrainian politicians about the chances of EU accession, she did not reject the populist narratives suggesting that the speed of EU accession depends on the bureaucratic performance in Brussels, as opposed to the country in question matching EU standards and rules. Seriously speaking, if Ukraine had been anywhere close to EU membership, it would already have been a candidate before February 2022. Nevertheless, the European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova at the end of June 2022, giving evidence of the geopolitical *Zeitenwende*.

At the same time, when von der Leyen spoke to EU citizens, she constantly downplayed the expected costs of the derationalisation of energy policy and of turning the EU into an economic hinterland of war in Ukraine. No wonder Europeans were disappointed when the sanctions imposed on Russia were not helping to force the aggressor to end its campaign and leave Ukraine alone, and even more when the continent was sliding into a most-unprecedented economic recession, together with a long-term reduction of growth potential and living standards.

Under the shock of the war, European leaders decided to frame energy policy as part of a global struggle between democracy and autocracy (which essentially is a hybrid world war for the rebalancing of the global economy), but shortly after they started to appeal to autocratic Arabic leaders for critical oil and gas deliveries. In May, Sweden and Finland decided to apply for membership to NATO, only to find themselves at the mercy of human rights champions Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Viktor Orbán to fulfil their newly developed ambition, and faced by tough choices regarding the fate of Kurdish freedom fighters. All this showed that, while war tends to simplify thinking and people tend to see the world in black and white when a conflict gets polarised, there are certain complexities we cannot escape, even under such stressful circumstances.

Limits of western support and unity

Support for Ukraine by North America and western and central Europe took various forms from the very start of the war. This Transatlantic community delivered military and financial aid, as well as humanitarian assistance to millions of refugees. At the start, Americans and Europeans were unclear about how much military aid and how quickly it could be provided, while the speed and intensity of economic sanctions on Russia appeared to be robust. Western politicians' rhetoric never missed references to 'unwavering support', while the limitations of this support were also quickly visible.

What was clarified in the hours following the invasion of Ukraine, and confirmed again and again in subsequent months, was that the northwest did not wish to enter into a direct confrontation with Russia. This became perhaps the most important lesson of the last six months, even if it was a lesson learned during the very first month of the war. We quickly learned that the unwavering support of the west would certainly not amount to deploying troops or nuclear weapons on Ukrainian ground. After short exchanges in March, it was also clarified that the west would not offer no-fly zones for Ukraine, and fighter jets from the stock of NATO member state air forces would not be provided either. Various western countries (primarily the US and UK, but many others too) sent light and heavy weapons, but often this did not mean the newest and most powerful versions of the given weapons.

In other words, European politicians were busy continuing gesture politics in support of the narrative of Ukrainian nationalism, while providing further military aid was about to encounter two barriers. One serious limit was the objection of the US and other western governments to provide weapons that could be used to hit Russian territory (highest power HIMARS rocket launchers or ATACMS rockets), and the other one was, especially towards the end of 2022, the concern about reaching the minimum levels of arms stockpiles preserved by western countries should a worst-case scenario materialise.

The Ukrainian army has been reinforced and managed to roll back the invaders through a counteroffensive. In the last quarter of the year, Ukrainians also managed to hit certain targets (e.g., air bases) deep inside the territory of the Russian Federation. But, at least until the end of 2022, the counteroffensive remained far from pushing back the Russian armed forces to the pre-February positions, let alone pushing them out of the entire territory of Ukraine.

The obvious and apparent limits to military support underlined the importance of economic warfare, even if the actual potential of the latter has been and remains dubious. Sanctions on Russia have been in place since 2014, but new ones were rolled out with the speed of light and in unprecedented forms. In a normal operational mode of European institutions, much smaller initiatives go through a thorough process of impact assessment, sometimes not once but twice. This did not happen in the case of the sanctions on Russia or the major decisions on energy policy, at least not in the weeks immediately after the invasion. At the same time, the impression was created that economic sanctions could be effective substitutes for military aid, but it was never properly explained how this would work out. Due to the somewhat fuzzy rhetoric of political leaders, Europeans might have, therefore, remained confused about the actual purpose of the economic sanctions. Were they rolled out to block Putin's capacity to wage a protracted war in Ukraine; simply to punish Putin and the ruling circles of the Russian Federation; to trigger a regime change in Moscow; or, perhaps, to undermine Russia's military might and purge its aggressive nature for the long run?

What some Europeans realised at the very start, and many more towards the end of the year, was that the new age of economic warfare is much more costly for Europe than for the US, which used the new global situation to enhance the competitive edge of its economy in a variety of sectors, starting with the export of liquid natural gas. The US

doubled down with the so-called Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), heralding a new era of industrial protectionism. Only at the end of 2022, and after the Nord Stream pipelines were blown up by unidentified saboteurs, did France and Germany express discomfort with the US strategy to reshuffle the cards of the global economy, of which management of the war in Ukraine is just one deal. Together with Olaf Scholz's courageous visit to China (4 November), this was a sign of Europe not being prepared to go against its own economic interest beyond a certain point. Western Europe cannot afford to reduce its own economic powers and needs to keep all options open, even if it is more difficult to make the case for prosperity at a time of hostility and global conflict.

Learning to love the war

Notwithstanding the tremendous damage the war has been causing and will continue to cause, primarily to Ukrainians, but also to many others in eastern Europe and elsewhere, European public discourse became quickly dominated by the view that war has no alternative, especially not diplomacy. The 'West' should basically support Ukraine as long as it wishes to fight, and Ukraine should define its war aims autonomously. Such claims were based on the false assumption that Ukraine can take autonomous decisions while its military capacity almost entirely depends on western and, particularly, US aid.

With ever-increasing western commitments to the war came the management of expectations, suggesting that 'we are in this for the long run'. There should be no fear of increasing costs or the repercussions of sanctions. Although it is not very well defined (unless we mean unconditional surrender by Russia), Ukrainian victory is the only acceptable outcome of the war. There should be no fear of escalation, and those speaking about nuclear risk or world war three are either cowards or supporters of Putin.

Sky television's favourite defence and security expert, Professor Michael Clark from King's College London, was suggesting that the Russia-Ukraine wars could last six to seven decades, and where we are now is only the second one (the first one took place in 2014-2015). And if permanent warfare is not comfortable, let's speak about 'unpeace', as proposed by the British-American Kremlinologist Fiona Hill, who borrowed this comforting expression from Mark Leonard of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

In essence: Europe's homework is to overcome its aversion to military conflict. Europeans should forget about being from Venus, while the US shoulders the responsibility (and direct costs) of keeping the challengers of the west at bay. Mugged by the reality of Russian aggression, we should all move to Mars. This interplanetary metaphor was first applied to geopolitical analysis by the neoconservative American author Robert Kagan, whose spouse, Victoria Nuland, was the main government official shuffling the cards on Ukraine on behalf of the US in both 2013-2014 and 2021-2022.

Neoconservatives have been showing the way to much more than full solidarity with Ukraine. Their trademark has been a fusion between liberal internationalism and hegemonic unilateralism. As in previous cases, this recipe has helped to undermine multilateralism and

frame the contemporary conflict as a clash of civilisations, even in 2022. This was a most obvious sign of neoconservatives, an epistemic community advocating US supremacy and orchestrating military interventions, having completed their transition from the Republican Party, which they influenced from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush, to the Democrats, following their disappointment with Donald J. Trump, who is a controversial figure in US politics, and particularly dangerous to democracy, but took a position against generating new wars.

For many, the support for Ukraine stemmed from sympathy with the perceived underdog, without any historic knowledge or security doctrine. For others, this became a historic opportunity for revanchism, that is, for paying Russia back for grievances of 200 or 300 years in a war in which only Ukrainians need to risk their lives, while many others along Russia's borders would benefit. Ukrainians' will to fight has been held up as evidence that war is the only decent option, even if this will had to be qualified by the suppression of political pluralism within Ukraine and the ban on fighting-age men leaving their country. Creating legends on the Ukrainian side ('Ghost of Kyiv', defenders of Snake Island etc.) and exposing atrocities by the Russian forces helped to maintain the fighting spirit within Ukraine but also among supportive nations.

Given the dramatic effects on food prices and the manifold repercussions of economic warfare (starting with energy costs but also well beyond these), the West started to incur significant costs stemming from the war, while the primary human losses have been suffered exclusively by Ukrainians. Therefore, much of the public sentiment in the West, especially among younger people, treated the Russia-Ukraine war as if it were fantasy football. One takes sides, wears the colours of the team being supported, and wishes that the next fixture ends with victory for our favourites and loss for our opponents. What was remarkable after 24 February was how quickly the public sentiment could shift to total belligerence, shepherded by a myriad of 'security experts' who could afford to be ignorant about economics and indifferent to the human and environmental consequences of warfare.

Annalena Baerbock (Germany's answer to Luigi Di Maio of Italy) managed to say in a Prague meeting that she wanted to deliver for the people of Ukraine, no matter what her German voters think. Simplification, exaggeration and pretending that the current case is somehow unique and does not need to be contextualised have all been ingredients for the overall framing of the clash between, on the one hand, the West, which equals democracy and a rules-based international order, and, on the other hand, the Russians, who are genetically imperialists, if not fascists. No wonder, this wholesale militarisation of public thinking and discourse favoured a shift towards Eurocentrism, civilisational conflict and right-wing ideologies in European domestic politics, influencing all major elections of the year. The elections in Hungary, France, Sweden, Italy and Israel had one common element: significant net gains by far-right political forces. This development was bad enough for progressives in Europe, but it was not the main cause for continuing the war. What was missing from April onwards was the openness of the two sides, Moscow and Kyiv, to sit down at the negotiating table, and this remained the case until the end of 2022.

The inconvenient peace

“Agreeing peace requires courage – more courage than continuing the war – to engage in dialogue and compromise”; these were the words of HRVP Josep Borrell on 11 August 2022. He made this statement in the context of the war in Ethiopia, but the approach should also apply to the war that is geographically closer to us: the one in Ukraine.

In fact, in 2022, it was not only agreeing on peace that required courage but merely speaking about it sometimes. For a while, in March 2022, peace talks between Russia and Ukraine went on for weeks in Turkey, and not without any hope. But once those talks broke down, western discourse became dominated by the notion that, under the current circumstances, peace could only be unjust. There should be peace in the end, but only after Ukrainian victory. The right place for decisions was not the negotiating table but the battlefield.

Juxtaposing peace and justice became so widespread that the ECFR decided to ask Europeans in ten countries about which one they considered more important than the other. The pollsters of EPSR found Europeans sharply divided over how the Ukraine war should play out, with some favouring peace and others wanting ‘justice’. The survey showed that 35% of Europeans were in the ‘peace camp’, favouring an end to the war as soon as possible. On the other hand, 22% of respondents wanted ‘justice’, punishing Russia for its invasion and fully restoring Ukraine’s territory. Among those surveyed, Poland had the most respondents wanting ‘justice’ against Russia, while Italy, Germany and Romania had the most favouring a peaceful end to hostilities.

When this survey was produced, western solidarity was just entering the phase when weapons deliveries started to make a difference on the Ukrainian battlefields, and at the same time, campaigning for EU membership of the country that stood up for its independence from the larger and aggressive neighbour also intensified. This, together with piling up economic sanctions against the aggressor, meant that solidarity was pointing towards an escalation of the conflict rather than bringing it to an end, or at least a halt.

By the end of June, Ukraine (together with Moldova) became candidates for EU membership. However, it was somehow side lined that, between escalation and EU membership, there will have to be de-escalation, ceasefire, peace and reconstruction, and perhaps also a period of reforms. Not even theoretically can we jump from the escalation of warfare to EU membership, and in practice it is definitely impossible, and all the interim steps will have to be designed, engineered and implemented.

However inconvenient it is to talk about it, peace is a precondition for reconstruction and EU integration. And for peace to be lasting, it has to be built on mutual understanding. Peace to last cannot be perceived as unjust. In other words, it has to be genuine. The concept of proxy war was invented a long time ago, but there is no such thing as proxy peace.

What became even more inconvenient than talking about future peace was mentioning the peace before this war. The reason is that, in reality, the Russian aggression on 24 February was not the start of the war; it only turned an internationalised civil war into an

interstate war. The domestic political conflicts in Ukraine turned violent in 2014, triggering interventions by the US (politically) and Russia (militarily) on the two sides. The Minsk agreements aimed at restoring peace, and what is today particularly inconvenient is to admit that the outcome of the war could be more favourable for Ukraine than what maintaining the Minsk II framework would have been, through the application of the Steinmeier formula (originally proposed in 2015).² The inconvenient truth is that international diplomacy did not invest enough in the implementation of the Minsk agreement, and thus, was not able to avoid a devastating war – perhaps because the Russian threat was considered a bluff.

Some commentators, like Branko Milanovic, pointed out that the United Nations, whose job would have been to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table, was nowhere to be seen, except for two facets: the deal that was hammered out to secure grain exports from Ukraine through the Black Sea, and the safety and security of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant. No visible attempt was made to build a broader ceasefire or de-escalation strategy out of these two interventions. Nobody invoked the spirit of Martti Ahtisaari or Richard Holbrooke, and advocating diplomatic talks and a ceasefire, while the West continued to supply arms to the Ukrainian side, was often condemned as some kind of heresy.

In 2009, Barack Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize “for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples”. He did not need to be an actual peacemaker to receive this prize. The Russia-Ukraine war is a big enough conflict to reward those who actually invested political capital in avoiding it. Politicians who made great efforts to restore peace in Ukraine and avert Russian aggression (e.g., Frank Walter Steinmeier) could also be nominated for a peace prize. Not least because the Minsk framework remains a point of reference for those whose job it will be to design the next peace, however inconvenient this might be.

History taken hostage

Various interpretations of history have played a crucial role in the two sides of this war in deepening the conflict and making dialogue and eventually a *rapprochement* more difficult. The Russian build-up for the war in 2021 included the creation of a narrative that would help to influence public opinion in Russia, but potentially also to disarm some of the opposition in other countries to the enforcement of Russian dominance over Ukraine. Vladimir Putin’s infamous essay on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians (July 2021) was a mixture of historical facts and fictitious interpretations, overstating the togetherness of Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian nations and essentially denying the fact that Ukraine could be an independent nation and state.

² The Steinmeier formula was an attempt in 2016 by the then German foreign minister to ensure implementation of the Minsk II agreement (2015) by calling for elections to be held in the separatist-held territories in Donbas under Ukrainian legislation and the supervision of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In October 2019, the Ukrainian government actually expressed its agreement with the Steinmeier formula.

Putin's provocation was not the first one, and it also created a specific battlefield. History often took the place of normal political discourse, and became a tool of the propaganda war on various sides. For example, history was instrumentalised by references to 1956 (the year of the Hungarian uprising against Stalinist leadership suppressed by Soviet army intervention) when Poles, Czechs and others in the region wanted Viktor Orbán to hate the Russians as much as they did and abandon his overt and covert pro-Putin stance. World War II images were used and abused, from appeasement bashing to comparing Putin to Hitler. Like previous adversaries of the US (Slobodan Miloević, Saddam Hussein etc.), Vladimir Putin was often compared to the leader of the Third Reich, and even a new nickname – Putler – was coined for him.

Poland's right-wing government continued to demand reparations from Germany for acts during World War II, although without labelling them as genocide. At the same time, memorials for liberation from Nazis by the Soviet army are being taken down and the German Bundestag, in November 2022, declared that the Soviet Union committed genocide in one of its member states, Ukraine, in the 1930s. Indeed, a remarkable reinterpretation of 20th-century history is underway.

Putin's version of Russia-Ukraine relations, with his broader world view, was feeding on the concept of Eurasianism, represented among others by Alexander Dugin, whose daughter was, probably mistakenly, assassinated in August 2022. Dugin and similar thinkers have cultivated an ideology of Russia being distinct and virtuous, as opposed to the decadent West. Meanwhile, in the West, the mirror images of Dugin emerged, agreeing with the Euroasianists regarding the existence of the civilisational Iron Curtain, but considering the West immaculate and virtuous and the East to be hopeless regarding reform and convergence.

In December, Ursula von der Leyen contradicted this east-west schematism and came under attack for drawing a parallel between Russian and British imperialism, when speaking to the joint session of the houses of the Irish parliament (Oireachtas). The European Commission president claiming that Ireland "knows what it means to struggle for [the] right to exist", was heavily criticised by British conservatives like Jacob Rees-Mogg. In reality, von der Leyen was too generous to the British, neither exposing disastrous military adventures of the UK in recent decades, nor criticising the dubious role the former British PM Boris Johnson played in relation to the war in Ukraine.

The excessive and inappropriate metaphorisation of World War II was criticised by Anatol Lieven. He pointed to the role of a small conflict (Austro-Serbian rivalry over the control of Sarajevo) in generating World War I as a much better comparator than World War II. Had leaders known in 1914 what the consequences of the explosion of the Bosnian powder keg would be, they presumably would have been keener to find a negotiated solution. The same would apply to the dispute around Crimea and Sevastopol. However, referencing World War I has remained an atypical approach, just like rare comparisons to the post-imperial wars of the British and the French (the former being the case with von der Leyen), and also rare analogies with the post-Yugoslav wars of secession, which dominated southeast European history in the 1990s, with grave consequences ever since.

The dispute around the Donbas can be compared to the case of Alsace-Lorraine. Having not only a mixed population, but, more importantly, the reserves of coal and iron ore, Alsace-Lorraine was a theatre of geopolitical competition and war between Germany and France. The German Empire annexed it in 1871, but the borders changed again after World War I. The long-term settlement of the conflict was provided after World War II by the launch the European Coal and Steel Community (and subsequently the EEC) by France and Germany together with four other western European countries. However, as long as Russia and Ukraine are in a conflict, the utility of such comparisons remains limited, while the manipulative use of World War II references will remain with us.

To offer another example in this series, the total confusion regarding the long shadow of World War II was on display at the United Nations, where, following a practice introduced in 2012, Russia has put forward a motion to condemn the glorification of Nazism and collected over 100 votes (4 November). The opposition, with half as many votes, included the US, the UK and Germany. Call it a Hegelian ruse of reason, but it was very fitting when, at the end of this turbulent year, the German authorities had to foil a domestic conspiracy that was about to overthrow the democratic order of the country.

Trouble in the garden

Josep Borrell's staff meeting, which has been mentioned already once in this chapter, became famous for different reason, and it was the less fortunate description by the HRVP of Europe as a garden that is surrounded by the rest of the world, which is mostly a jungle. Borrell actually stressed that the 'gardeners' needed to take care of the 'garden', and called on European nations to engage with the rest of the world. Borrell said, "we have built a garden. Everything works. It is the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that humankind has been able to build – the three things together".

Even if later this statement was corrected to ensure that wrong interpretations did not start circulating around the world (including the Global South), the controversy was inevitable. In the subsequent months, there were two global events where it was demonstrated that the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world was not so simple that the garden-jungle dichotomy would be the best one to use.

Firstly, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) took place in Egypt, where one of the main conclusions was that the high-income countries of the world would need to contribute more to solving the energy transition of weaker countries. As on many other occasions in the previous half-century, the conference was surrounded by lots of talk about reparations to be paid by former colonial powers in Europe (and North America?) to former colonies in the Global South. At the end, the talk of northern responsibility was not totally unproductive, since COP27 closed with a breakthrough agreement to provide 'loss and damage' funding for vulnerable countries hit hard by climate disasters.

The other major global event where the complexity of north-south relations came to the fore was the FIFA football world cup hosted by Qatar. The small Arab monarchy overlooking the Persian Gulf has been at the centre of criticism, ever since it was given the right to host this high-visibility tournament. The precarious working conditions of those building the new stadiums was exposed and invited voices to call for boycott, similarly to the host's record regarding the rights of LGBTQ+ people. To silence critical disputes, at least for the time of the games, FIFA President Gianni Infantino (the man who is not Michel Platini) rebutted the critics of Qatar by pointing to the long history of European colonialism. According to Sepp Blatter's replacement, "Europeans should apologise for 3,000 years before they give moral lessons". Thus, the weeks of the Qatar games were more rather than less political than the average world cup of FIFA. German footballers, who long campaigned for gay rights, protested the ban on such gestures.³ And when Carlos Queiroz, the Portuguese coach of the Iran team, was fed up with questions concerning the relationship between footballers and the Iranian regime, he asked: why Gareth Southgate is never asked about what the UK has been doing in the world, e.g. for example, leaving behind the women of Afghanistan after 20 years of tragic intervention. After all these sideshows, it is hard to decide whether it was a political or an apolitical decision by FIFA leaders to reject the offer by the Ukrainian president to address the audience of the final between Argentina and France.

The greatest shockwaves of Qatar were actually not reported from the Persian Gulf but Brussels itself, following several arrests after detecting signs that the host country of the football tournament was using illegal tools, including bribes, to influence the views and rhetoric of European officials and decisions of the European Parliament. It was also discovered that not only Qatar, but also Morocco, had been involved in buying the influence of EU institutions. These revelations by the Belgian police caused a genuine crisis within the European Parliament and, in particular, in the most affected groups: the socialists and democrats.

The lack of progress in relations between the EU and the Global South was also illustrated by assessments of the one-year-old Global Gateway programme. It is not only that stakeholders had to take note of the 'failure to deliver', but a gala event held in the metaverse to explain the Global Gateway concept to 18-35 year olds was also criticised after it was discovered that no more than a handful of users logged on – despite the EU spending €387,000 to host it. To provide some moderately happy end to this controversial chapter of 2022, the prime minister of the Netherlands, together with the Dutch monarchy, apologised for the role their country played in the slave trade through the centuries. Undoubtedly, this gesture was very important, by which the Netherlands made itself eligible to continue to give moral lessons, within FIFA but also well beyond.

3 Germany's national football team had been planning to wear the OneLove armband in support of LGBTQ+ rights in Qatar until the FIFA leadership announced at the last moment that they would face sanctions for doing so. In response, the players posed with hands over their mouths to indicate they felt they had been silenced.

Light at the end of the tunnel?

Twenty years ago, British Prime Minister Blair spectacularly mismanaged the *Zeitenwende* of his time. Through a sequence of errors, he contributed to turning a big problem into a much bigger one and wasted all his political capital on a military adventure that was not only illegal, but also caused tremendous economic, environmental and geopolitical tragedies. It remains to be seen whether European leaders of our time can avoid dangerous traps and hugely consequential errors.

Europe closed the year 2022 remarkably united in unwavering support for Ukraine, and even a new financial aid package was adopted, together with another round of sanctions on Russian officials, as well as business and media persons. On the other hand, European views remained diverse regarding expectations about the European post-war security architecture, and the possibility of restarting economic cooperation with Russia once this war is over.

It is, therefore, quite remarkable that, even without a coherent all-European view about the future, a new continental organisation was launched on 6 October: the European Political Community (EPC). The EPC has offered a broad framework to include the UK, as well as potential future members of the EU. For sure, the EPC would need to be further developed to prove its additionality and its potential to help members fulfil their ambition for peace, prosperity and justice. But as a first act, it is still an important one to start the construction of order when much of the daily action is still tied up in the ongoing war and efforts to deal with its immediate consequences.

The EPC leaves it open whether there would be a new Cold War to overshadow the life of the next generation of Europeans, or whether there would be further EU or NATO enlargement towards the east. At the end of 2022, it is not at all clear what peace will look like between Russia and Ukraine, or even who would be capable of brokering peace or just a ceasefire. But the need for a faster arrival at this negotiated phase has been more frequently expressed.

After the European Parliament in late November declared Russia to be a state supporting terrorism, one would have expected this declaration to lead to a further diminishing of diplomatic relations with Russia, if not a complete disconnect from Moscow and the current rulers of the Kremlin. Instead, Joe Biden declared that he would be ready to negotiate with Putin about ending the war. Most certainly, this was not just another gaffe by the frail president, since, in November, General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, also declared that the war in Ukraine is unwinnable by purely military means and suggested that Ukraine is now in a position of strength and that this winter might be the right moment to consider peace talks with Russia.

No Ukrainian or western politician should be denounced for not having an appetite to negotiate with Vladimir Putin, especially when Russian rockets and drones continue to hit Ukrainian targets. Whatever the outcome of the war and the shape of the new international order will be, Putin's reputation will not be repaired any more. Putin and his *siloviki junta* secured for themselves a place in history books as authors of Russia's moral fall, diplomatic

isolation and economic decline. On the other hand, Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's unlikely president, not only managed to unite his country for the war of independence but also became a worldwide hero, who drummed up international support and solidarity for his country beyond expectations. It is mainly thanks to him that most Europeans today judge Ukraine not for what it was before the Russian invasion, but for what it might become after this war ends.

Until 2022, the EU's Ukraine policy was a derivative of its Russia policy. From this year onwards, the EU's Russia policy will be a derivative of the Ukraine policy. For the time being, this is the maximum Ukraine can achieve, and it should not be underestimated. What this alliance should concentrate on is to ensure that the broadly defined West remains as united and resolute in reconstruction support as in the military one and helps establish the preconditions of sustainable reconstruction.



PROGRESS IN EUROPE



ANIA SKRZYPEK

The progressive Europe we want

The history of European integration has been marked by many troubles, twists and turns. There has been no shortage of cliffhangers and ‘turning points’. But, against all the odds, the Community has always been able to persevere. So, although it is hard to argue that any crisis is a positive phenomenon, for the EU each crunch has resulted in a new opening. That makes these formative moments when ‘impossible’ becomes ‘doable’.

This tendency to sinusoidal development (from crisis to crisis) has become a sort of predisposition to European integration. Therefore, it seems legitimate to wonder how it manifested itself in the last two years. Undoubtedly, the turmoil that the EU has undergone has been multifaceted. The spread of the pandemic and its consequences, the war at its doorstep and the consequences this has already triggered, and the energy and cost-of-living crises have all been profound ‘game changers’. So much so that they overshadow all the previous preoccupations about the EU’s future, which in the preceding years and after Brexit had a somewhat ‘existential’ note to them.

Consequently, instead of asking *if* the EU should play a greater role, the question was *how* it should act to be most effective. The sense of togetherness came from the conviction that, jointly, the member states could achieve more. So, even if there were some centrifugal tendencies, especially in the second half of 2022, they have been consequently defeated. And this created a very different mood from the one around the financial crash of 2008. The sense of urgency, necessity and responsibility enabled some important compromises. They paved the way to the largest and most ambitious ever modernisation plan. The latter was labelled as “Next-GenerationEU” and was an expression of a joint aspiration for a stronger, more cohesive and modernised EU. As Pedro Sánchez, the Prime Minister of Spain, underlined when speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos:

Clearly, the last couple of years have not been easy for the European project [...]. However, the bigger the challenge, the more resolute our reaction. Throughout these trying times, we always went for further integration. To unite, and not to divide. To make our common project, Europe, stronger.¹

1 Sánchez, P. (2022) “Sánchez calls for European unity at Davos 2022 - says ‘Spain will do its part’”. World Economic Forum, 24 May 2022.

And, to that end, while remaining together was relevant to increase the odds of fighting the pandemic and providing the path to recovery, it has proved equally, or even more, relevant when facing the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its consequences for the EU. Sanna Marin, the Prime Minister of Finland, captured it well during her speech in the European Parliament in September, underlining that this was not only about an ability to act in sync but also about the capacity to do so swiftly. What she said was that “Europe and the western world have acted decisively and consistently. Unity is our greatest strength”.²

Building back better

Since the *building back better* agenda has been about *recovery and resilience*, and not a simple reconstruction, there have been several binding targets set. They served as criteria for the member states, each of which had to come up with a national plan, to be eligible to receive recovery and resilience facility (RRF) funds. They had to meet the requirements within the fields of just transition and greening of economies; digitalisation; reform of public administration, social services and public goods provision; and rule of law and democratic standards. Each plan would then be evaluated, and only upon the positive recommendation of the European Commission, with Council agreement, were the first payments released. This reflected the logic that the process goes beyond crisis management and aims to set fundamentals for a different Europe in the long term. The European leaders followed their motto: *even in exceptional times, we are determined to work for a better Europe*.³

The Next-GenerationEU was therefore a joint commitment, whereby essential elements of it were the member states’ individual efforts to contribute to a common modernisation process. While setting common standards and providing means, it would enable each of them to craft the most adequate action plan. It served as an incentive, which, for example, for Spain, would be a catalyst for the following: “we are going to pay special attention to the field of digitalisation, where Spain has a lot to learn from Finland, taking advantage of the framework and opportunities offered by the European funds, the *next* generation funds”.⁴

The Next-GenerationEU has been incomparably ambitious, and it has a fair chance of succeeding as a modernising agenda, since it is not a stand-alone programme. There were a number of other accompanying initiatives launched in parallel. There have been parallel efforts made in the social dimension (visible through the Social Summit, the Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) mechanisms and others), important legislation passed regarding the European Green Deal (including here the Fit for 55 package) and serious debate about the institutional aspects (within the Conference on the Future of

2 Marin, S. (2022) “Prime Minister Sanna Marin’s speech at the European Parliament on 13 September 2022”.

3 Ibid.

4 Marin, S. and P. Sánchez (2022) “Joint appearance by the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland, Sanna Marin, before the media at Moncloa Palace”. 26 January.

Europe, CoFoE). One could conclude that altogether they contributed to a decisive leap forward, which was undoubtedly induced by the Covid-19 crisis. António Costa, the Prime Minister of Portugal, observed that „this crisis had the capacity to unblock a subject that had been dragging for years”.⁵ The question remains though about how far it really has been the awaited historical turning point. Was this a new opening to give European integration a totally fresh, long-awaited trajectory?

At the dawn of the new beginning

Pondering if the crossroads have been passed or if, in fact, the EU is just at them is not a matter of indulging in philosophical curiosity. Assessing the state of play is, in this case, about defining expectations and possibilities. And for this, it is essential to take another look at the political map of Europe, which has changed vastly since the beginning of 2020.

The first observation is that the forces which induce centrifugal tendencies are growing in strength again. The results of recent elections in Italy and Sweden are reasons for concern. But so is the audacity of the reconfirmed Hungarian regime, which has been attempting to block decisions requiring unanimity, such as another aid package for Ukraine. It instrumentalised a veto to leverage the country's bargaining power when it comes to disputes around cohesion and RRF funds. This sadly encouraged the government in Warsaw to do the same to get tougher in its aggressive anti-German narrative. The latter may be yet another smokescreen to the truculent approach towards the EU, of which demands regarding the restoration of the rule of law remain neglected. These are just a few examples of the issues, which have been corrosive. While, as mentioned before, these kinds of behaviours have been tempered in the midst of the pandemic, now they suggest that there is no longer the prevailing mood of *we are in this together*. And that is worrying.

It is true that the countries with right-wing radicals and authoritarian forces in government may not have the power to reverse those decisions made during the pandemic and the first months of the war in Ukraine. But, at the same time, they can provide obstacles on the path ahead. They will continue to dispute rules and values, which causes conflicts and further fallouts. It will cause a situation in which some states will lag, as it starts being the case for those upon whom the conditionality mechanisms have been applied. They are not benefitting from the RRF, which undermines their respective recovery plans. This will hinder political, economic and social cohesion.

Secondly, the reinforcement of right-wing radicals and authoritarian parties means a change in the dynamics of political competition, especially since there has been an apparent crisis of the centre right.⁶ It derives partially from fatigue with the respective Christian democratic and conservative parties, who had been the dominant governing force in the EU. But it also

5 Costa, A. and P. Sánchez (2022) "European Council acknowledges Spain and Portugal's energy specificity". Republica Portuguesa, XXII Governo, 30 March.

6 Wolkenstein, F. (2022) "Christian Europe redux". *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 27 July. DOI: 10.1111/jcms.13400

adds to the effects they have been exposed to amid the crisis of the traditional parties. Thus, the space for the centre right has shrunk – especially since in some countries there has also been a revival of liberal forces. Experiments to move to the right did not work, as radicalism estranged more moderate conservative voters in several countries. The only result has been that it has fuelled tension between the centre right and the radical right, which has seen several outbursts inside the European Parliament. To that end, there is an ongoing fight about the primacy on the right side of the political scene, the outcomes of which will determine the potential for reinforcement for euroscepticism and anti-Europeanism.

This tectonic shift is most relevant for the centre left, which has been gradually overcoming its own predicament. For progressives, the struggle on the opposite side of the aisle means that there is another kind of political adversary, which they have a moral duty to fight. Stefan Löfven, former Prime Minister of Sweden and recently elected Party of European Socialists (PES) president, said in his PES Congress speech:

It is a frightening development we see in the world around us. And the history of Europe teaches us with brutal clarity what happens when democracy and human dignity are curtailed. The labour movement has always been right-wing extremist main adversary. So are we now.⁷

The return of the social democrats

Realising the change in the political map also means that questioning where the EU is in its search for a future trajectory becomes central to the strategy for progressives. As a political force returning and being again entrusted with governing responsibilities, they need to ponder how far they desire to go and if they can turn their new numbers into the potential to allow them to change Europe.

There were several moments in the 2000s and 2010s when it wasn't the movement's affinity that guided the respective progressive prime ministers' actions. An example of that was the quick support for Barroso to become the European Commission's president in 2009. But this time seems very different. Aside from declarations within the framework of the PES pre-Council meetings, there have been several meaningful bilateral exchanges between respective social democratic prime ministers. One such meeting was the visit of Sanna Marin to Madrid in January 2022. At the press conference, Sánchez stated:

[...] the European Council gives us many occasions to be able to talk about Finland and Spain, but there are really few opportunities like today's, to be able to sit down and talk about our bilateral agenda, to discuss both this bilateral relationship and the intense European agenda and the enormous challenges ahead of us in depth.⁸

7 Löfven, S. (2022) "Speech as president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)". PES Congress, Berlin, 15 October.

8 Marin, S. and P. Sánchez (2022) "Joint appearance by the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland, Sanna Marin, before the media at Moncloa Palace". 26 January.

He added that the bilateral exchanges:

[...] also reaffirm our Europeanist conviction. We are both governments led by the social democratic family, which, I believe, reinforces the new political direction that citizens in Europe and elsewhere in the world are taking in choosing different solutions to the crisis resulting from the pandemic, logically based on dignity and justice.⁹

Another example that depicts the relevance given to the bilateral cooperation between social democrats was the visit that Olaf Scholz, the incumbent German Chancellor, paid in January 2022 to Pedro Sánchez. It was almost immediately after the successful federal elections. Evidently, there was a lot of symbolism in that as well, to recall the traditionally close cooperation between the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE), and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), since the times of Felipe González and Willy Brandt. These were, of course, the times of the social democratic giants, who jointly and decisively shaped the trajectory of European developments. At the press conference that followed in Madrid, Sánchez stated:

If the past has shown us anything, it is that Spain and Germany have achieved great things when we have worked hand in hand. We are more than the sum of the two countries, and so today we are putting this harmony at the service of a greater ambition for the European Union. Chancellor Scholz and I have noted that today we are entering a new phase in our cooperation at the European level.¹⁰

What is interesting is that, at the conference, a journalist asked if it was meaningful that this was a meeting of two social democrats. Sánchez replied:

I would like to recall when Chancellor Scholz was a candidate for the chancellorship we were at a meeting of the Party of European Socialists in Berlin, and I remember one of the things he said at that meeting, which has been one of his main messages throughout the election campaign in Germany. When citizens want respect and dignity in their lives, they always look to social democracy. And I believe that the revolution of respect, of dignity, is the great pending revolution on the European continent and undoubtedly in Spain.¹¹

The sentiment expressed by Sánchez was echoed by Scholz, but also became a driver for all the progressive prime ministers. Their conclusion, indeed, was that this was the time for them to assume historical responsibility. This wouldn't be the first time: for example, in the 1979 campaign, Willy Brandt spoke about "delivering on the hopes entrusted in us in Europe". But recovering this sense of duty was this time paired with a confidence that they were able to rise to the occasion and ensure the primacy of social democracy for Europe. In the second half of the year, Stefan Löfven explained this as follows:

I believe that in times of crisis, it becomes even more obvious for more people that the answer to our great political challenges is the social democratic ideas of equality,

9 Ibid.

10 Sánchez, P. and O. Scholz (2022) "Joint media appearance of the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Olaf Scholz, at Moncloa Palace". 17 January.

11 Ibid.

solidarity and community. No one is strong on their own. We social democrats, we know that, we have known that for a long time.¹²

What was also different than before was that, this time, social democrats did not give in to determinism. They did not believe that the circumstances would simply make the political pendulum further swing in their direction. They had the ambition to shape the events, instead, and actually conduct politics at the European level. In 2022, there were several examples and statements that left no doubt about this – with the most prominent of them being, perhaps, the lecture delivered by Olaf Scholz in Prague in September. But where one can find a very bold manifestation of the commitment to make a difference was in a speech given by Sanna Marin in September to the European Parliament. The Finnish prime minister said:

European cooperation is a success story. We can see it in the desire of ever more European nations to become members of our democratic community. Yet Europe is not a monolith. The integration of the Union will not stop but will change constantly. We must become better, bolder and even more capable. The efficient functioning of the European Union is ultimately a question of political will.¹³

The roots of the grand ambition

The goal to ensure the primacy of progressive ideas over European integration required coming up with a vision for the future. Inside the EU, there was a feeling that the CoFoE delivered many results, as a process that enabled participatory democracy at the EU level, and coming to a close with a clearer understanding of what the citizens expect from the Union. There were, as noted, several important initiatives and political decisions taken, which undoubtedly enabled a leap forward. But what was absent was the setting of a new horizon. And this is what progressives, among others, have embarked on trying to do.

In April, Enrico Letta, then secretary general of Partito Democratico, published an important piece in the *Corriere della Sera*. He argued that accepting the Ukrainian application for membership by the EU would be an act of historical significance. It was a recognition of Ukrainian citizens' rights to self-determination, but also a manifestation of strength from the side of the Community.¹⁴ For Letta, although it opened the door to other Eastern countries *with the same ambition*, it should have not been confused with offering a fast track. The process ahead was still to be demanding and complex, and it would have to be conducted with a view on the impact that it would have on both accession countries and the EU itself. Consequently, for Letta, the momentum looked different than in 1989,

12 Löfven, S. (2022) "Speech as president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)". PES Congress, Berlin, 15 October.

13 Marin, S. (2022) "Prime Minister Sanna Marin's speech at the European Parliament on 13 September 2022".

14 Letta, E. (2022) "A European Confederation: A common political platform for peace". *The Progressive Post*, 25 April.

as the mood was different as well. Four decades ago, enthusiasm and idealism *may have taken the focus away from the practical implications*. Richer with the experience of what happened afterwards, Europe should proceed with more caution now. Letta wrote that, while the time now seemed to prompt *great promises and expectations*, the reservations of different natures shouldn't be downplayed. Therefore, his proposal was that of the *creation of a European Confederation*.

According to Letta, a European Confederation would consist of 27 EU members plus Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. This would enable closer cooperation of 36 partners, while, in parallel, the premises of the enlargement process and the need for the applicants to fulfil their obligations would stay the same. In other words, it would become a space to define shared global strategies *starting with the defence of peace and security, the promotion of a fair and sustainable development model, and the fight against climate change*. The decisions within the confederation would be taken by a leaders' summit, the meetings of which would follow those of the European Council.

Enrico Letta published his text when other stakeholders also wondered about possible scenarios for Europe. The shared concern was that the EU in its current shape could no longer fulfil its mission, regarding safeguarding peace and security. And though there have been many statements in solidarity with Ukraine, and the debate on future enlargements was back in the spotlight, there was hesitation about each aspect of it. This is also what prompted Emmanuel Macron, who in 2022 stood for re-election in a tough presidential race, to formulate some proposals himself. Macron has always been an outspoken pro-Europeanist, which was one of his competitive advantages in the campaign. He has been heavily involved in reshaping the agenda of EU liberals, who inside the European Parliament rebranded themselves as a consequence of his party joining after 2019. What undoubtedly added to Macron's challenge was the fact that, following the 2021 general elections in Germany, there was a change in the seat of a chancellor and questions were asked about the future of the Franco-German tandem.

Seizing the moment after his re-election, Macron went to the closing ceremony of the CoFoE in Strasbourg on 9 May 2022 and used that as an opportunity to propose the creation of *the European Political Union*.¹⁵ He argued that this is not a substitute for enlargement, but can facilitate cooperation in the name of peace, stability and prosperity. And for that reason, he also hoped to include the UK and Switzerland within it. Adequately to the circumstances in which it was delivered, the speech was brief – but even so, one could notice that not much focus was offered to the other geopolitical aspects.

Immediately after, Macron boarded a plane and flew to Berlin to meet with Chancellor Scholz for the first official trip of his mandate. This stirred some excitement, especially since news about the SPD's electoral gain had been received with overwhelming enthusiasm earlier, and for social democrats elsewhere, Berlin became an informal reference point

15 Macron, E. (2022) "Speech by Emmanuel Macron at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe". French Presidency of the European Union, 9 May.

again. Echoes of that sentiment can be heard, for example, in the acceptance speech of Stefan Löfven at the PES Congress, who said: “It’s an honour to be elected PES president 30 years after we were founded. And to be that in Berlin, in Germany, also under the hosting of a German social democratic chancellor is something special”.¹⁶

The Scholz-Macron meeting was summarised in a press conference. The chancellor expressed his appreciation for the honour of hosting Macron’s first foreign trip on the Europe Day. He remarked that “German-French partnership and friendship were more important than ever”, also as “a foundation stone, [...] a driving force and source of inspiration for the European project and the future of Europe”. Scholz promised that the two would continue to “do their bit” to strengthen “a European Union which stands for peace and freedom, for democracy and the rule of law, which can assert itself and stands shoulder to shoulder with the countries who share our values”.¹⁷ But no comment was made in support of the European Political Union idea and, instead, there was a pledge made towards the Western Balkans. Both the chancellor and the president emphasised that they “stood by (their) promise of membership”.

The ideas presented in spring saw a follow-up in the autumn. There was an anticipation that the Prague Summit could be the first meeting of the European Political Union, even if there was no formal process to consolidate the new structure. The clock was running, especially since the war in Ukraine kept evolving and having a set of impacts on the EU and its economy. The energy crisis was among the reasons why it was also necessary to consider a great many aspects of the post-Brexit EU-UK relationship. But also, the geopolitical rationale required thinking about *greater Europe*. Social democrats felt that they needed to come forward with more complex answers, and so they did when Sanna Marin addressed the European Parliament, Olaf Scholz held a lecture at the Charles University in Prague and the Congress of the Party of European Socialists took place.

Of these three, it was the German chancellor’s speech that received incomparably the most attention. Firstly, there was still the expectation to hear what the new direction for Europe looks like from the German perspective. Secondly, Scholz himself was recognised for his work for the EU, which he delivered in his previous ministerial capacity. Illustrative of this were the words of Pedro Sánchez, who welcomed Scholz in Madrid, saying “I would [...] like to congratulate you, chancellor, and thank you for the pro-European commitment you have shown over the years and which, I am convinced, you will continue to show in the years to come”.¹⁸ Hence, what Scholz would have to say would matter a great deal.

16 Löfven, S. (2022) “Speech as president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)”. PES Congress, Berlin, 15 October.

17 Macron, E. (2022) “Standing up for each other and for Ukraine”. Berlin, 9 May.

18 Sánchez, P. and O. Scholz (2022) “Joint media appearance of the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Olaf Scholz, at Moncloa Palace”. 17 January.

For a geopolitical Europe

Thus, Olaf Scholz's lecture was prepared from every possible aspect. The choice of Prague and Charles University was symbolic: the chancellor recognised the place as being at the crossroads between west and east, where diverse traditions intertwine. This introduction, which was rich in references to the good and bad events of the past, was, however, focused on a vision for the future. Scholz announced in the introduction that he was there "to talk to you about the future, about our future, which I believe can be summarised in a single word: Europe. [...] This is about our future, which is called Europe. That Europe is being challenged today as never before".¹⁹ And though the phrasing left a lot of space for interpretation, one possibility was that he would attempt a new kind of approach – building on, but going beyond, what has been known as *Ostpolitik*. This already made the speech ground-breaking.

There was, of course, a reason why Scholz used so many references to the past, which go beyond the style that is rather typical for German speakers from the centre left. They were used to underline the proud legacy of the European project and the current responsibilities to preserve its unity. He underlined that, at that moment, new kinds of demarcation lines were being drawn and that *the dividing line will run between this free Europe and a neo-imperialist autocracy in the future*. In that context, he recalled that

[this] united Europe was born as a peace project within Europe. Its objective was to ensure that war never broke out again between its member states. Today, it is up to us to continue to develop this promise of peace – by enabling the European Union to safeguard its security, its independence, and its stability also in the face of challenges from without. That is Europe's new peace mission.²⁰

And this is what brought him to a specific vision regarding further enlargements: "Our Europe is united in peace and freedom and is open to all European nations who share our values. Above all, however, it is an active rejection of imperialism and autocracy".²¹

These few sentences point to an understanding that the EU must do both: become stronger and grow larger; these two are co-dependent. There must be more cooperation to ensure strategic autonomy, as there must also be an openness to work with different partners to ensure the primacy of the ideas of peace and democracy globally. But there Scholz insisted on a need to change the parameters of cooperation. It shouldn't be driven by short-term gains. Instead, it must be underpinned by shared values. For him, the latter are not abstract concepts, but the core of *new realpolitik*. This he explained as follows:

Realpolitik in the 21st century does not mean putting values on the back burner or sacrificing partners on the altar of lazy compromises. *Realpolitik* must mean involving

19 Scholz, O. (2022) "Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague, on Monday 29th August 2022".

20 Ibid.

21 Scholz, O. (2022) "Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague, on Monday 29th August 2022".

friends and partners with shared values and supporting them in order to be strong in global competition through cooperation.²²

This ideological reasoning is where the chancellor also embedded the answer to President Macron's proposal. This was the first time he addressed the question of the *European Political Community* more broadly, explaining that his understanding was that it would be a step towards forming a strategic, values-driven alliance. This would be an added value to the existing structures, as it can be a space for a

regular exchange at the political level – a forum in which we heads of state and government of the EU and our European partners meet once or twice each year to discuss the key issues that affect our continent as a whole, such as security, energy, the climate and connectivity.²³

This understanding made the European Political Community appear as just one of the tools in a larger toolbox. It could serve a specific purpose, but in Scholz's very definitive opinion, it could never be an alternative to enlargement. He believed that the EU had made a promise to Western Balkans, and not only should the EU keep it but, even more importantly, act upon it. He pledged, "I'm committed to the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of the Western Balkans, as well as Ukraine, Moldova and, down the line, also Georgia". And therefore, he believed that the future Union would be one of 30-36 member states.

In his genuine commitment and confidence that this was a real prospect, he was not alone. In fact, if comparing what he expressed in Prague with what other social democrats said in that period of time, their thinking is shared and consistent. To give an example, Sanna Marin, addressing the European Parliament that same month, stated that

Our decisions in June to support enlargement of the Union showed integrity and our credibility as a partner. Ukraine and Moldova were granted candidate status and Georgia was given a European perspective. The Western Balkan countries' convergence with the Union is finally progressing. The road to membership is neither short nor quick. However, the European Union's doors must be open to any European state that wishes to become part of our community of values and is committed to carrying out the necessary reforms.²⁴

Similarly, Stefan Löfven addressed the PES Congress just a couple of weeks later with the following words:

Friends, our family has been a driving force behind the European enlargement. It is gratifying that Moldova and Ukraine have been given candidate status and that Georgia is aspiring. A clear commitment to the Western Balkan process must be followed by action. At the same time, it's important that every step of the enlargement process builds democratic institutions because that is how we strengthen the rule of law and

²² Ibid.

²³ Scholz, O. (2022) "Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague, on Monday 29th August 2022".

²⁴ Marin, S. (2022) "Prime Minister Sanna Marin's speech at the European Parliament on 13 September 2022".

how we fight corruption. But bringing Europe together is about giving more people the opportunity for a better future and also about strengthening Europe's security and sovereignty.²⁵

While the social democrats expressed their strong support for enlargement and, once again, they saw their own responsibility to deliver it in that historical moment, they also underlined that there could be no fast track. The chancellor repeated several times that the candidate countries must fulfil the accession criteria, as also, in parallel, the EU has to transform to become *fit for this major enlargement*. This meant that the EU reform process should not be delayed and should reflect lessons learned after 2004. The EU of the future would

then have over 500 million free citizens enjoying equal rights, with the biggest internal market in the world, with leading research institutes, innovations and innovative companies, with stable democracies, with social welfare and a public infrastructure that is without parallel around the world.²⁶

And this was the kind of strong, grand Europe that social democrats desired and that they would see as worthy of the label of a new, *geopolitical Europe*.

Delivering peace and stability

The renewed commitment to values-driven politics also manifested itself strongly in progressive proposals about how to equip Europe to deliver on its original promise: to safeguard and promote peace. Analysing all of what progressives said about the Russian invasion, the EU's role and strategy to help Ukraine goes beyond the scope of this paper. But as the tension and then the eruption of armed conflict reminded everyone about the fragility of peace, there have been some crucial reflections about Europe's capacity to act. They require to be mentioned here, as they constitute building blocks of the progressive vision for the EU, as they are also a sign that social democrats assume a stronger position regarding, for example, a defence union.

The beginning of 2022 was marked by growing tensions on the global level, and progressives were arguing that the situation required common reflection. In January, Sanna Marin explained that:

Within the European Union, we are currently completing the strategic analysis for security and defence, which will enable the European Union to be better prepared to defend its interests, promote stability in our neighbouring regions and contribute to the defence of Europe.²⁷

25 Löfven, S. (2022) "Speech as candidate for president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)". PES Congress, Berlin, 14 October.

26 Scholz, O. (2022) "Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague, on Monday 29th August 2022".

27 Marin, S. and P. Sánchez (2022) "Joint appearance by the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland, Sanna Marin, before the media at Moncloa Palace". 26 January.

This was a strong statement, which pointed to the willingness not only to coordinate more but also to act together.

As the months have passed and the situation has kept escalating, progressives have stepped up their efforts to define a new kind of doctrine for the EU, and this was echoed in the Prague speech of Olaf Scholz. For him, this was a matter of “European sovereignty”.²⁸ Being a complex concept, it encompassed the EU “growing autonomous” in all fields, and by extension assuming a “greater responsibility for our own security”. The chancellor believed that it required more unity in “defending our values and interests around the world, and hence, more synergy”.

When it comes to defence policies, Scholz argued that, first of all, there was a need to overcome the “shrinkage of European armed forces and defence budgets of the past”. This was a meaningful statement, perhaps even reviving such historical concepts as *pragmatic pacifism* (which, in the SPD traditions, existed, for example, in the writings of Eduard Bernstein). Furthermore, he believed that “the EU must be in a position to respond quickly and effectively”, which required concerted actions. He declared Germany ready to enhance efforts and provide core troops to the planned EU rapid deployment force. And consequently, he called for the establishment of the *real EU HQ* for them – “with all the requisite finances, personnel and technology”. *German responsibility* would stretch further to support Lithuania and Slovakia, to compensate with equipment for the Czech Republic, as there would also be an investment of €100 billion in modernising the *Bundeswehr*. Making their own army stronger was, in that context, a contribution to *strengthening European and transatlantic security*. Finally, Scholz’s *European sovereignty* concept was, therefore, strongly correlated with the *European armament capabilities*, which was a reason for him to call for a “separate Council of defence ministers, which [...] can become the nucleus of a Europe of joint defence and armament”.

The sense of common responsibility and that the time calls for more action in strengthening defence capacities was also shared by other progressive prime ministers. An example of that is the statement by Pedro Sánchez, who said:

Spain has had troops and units deployed in the Baltic countries for years, and I believe that this, if it demonstrates anything, is precisely that the security of the borders [...] is a security issue for the European Union as a whole and therefore it is not a question of distances in kilometres [...] but of solidarity between allied countries.²⁹

While debates on how to make the EU capable of delivering peace and stability continued, an important question arose – namely, regarding the relationship between the EU’s efforts and strategy within NATO. For social democrats, this was pertinent, especially since progressives held the positions of both high representative and secretary general of NATO. And as Scholz said, it was NATO that “remain[ed] the guarantor of our security”.

28 Scholz, O. (2022) “Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague, on Monday 29th August 2022”.

29 Marin, S. and P. Sánchez (2022) “Joint appearance by the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland, Sanna Marin, before the media at Moncloa Palace”. 26 January.

Additionally, amid the Russian-Ukrainian war, two EU member states led by social democratic prime ministers decided to join the Transatlantic alliance. And this was of historical relevance, especially because in January 2023 this still hasn't been given. Reflection of what this, in turn, meant for the adhering countries was perhaps best depicted in the Madrid statement of Sanna Marin:

Finland has the possibility to apply for full NATO membership, but this is not being discussed at the moment. It would require a majority in the Finnish parliament, and also a majority of Finnish citizens, and that is not the situation right now, although there is the possibility of applying for NATO membership in the future, and it is important that this possibility is kept open and is ours and that nobody can tell us what to do, that it is our own sovereign decision.³⁰

Defending and promoting fundamental values

Deliberations regarding the new vision were all underpinned not only by a sense of responsibility and necessity of the moment, as noted earlier, but even more so by a regained confidence in a mission of social democracy. This boosted the conviction that the politics of the future must be values-driven and, herewith, at least on the centre left, one could observe a somewhat unexpected return to the ideology. 'Unexpected', as the literature on the matter had been depicting for a long time, was now the end of grand narratives.

In that sense, 2022 saw the continuation of trends that had been set earlier within the respective national contexts. A great inspiration here was, of course, the SPD campaign ahead of the *Bundestag* elections, which focused on the core values and proposed "respect" as a concept to translate them into the new reality. The influence it had on the narratives of the sister parties was extensive,^{31,32} and one of the examples was the clear statement by Pedro Sánchez:

When I talk about respect and I talk about dignity, I talk about dignity in employment. I am talking about dignity in pensions, I am talking about dignity in wages. It is also about dignity in the education of our young people. In the dignity to be able to access housing at an early age and not the ages we have now in our country, in Spain. And I would like to reclaim the word respect used by Chancellor Scholz because I believe that this is precisely what summarises the social democratic proposal for Europe.³³

30 Ibid.

31 Skrzypek, A. (ed) (2022) *Transforming the Political Union: Reinforcing Europarties ahead of the European Elections* (Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies).

32 Skrzypek, A. (2022) "The narrative of respect and how it revamps the progressive values", in A. Schieder et al. (eds.) *Progressive Proposals for the Turbulent Times: How to Boost the Political, Organisational and Electoral Potential* (Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies) pp. 20-53.

33 Sánchez, P. and O. Scholz (2022) "Joint media appearance of the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Olaf Scholz, at Moncloa Palace". 17 January.

Evidently, Chancellor Scholz sustained his commitment to values-driven politics, and this was a prominent thread within his Prague speech. He expressed the conviction that “values are what keep the EU together”. He said:

Peace and freedom, democracy and the rule of law, human rights and human dignity – these values of the European Union are a heritage we gained together. At this of all times, facing the renewed threat to freedom, pluralism and democracy in the east of our continent, we feel that connection especially strongly.³⁴

In that sense, the future of the EU and its policies depends on the commitments to the founding principles: “Because values are essential to the EU’s continued existence, it concerns us all when those values are violated – both outside Europe and even more so within Europe”.

The words of Scholz are, therefore, also indicative of why the Russian aggression has been perceived in ideological terms by the social democrats, and why they have become even more outspoken about the issues connected with the EU’s internal democracy and the rule of law (to which the next section will refer in detail). For progressives, this was the essence of the test that the EU was being put to and why they had to respond:

Our commitment to human rights, the rule of law and democracy are being tried. In Russia’s view, diversity, democracy and respect for human rights make us weak. [...] But it is exactly this commitment that makes us strong. Our societies are flourishing precisely because, in democracy, it is for the people to decide their future. We value diversity. We promote human rights. We want to give everyone an opportunity to succeed.³⁵

The return of a values-driven narrative manifested itself across the board, as illustrated in two speeches delivered by Stefan Löfven at the PES Congress.^{36,37} Asking for support for his candidacy, he said:

That sums up the main goals of the social democratic movement, namely, that the fight for human dignity requires equality, that equality is a prerequisite for the freedom of all people, and the most important condition for achieving equality is a society built on solidarity.³⁸

And that was a bridge between the fight for equality, which progressives had assumed after the years marked by austerity politics, and the fight against the backlash that the recent years brought to specific components of it – like gender equality. Understanding that Covid-19 and right-wing politics undermined women’s emancipation was a manifestation

34 Ibid.

35 Marin, S. (2022) “Prime Minister Sanna Marin’s speech at the European Parliament on 13 September 2022”.

36 Löfven, S. (2022) “Speech as candidate for president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)”. PES Congress, Berlin, 14 October.

37 Löfven, S. (2022) “Speech as president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)”. PES Congress, Berlin, 15 October.

38 Löfven, S. (2022) “Speech as candidate for president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)”. PES Congress, Berlin, 14 October.

of the difference between what paths previous and current generations of social democrats saw to recovery.

As a principle, gender equality should, therefore, become a transversal guideline. This rationale was depicted, for example, in the statement: “We will boost coordination at the multilateral level, in the defence of our shared values [...] with the promotion of gender equality, of the women, peace and security agenda, [...]”.³⁹ As such, it should be at the centre of every action, especially inside the EU: “as social democrats are committed to embracing the social and feminist dimension of politics and to bringing a progressive approach to the European agenda through dialogue”.⁴⁰

Social democrats also believe that gender equality is where the fight against right-wing radicals will be crucial. On this, Prime Minister Marin commented that “it is particularly important and topical in the face of the so-called ‘anti-gender’ movements”,⁴¹ while Stefan Löfven stated that

As the right-wing conservatives gain power, women’s rights, conditions and participation deteriorate. The fight for women’s rights is a fight for human rights, but also our fight. Our fight as men for a gender-equal society. So equality must always be at the top of our political agenda. And I praise PES Women and their role in ensuring that we do have an EU Gender Equality Strategy. Now, ratification of the Istanbul Convention is a must. The right to abortion must be part of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and gender-based violence must be eradicated. And as a feminist, it is obvious to me that equality, gender equality, is both an ideological and moral issue. But it’s also a question of making use of everyone’s potential. So, all women and men must have the same opportunities and obligations in Europe.⁴²

Owning the fight for the rule of law

The primacy of values also consolidated progressives amid the debate on democracy inside of the EU and the struggle to uphold the rule of law in all member states. They had been outspoken before at the EU level (with such prominent personalities as, for example, Katharina Barley, the S&D Group vice-president); however, only some of the prime ministers had been addressing the issue directly, with exception of the NextGenerationEU debate. The context changed though, and as they depicted the Russian invasion and its further actions as an attempt to hinder the EU as a union founded on values, this was a matter of principle to ensure that democracy functioned internally. So, in 2022, one could say that it was visibly up to social democrats to lead the fight from within the respective countries.

39 Marin, S. and P. Sánchez (2022) “Joint appearance by the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland, Sanna Marin, before the media at Moncloa Palace”. 26 January.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Löfven, S. (2022) “Speech as president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)”. PES Congress, Berlin, 15 October.

That rationale is echoed in the Prague speech of Olaf Scholz, who said: “we, therefore, cannot stand by when the principles of the rule of law are violated and democratic oversight is dismantled”. He thanked the European Parliament and expressed support for the European Commission “in its work for the rule of law, [...] which is a fundamental value that should bind our union together”.

The chancellor believed that Europe could not refrain from using the tools it has at its disposal, arguing that, also in Hungary and Poland (countries he specifically named), citizens wanted more EU and they wanted it to stand strongly on the principle matters. Consequently, he supported the application of Article 7 and the conditionality mechanism, saying: “we should give the Commission a new way to launch infringement proceedings when there are breaches of what unites us at the very core: our fundamental values”. He regretted that several of the arguments about the rule of law went “all the way to the court” and expressed hope that a dialogue based on the “Commission’s report on the rule of law with its country-specific recommendations” could be a better way forward.

In other words, the fight for democracy was yet another sign of how much social democrats learned the lesson that nothing can ever be taken for granted, and at these historical crossroads, this is an important test. This is also audible in another speech, by Stefan Löfven, who claimed:

We see what is happening in countries such as Hungary and Poland. Democracy and the rule of law are gradually being dismantled. Gradually, women’s rights are restricted. [...] We see what is happening in Italy and unfortunately also in my home country, Sweden. Parties with roots straight down in the fascist and neo-Nazi past have now reached the ultimate political power. [...] defending democracy and human dignity will be one of our main tasks as social democrats in these coming years. We have and we will always be clear. It is thanks to our political family that the EU today is committed to defend the rule of law and democracy, and there must be clear consequences for those countries, member states that violate these European values.⁴³

Ensuring the capacity to act

As already emphasised earlier here, for progressives, the future of the EU is related to both deepening and developing. They had learned from the experience of almost two decades before. As much as they supported future enlargements, they also believed that a profound institutional transformation was a necessity. This is what made them more invested in questions regarding the EU’s capacity to act. However, one must point out that they were not in agreement regarding many of the aspects of institutional reform.

Some of the social democrats pinned their great hopes on the CoFoE. When it was inaugurated, there were two progressives signing the launching act – the late David Sassoli,

⁴³ Löfven, S. (2022) “Speech as president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)”. PES Congress, Berlin, 15 October.

then president of the European Parliament, and Antonio Costa, prime minister of Portugal. While the CoFoE had been criticised for a delayed start, unclear mandate and ambiguous planning, it delivered more than anyone anticipated. It augmented (even if only temporarily) standards of deliberative democracy, and it showed that the involvement of citizens at the EU level was possible. Though the closing ceremony on 9 May had been magnificent, the results of the whole exercise were largely overshadowed shortly after. But regardless of this ending being a rather brisk moment, social democrats did their utmost to keep the spirit of the CoFoE alive. They kept referring to the final outcomes rather frequently (also within the context of the national press conferences held by respective prime ministers). Also, the fact that António Costa went to Strasbourg on Europe Day, although he had no official role assigned, was a grand gesture that became an iconic one.

Within the history of EU integration, social democrats had several prominent representatives delivering institutional reforms. The Lisbon Treaty is a prominent example. But there has also been hesitation over the recognition that the sister parties weren't aligned: the so-called Nordic parties were known for their anti-federalist stands, eastern and western parties were divided about the mechanisms of enhanced cooperation, etc. But as it became clear in recent months that the EU must be able to decide and move quicker, social democrats became determined to labour internal compromises and find ways to common, pragmatic, practical proposals that could accommodate everyone.

Consequently, Chancellor Scholz argued that it was a time to shake off the prejudice against any profound reform. He emphasised that “the currency of the European Union is not supremacy or subordination, but rather the acknowledgment of diversity, a level playing field between all of its members, as well as plurality and the balancing of different interests”. Therefore, an increased capacity of the EU to act would make everyone involved in the Union respectively stronger. And then, similarly to Letta, who in his spring article spoke against bottlenecks,⁴⁴ Scholz pointed to the blockages that prevented the Community's action. He saw no reason why – with such logic – the rules couldn't be changed, and even added that “European Treaties aren't set in stone”.⁴⁵

On this last point, social democrats were not in agreement. There was reluctance due to timing and the question of whether it wouldn't be more pertinent to start with fully using existing provisions and fixing the rules that were stretched amid Covid-19. This was the point that Sanna Marin made towards the European Parliament:

Finland also takes a constructive view on the development of the EU. We take very seriously the voice of the citizens and the new proposals they have brought up in the Conference on the Future of Europe. However, a crisis is not the right time to open up a debate on the Treaties. Our citizens did not ask for institutional changes as much as for reforms that respond both to the major challenges facing humankind and people's everyday concerns. The current framework allows us to meet these needs. For example,

44 Letta, E. (2022) “A European Confederation: a common political platform for peace”. *The Progressive Post*, 25 April.

45 Scholz, O. (2022) “Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague, on Monday 29th August 2022”.

we can increase qualified majority decisions in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.⁴⁶

The search for a pragmatic, progressive approach continued. And step by step, the issues on which the compromises could have been achieved were crystallising. The first among them was the desire to make the decision-making processes more efficient. This meant a need to strike a new balance between the intergovernmental approach and the necessity to remove the veto. In Prague, Scholz insisted that this was the time to drop abstract debates and apply the motto “form follows function”. He argued that one concrete idea, which especially in the current context would benefit from more “flexibility”, was defence policies. The chancellor believed that exploring the existing mechanisms, which allowed *enhanced cooperation* among the “coalitions of willing” would already be a step forward. In that sense, for Scholz, elimination of the veto wasn’t exactly an either/or dilemma. He proposed another option, which he called “constructive abstention”. He said, “if as many people as possible pursue this idea, then we will get very much closer to a geopolitical Europe capable of holding its own on the international stage”. This could prepare the way for a steady process that would, in the end, eliminate the unanimity rule. For Scholz, it was a corrosive instrument that could empower one state to prevent everyone else from progressing and would induce decisions based on the lowest common denominator. He called for “a gradual transition to majority voting in common foreign policy, but also in other areas, such as tax policy”. He admitted that the latter could have large repercussions for Germany, but this he treated as an example of how a country like his will have to give something to get much more.

Furthermore, social democrats have been offering some specific options for institutional reforms. They underlined that representative democracy must be a functional one, especially after enlargement. Chancellor Scholz was particularly invested, believing in Germany’s responsibility. He considered his state to be a country “at the heart of Europe and crucial in eastward going Union”, hence developing as a “compromise-broker” in the future. That said, he also underlined that the EU “should be about reaching decisions together and not being exclusive clubs or directorates. [...] [within the EU] members enjoying equal rights”. Therefore, he argued for a reform of the European Parliament, whereby composition should better reflect the principles of representative democracy and *every vote in the EU counts the same*. While this was rather explicit, Scholz did not refer to proposals on electoral reform, even if they had been politically sponsored by social democrats (see the European Parliament report of Ruiz Denesa⁴⁷). To that end, the chancellor also redressed the old argument that a European Commission composed of representatives of 30-36 member states would not be able to function after enlargement. He did not deny the importance of each member

46 Marin, S. (2022) “Prime Minister Sanna Marin’s speech at the European Parliament on 13 September 2022”.

47 Ruiz Devesa, D. (2022) “Report on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that decision”. European Parliament, 4 April.

state being represented by “their” commissioner and being part of decision-making as a principle, but he proposed a new setup in which, for example, two commissioners would be jointly responsible as directorate-general.

Progressive, pragmatic, politically marketable

The analyses included in this article focus on progressive proposals for the future of Europe, several of which were articulated by the respective prime ministers during the turbulent times of 2022. Importantly, they sensed the great responsibility for the EU, which led them to invest themselves in European politics beyond what could be considered essential due to the circumstances. They considered the momentum to be a historical crossroads, where progress should not be just the sum of crisis-related policies but, instead, should be politically driven. For the first time after many years, social democrats had the confidence that it was their core values and policies that should and could take primacy.

This was also reflected in the somewhat unexpected return of ideologically framed politics. The core values were what social democrats believed to be key to ensuring the integrity of the EU and its power to persevere, facing both internal and external challenges. Accordingly, the narrative and actions connected again, in a process that Olaf Scholz labelled, in his famous Prague speech, as a moment in which “ideology gave way to pragmatism”. And this was what underpinned certain strategic choices, such as assuming a tough stance in the debate on how to guarantee the rule of law internally and how to create alliances and trade agreements internationally.

Amid important statements and speeches delivered by social democrats in these past 12 months, one gains a good understanding of what progressivism stands for nowadays. This is of great relevance, as there can be no doubt what social democrats are in favour of and what they will fight against, the clarity and consequently predictability of which hadn’t been there for a long time. The power of conviction comes from the lessons learned, especially after the financial crisis, and the determination to do differently next time. Still, it is further solidified by the recent relevant experiences, such as the “respect”-focused campaign of the SPD, the fight for different democratic standards conducted by PSOE or the consistency in pursuing the green transformation by social democrats in Finland. Overall, the new approach is also inseparably pro-European.

When it comes to specific proposals for the future of the EU, social democrats are committed to what they call *enlargement and deepening*. This is the way forward that will strengthen the EU and make it answer the call of the current times. Therefore, although they are not opposed to proposals by President Macron, they insist that they cannot be seen as substitutes and cannot be allowed to cause any delays. The Community must be equipped with tools to take decisions and act, which is also why institutional reforms are crucial. Social democrats are not aligned on the question of what requires treaty changes now; however, they are very pragmatic in proposing other changes that could help advance

the integration processes in different areas and, by extension, make both the EU and all its members stronger.

This article focused on the questions connected with the long-term vision and institutional changes because these have seen the comparably largest leap forward in progressive positions. That said, evidently, there have been several other threads in the debate about the future – including assessment of the instruments that were agreed upon during the last crisis (SURE, Next-GenerationEU, Fit for 55) – and others that urgently require to be solved, like questions of (fiscal) rules, capital market union and migration. All are very relevant, especially since they are the fields where disagreements can still be detected. But what seems to emerge as a common denominator for these, and may be a reference point in the medium and long term, is a vision for a *Social Europe*; this is a concept that has been a traditional unifying agenda for social democrats in Europe since the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community (predecessor of PES) in 1973.

The level of ambition was perhaps best depicted in the statement by Pedro Sánchez at Davos:

[...] we certainly must show the highest degree of ambition in promoting a renewed social agenda for the European Union. Because combating inequality and fostering social cohesion is the only way to achieve our goals of progress, prosperity, and welfare in the most efficient manner.⁴⁸

This view was shared by others, including the new PES president, who said in his acceptance speech: “[...] equality and growth are not in opposition to each other. On the contrary, equality and growth are each other’s prerequisites”.⁴⁹

Social democrats were, therefore, determined to see the response given by the EU, and all the investments that came along during the crisis, as an opening to greater modernisation. They wanted to ensure that it is a just one, based on solidarity and focused on the future. They wanted to see ecological and digital transformation lead to better work organisation with greater protection of workers, sound reindustrialisation and a boost to technological development. They spoke about *European sovereignty* and *autonomy*, as they also argued – boldly for the first time since the 1990s – for making Europe globally competitive. In this spirit, Olaf Scholz also argues for standing tall and getting in place the *Made in Europe 2030 strategy*.

To that end, there has been a great change in the involvement, narrative and agenda. As stated, although the objectives crystallised and the political will became stronger, there were still several important issues that continued to cause internal disagreements. These were crucial, as they concerned, for example, fiscal rules; EU budgetary capacity; or, for that matter, the possibility of using nuclear energy. But even in this context, hope remained that the progress achieved would continue in the spirit of Stefan Löfven’s PES Congress speech:

48 Sánchez, P. (2022) “Sánchez calls for European unity at Davos 2022 - says ‘Spain will do its part’”. World Economic Forum, 24 May 2022.

49 Löfven, S. (2022) “Speech as president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)”. PES Congress, Berlin, 15 October.

It is together that we shape visions for the Europe of the future. It is together that we work out our joint political proposals and thus win the trust of Europe's citizens, both in the election for European Parliament in 2024, but also in every national election. And we know that one party's success is everyone's success and we need more social democratic governments in Europe.⁵⁰

50 Löfven, S. (2022) "Speech as candidate for president of the Party of European Socialists (PES)". PES Congress, Berlin, 14 October.



Pedro Sánchez

“Internationalism is the antidote to the myopic politics of trenches and borders”

On Friday, 25 November 2022, at the 26th Congress of the Socialist International (SI), which was held in Madrid, Pedro Sánchez, Prime Minister of Spain and Secretary-General of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), was elected President of the worldwide organisation of social democratic, socialist and labour parties. We are honoured to publish his acceptance speech in this Progressive Yearbook 2023.

Comrades of the Socialist International,

We are a moment in the historical cause of socialism and in the life of the parties that represent it. But, even if we are just a moment, our belonging to the Parties of the Socialist International explains a good part of our life. For me, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party has been a school of life in which to grow politically, humanly and morally. Today, on a day full of emotions, I want to dedicate my first words to the militants of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party.

Dear colleagues, on your behalf and on behalf of all Spanish socialists, I assume the presidency of the Socialist International as Secretary General of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. And to all the delegates, and to the colleagues of the outgoing leadership, I can only thank you for your support in facing this challenge. I will dedicate all my work capacity and effort to one aim: to return the enormous amount of trust that you place in me.

I expressly thank George Papandreou and Luis Ayala. Thank you for your dedication and commitment. I will count on you in this new stage.

From this responsibility, I will put all my efforts into offering new progressive responses to the huge global challenges. I will also put all my efforts into strengthening an organisation whose voice is heard and taken into account in the world. An organisation that unites all the progressive internationalist movements again. We are the home of all the socialist, social

democratic and progressive forces in the world. A Socialist International that embraces gender equality for the outside, but also on the inside: in our own home.

Comrades, I belong to a generation that benefited from the advances of the socialist governments of Felipe González and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Governments that led the greatest advances in the recent history of Spain. Governments that laid the foundations of the solid welfare state that we have today.

In Spain, the initials of the Socialist Party and the development of democracy are inseparable. All the great social and rights achievements of our democracy have come from the Spanish Socialist Party. But for something like this to be possible, democracy itself had to be established in my country first. And in that fight, we were not alone. Great leaders and socialist parties in Europe and the rest of the world believed in that young and threatened democracy, and they fought tirelessly to strengthen it. Giant figures like Olof Palme or Willy Brandt, relevant members of the Socialist International, which in 1980 held its congress in Madrid with a firm purpose: that democracy finally takes root in Spain. That country, even threatened by the risk of regression, overcame fear to look ahead with a hunger for the future. The optimism of those leaders, coming from all latitudes, made us believe. Together we made possible an old wish we dreamed of in the Second Republic: that no one would ever again steal these people the right to be free.

How can we forget the image of a Swedish prime minister, piggy bank in hand, raising funds for Spanish democrats in exile? How can we forget the demonstrations throughout Europe against the latest barbaric acts of Francoism? How can we forget the support of socialists from so many countries for the Spanish exiles? Spain will always remember that exercise of solidarity by European social democracy and the whole world in defence of our freedom.

We are the country that we are, also, thanks to progressive internationalism.

From there, from the memory of the help received, our vocation to help others to advance today on the path of freedom, democracy and the defence of human rights is born. We forge our collective memory with symbolic experiences in distant countries and continents. Because we are united, in addition to the passion for freedom and equality, by the third principle that emerged from the French Revolution: fraternity.

Every 25 April, many Spanish radio stations play “Grândola vila morena”. We evoke the carnation revolution in that spring in Lisbon that precluded our own. Today in Lisbon, tomorrow in Madrid, our fathers and mothers sang. Every 11 September, we remember Allende, and we are moved by his call to walk the great avenues on which the free man would once again make his way. These are dates on the calendar that go beyond borders and we feel as our own. They feed a shared story that unites us. That is the power of fraternity for the global progressive movement, which this organisation embodies like no other.

Comrades, being on the left builds character. That is why it is so necessary, in complex times like these ones, that we promote the values of common sense, which are the values of social democracy.

On 15 November, the world exceeded 8 billion inhabitants. The question we must ask ourselves is not whether there is the capacity to feed, educate, care for, protect and offer

security to the whole of humanity. The question is: what are we doing wrong so that this does not happen? We are already 8 billion human beings on Earth. Some say there are too many. But the problem is not that there are too many human beings, the problem is that there is a lack of humanity.

In a world marked by geopolitical competition and predatory capitalism, appealing to a multilateral agenda and global collective action is a duty that social democracy must assume as a true principle. Not only because cooperation is a more valuable instinct than competition, but because the defence of multilateralism is in our DNA. And in particular, in the action of the United Nations, an organisation that we helped create after the Second World War. That bond must be strengthened and renewed. We must be an ideological pole in defence of the United Nations, because there is no more suitable forum to combat these global threats that do not stop at our borders.

Our internationalism is the antidote to the myopic politics of trenches and borders. Today, with the withdrawal of a neoliberalism that was only interested in globalising capital and markets, it is time to globalise rights and freedoms; globalise climate justice; globalise equality; globalise democracy and the dignity of the human being.

That globalisation was deliberately ignored by those who led the world into a disaster a decade ago. Those who folded the sails and collected their profits to hide them under a net of opacity in tax havens. Those who, under the excuse of deregulation, consented to modern forms of semi-slavery in the field of work. The merchants of doubt, allies of post-truth and alternative facts to stop the green transition, knowing that the time to act on climate change is running out. These are the ones who privatised obscene profits and socialised losses until they plunged the world into a devastating economic crisis. It is the legacy made of ashes from a decade lost to progress due to the financial crisis. A legacy that we must confront from a renewed and courageous social democratic alternative.

That is what we are doing in Spain.

We have just approved a new social budget and new taxes on large corporations. Social justice and fiscal justice: the right and the far right opposed them, but despite their noise, insults and blockades, we advance. We are moving forward because we protect people. We are making progress because, with European funds, we are strengthening economic growth. We move forward because we are asking big companies for an extra effort while we relieve the social majority of Spaniards. Spain advances because we provide stability to our country and its people at a time when they need it most.

It is the time of the coming socialism.

More than 100 years ago, this organisation raised its voice for world peace. Days before being assassinated, Jean Jaures called on all the workers of the world to unite to “drive away the horrible nightmare”. On the eve of the first world war, only the Socialist International tried to stop the catastrophe with a desperate appeal for peace.

We know the lessons of History. And the price to pay when the people allow themselves to be dragged into the brutality of war. That is why we have the duty to make a global appeal in defence of peace. To be activists of a renewed pacifism based on the defence of

the international legality. It is always others who feed the hatred that leads to war. Social democracy has always been on the side of solutions and of peace.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine shows us the importance of preserving an international order based on rules, based on respect for the territorial integrity of states. We have built institutions to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. We forged a diplomacy of peace to prevail the word over the force.

All wars, in Ukraine and anywhere else in the world, are a crime against humankind.

We must open the time for diplomacy. It is time to respect international legality. It is the hour of peace. Of the end of the war. And we will work from the Socialist International to put an end to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and for the cessation of all conflicts in the rest of the continents.

Comrades and friends, I would like to summarise our proposal in the five areas of work that were debated in this Congress.

In the first place, the fight against climate emergency. A just ecological transition. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, expressed it clearly: our choice is to cooperate or perish. It is inconceivable that, faced with the evidence, there are forces that choose to deny and perish. It is not enough to oppose the inertia that leads us to the climatic catastrophe. We must step forward and be clear: the greed of a few can lead humanity towards self-destruction. And that is why I ask you to make a stand: fighting climate emergency is the only possible investment in the future. There is a tremendous injustice, almost existential, in the fact that countries most affected by the climate emergency suffer from the actions of the most developed economies.

The 58 most exposed countries, where a fifth of the world's population lives, are responsible for barely 5% of emissions. The 54 countries of the African continent emit just over 3% of global emissions. And, despite this, they are on the front line suffering the consequences of a devastation that we have a duty to avoid in the name of our sons and daughters.

Second, ending male chauvinism. Feminism, like socialism, is internationalist. There is no more just cause than the defence of full, real and effective equality between men and women. A woman dies violently every 11 minutes in the world. In the face of this barbarism, the firmness of social democracy must be as resounding as our determination to end this infamy. Gender-based violence and sexual exploitation are an intolerable attack on human dignity. Raising your voice is not enough. We must build effective public policies to end the violence that stems from the privilege of men.

Today the women of Iran are rising up against this fanatical privilege. From this forum, which brings together progressive forces from around the world, I want to pay tribute to their courage. And honour their cry for freedom, which no tyrant will ever be able to drown in blood.

You are not alone. For them, today, more than ever, socialism is freedom.

The great revolution of our time is the feminist revolution. And an organisation like the Socialist International, which has the supreme value of equality engraved on fire, must be a driving force when it comes to promoting this transcendental process.

For this, it is crucial to act on two fronts. On the one hand, I want to remember that this is also the cause of men. Support and applause are no longer enough. Women have been building their rights for a long time and it is time for men to start tearing down our privileges. So that men and women can act in real equality of conditions. It is something that we all have to do together, shoulder to shoulder. Because feminism means justice and it concerns us all.

We must fiercely combat the attempts to regress the rights of women that are taking place in different parts of the world. Let's say it out loud: not one step back. Winning this battle requires more women, many more, in positions of responsibility. Today only a quarter of the seats in all parliaments are held by women and here in my own home country, much remains to be done. My commitment to parity is as firm as the steps we are going to take so that women occupy the place that, by right, corresponds to them.

For this I count on you, general secretary. Dear Benedicta Lasi, you are already a symbol of a new time in which we are going to work hand in hand to break down barriers and tear down glass ceilings. It is an honour that the Socialist International has an African woman as general secretary.

Third, it is time for a fair economy to replace the neoliberal model that has prevailed in recent decades. There is no manifest destiny that condemns a country to eternal poverty. There is no reason for poverty to be rooted for eternity in entire regions of Africa, Asia or America. Accepting poverty as something inevitable makes us complicit in neglect. As a socialist, I refuse to believe that nothing can be done and that humanity, with all its knowledge and development, is not capable of correcting such lacerating imbalances. The destiny of a human being at birth cannot be conditioned by the tyranny of chance. A girl in the Sahel should not be condemned for being born there. A child growing up in Central America should not have his dreams mutilated by violence in the streets or drug trafficking networks.

We are socialists because we do not accept the dictatorship of chance and because we believe in the value of politics to combat social injustice. To combat this injustice, we fight those who hide their wealth in tax havens. We tell them that the rights – the health of our loved ones, the education of our sons and daughters, the rights of workers and the well-being of our elders – are rights that demand dignity and will never be commodities to be traded. The economy must be at the service of the people and the planet, not the other way around. More than 350 million children live today in extreme poverty: on less than two dollars a day. 44 million suffer from severe malnutrition in a world that wastes a billion tons of food a year, almost 3 million tons a day. Solving this tragedy would cost just 0.3% of the world's GDP in 2021; a quarter of what multinationals evade.

So, there is an alternative. It is a matter of values and decision.

The path to equality is that of fair forms of redistribution. In 2019, multinational corporations transferred 969 billion dollars of profits to tax havens. That means that countries collected, on average, 10% less in corporate tax than they should have. Stopping this bleeding of resources requires multilateral action. This was demonstrated when, in 2021, 136 countries approved implementing a minimum of 15% in corporate tax from

2023. A first step that must be followed by many others. With measures that guarantee a global trade based on fair and clearly defined rules. With ways to finance developing countries that contribute to it in a real way, instead of becoming heavy mortgages on their future.

Fourth, the Socialist International must have a leading voice in the commitment to decent work and labour rights. It is essential to remember where we come from to know where we are going: the fight for decent work was the embryo from which the Socialist International was born. In Spain, thanks to the labour reform approved by my government, we have made progress like never before in terms of stability and dignity at work. We have placed dialogue and collective bargaining at the centre of labour relations. I ask the CEOE (the Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales) to sit down with the unions to reach now a salary agreement that gives security to workers.

Let us work in three directions: first, in promoting the adoption of trade clauses that require compliance with minimum universal labour standards; second, in strengthening the work of multilateral institutions within the United Nations in defence of labour rights and fair trade; and, third, in guaranteeing the extension of these rights to the jobs generated by the technological and digital revolution.

Comrades, our idea of labour dignity was born as part of the industrial revolution. The technological revolution is now a great opportunity to deepen labour rights. We have a duty to take advantage of this great technological leap and democratise its benefits globally. The division of labour cannot consolidate a world at different speeds, with countries that are left out of a transformation that must imply, above all, more and better jobs globally.

Fifth, we are witnessing a crucial historical moment in the defence of democracy and civil rights. In the last decade, the number of countries with recognisable democratic regimes has been reduced by 20%. And the number of citizens with full rights has fallen by half. It is in this field that, with full awareness, we must make use of the extraordinary political and intellectual legacy that our organisation treasures. Women and men who, with their words, thoughts and actions, inspire us to support the cause of freedom and dignity in the face of tyranny and autocracy.

We are aware that democracy requires certain material conditions that are also those of human dignity. To have a strong democracy, we need a powerful citizenship, and that means citizens freed from poverty and ignorance, protected from the misfortunes of life. Freedom can never be the price to pay for well-being, because without freedom there is no well-being. Ideas change the world, for better and worse. Ideas that are not abstractions, but rather completely condition every aspect of the life of millions of people.

Let's make the Socialist International a great ideological platform that contributes to improving and making democracy grow on the five continents. Because the old principles of freedom, equality and fraternity that inspired socialist humanism are still valid today. Because we are the guarantors of achievements that, unfortunately, are not irreversible: democracy has to be defended day by day.

Dear friends, we are custodians of a unique legacy. No ideology in history has improved the material and spiritual conditions of their societies as much as democratic socialism. We

don't feel better than anyone else for being social democrats, but social democracy makes a better world. We are proud to look back and recognise ourselves in a tradition that has been able to successfully repel the offensives of neoliberalism and reactionary nationalism. Ideologies that respond to their recent failures by returning to a past full of isolation, lack of solidarity and conflict between nations. But today, we are not here to recreate past achievements or the progress of the social democratic ideal, accredited by the response to the pandemic or the consequences of the war in Ukraine. We are here to forge the socialism that comes from hope and not from pessimism. From ambition and not from conformism. From illusion and not from resentment. We are here, as social democrats, to respond to the great challenges of our time, with the climate emergency as a top priority. To respond with accurate diagnoses and concrete proposals. And to do it with proposals that assume the plurality of an organisation like ours: strong and representative; that assumes the diversity and particularities of each region that make it up. Proposals with which to create wealth and opportunities in every corner of the planet, in a sustainable and less unequal way. Proposals to renew the generational pact with young people, to whom I want to address my last words.

The Italian writer Claudio Magris says that utopia means not surrendering to things as they are and fighting for things as they should be. To every young person, I call on you to fight for that desire: for things as they should be in a world full of uncertainties.

There are those who insist on calling you the 'snowflake generation' and question your capacity for sacrifice. They seem unaware of your true strength. Your entire life has been marked by the economic crisis, a devastating pandemic and, now, by the shadow of war. For this reason, more than a generation of snowflakes, you are the generation of hope. It will be you who will put an end to hunger and poverty. You will stop the climate emergency. You will find a cure for terrible diseases. And you will take humanity to new frontiers.

Do not let anyone tell you that your destiny is to live worse than your parents, because it is not true. In your hands lies the hope of doing what gave meaning to democratic socialism from the day it was born and to which I want to call you today in Madrid: make a better world.

Thank you very much.



Progressive Person of the Year

Unexpectedly for most Europeans, the year 2022 became overshadowed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The war has not only devastated Ukraine but also affected every country in Europe and many others in the rest of the world.

In one way or another, nearly one third of the Ukrainian population became displaced in 2022, and millions decided to flee to Poland, the largest EU member state sharing a border with Ukraine. It is not an exaggeration to say that the shock of the war electrified Poland, and the whole country came to have just one priority – to provide military as well as humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, almost without limit. However, the work of local actors – municipal leaders and volunteers – is often hindered not only by the shortage of financial resources but also by disinformation on migration – a topic FEPS has studied in various contexts in recent years.

Poland is a country under the Article 7 procedure of the EU for violations of the rule of law, and it is often mentioned as the country that could drift away from the EU. This does not mean, however, that Polish people are cynical about or indifferent to our shared EU values. Moreover, we have reason to believe that the Polish left will be part of the great project to replace Poland's current populist-nationalist government. Without doubt, the left should certainly capitalise on its performance during the war effort and the refugee crisis.

In the first edition of the Progressive Yearbook, we introduced the tradition of choosing a Progressive Person of the Year in order to focus the limelight on a hardworking progressive who can show the way for others. The Progressive Person of the Year can be a political leader, an academic, or an activist – but it must be someone who has delivered an outstanding achievement (in politics, publication or otherwise) and who can be of inspiration to our readers. This person must also be someone who can motivate progressives, young and old, to renew and reinforce their commitment to our common cause.

This year we have chosen Grzegorz Pietruczuk, Mayor of Bielany in Poland, as our FEPS Progressive Person of the Year. Grzegorz is a champion of local political leadership and humanitarian assistance. He has been at the forefront of supporting refugees (mainly women and children) from Ukraine, ensuring that those who arrive feel the solidarity of fellow Europeans and keep their faith in the possibility of a better life, in the community of European nations.

In choosing Grzegorz, FEPS wants to highlight not just an outstanding example of behaviour within Poland but also an example that should serve as a model when we want to find the meaning of selfless support to those escaping the tragic conditions created by Vladimir Putin's cruel and unprovoked war. Our political family badly needs the examples of

composure, solidarity and sacrifice that Grzegorz embodies, far away from the high offices of Brussels.

Mayor Grzegorz Pietruczuk kindly welcomed the FEPS delegation in Warsaw and showed us his work in support of Ukrainian refugees. Our readers can learn about his experience and perspective in the interview that follows.



LÁSZLÓ ANDOR
interviews GRZEGORZ PIETRUCZUK

“Please, do not leave Ukraine and Ukrainians on their own”

László Andor: *Let’s go back to 24 February 2022. What were your first thoughts that morning?*

Grzegorz Pietruczuk: My first reaction was disbelief. I couldn’t imagine that in the 21st century there could be a war happening in the country we share a border with. All we had known about war until then was from books or from the stories that had been told to us by our grandparents or war veterans. But then, very quickly, this instinctive reaction was overpowered by other thoughts on whether we, ourselves, had been prepared in the months leading up to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. We had spent time devising very different crisis scenarios. We had had several drills – with some that involved testing defence and civil defence capacities. But we had perceived these as training exercises, and as training exercises only. So that morning, 24 February, I made a quick summary of what we had accomplished through these drills and what remained our weak points. On the way to work, I organised an emergency meeting with my closest co-workers. And within just a few minutes of arriving at the town hall, we set up an Emergency Council – which, by the way, has kept meeting ever since. We spent the first few hours evaluating our preparedness. We then rolled up our sleeves, driven by the one single thought of what we could do to help people. At first, it was of course about providing aid to those in Ukraine. But we very soon started asking ourselves how we could get ready for those who might seek refuge in Poland. At that point we didn’t really consider how many would arrive – we just expected that they would. We couldn’t possibly anticipate what would happen later, nor predict the vast number of refugees.

LA: *The media reported that Bielany was the first district in Warsaw, and possibly the first in the country, to pick up the challenge and start organising for the welcome of Ukrainians. How did you manage, given that you said that any scenarios considered before were purely hypothetical?*

GP: Life has taught me that you must be prepared for very different scenarios, even if they seem implausible. Even if personally you believe they are surreal, there always has to be an emergency plan in the back of your head. So, once we had called the Emergency Council, we decided to start from what we believed would be needed instantly – namely funds to help Ukraine and the Ukrainians. Within just a couple of hours, we had contacted UNICEF Poland, which agreed to take patronage over a concert that we proposed organising. I think the event took place within something like 30 hours after the news of the invasion broke. Hundreds of inhabitants of Bielany passed by and gave a donation, leaving us with a substantial sum of money. We also made a spontaneous decision to start fundraising via Facebook.

And in the midst of all this, it became apparent that this was to be a full-scale, long-lasting war. The pictures that we were receiving from Ukraine were terrifying. It wasn't just a threat, it was real. It was a military conflict, which would have grave consequences. Already at the concert, our Bielany inhabitants started bringing some essential items to donate to refugees. We felt we needed to act, and this was what a group of active citizens called 'Pomocne Bielany' (Helpful Bielany) took care of, with help from several District Council members, one of whom was Monika Szatkowska. This group had been connecting over 1,000 people, and it brought them, and others, together to continue collecting clothes, food, anything really. That is how the process began, although we believed we had to do more. We needed rooms, and we needed them nearby. We decided to adjust spaces inside the town hall. We started with the garage, which we emptied of its 60 cars and transformed into a pop-up workplace for hundreds of volunteers. It served that function for over six months.

There were around 600 people, who engaged in what was a profound effort. The pop-up workplace was where donations would arrive. They would come from individuals in Poland, but also from abroad – from Portugal, the United States, Malta, the Scandinavian countries, Ireland... In fact, it is easier to name the countries from which we did not receive anything, because the list of those countries from which we got so much is incredibly long. And this is how we also became a kind of a hub, where packages would be received and then repacked and sent on to their recipients. We were welcoming some really large transport lorries, with very, very diverse loads. Evidently, there were many needs.

So, the volunteers would repackage the parcels, and they were supported by members of the city guards and firefighters. Their work would continue round the clock because we needed to deal with the massive donations, and sometimes with enormous lorries arriving all at once. But more importantly, because the first trains with the refugees started arriving.

Now, that was an entirely new kind of experience for us. And I will never forget the pictures of how these people looked, and how the situation was at the railway stations. The memories that I have from those days are comparable to the pictures of the second world war that one sees in history books. And again, we took a very quick decision to do more. These people had no place to go, no place to sleep and nothing to eat. And we felt that it was our responsibility to provide them with shelter. So we took two sports halls and transformed them into dormitories. It took us a day or so to get them ready. We succeeded

thanks to an enormous effort from the many individuals that kept helping. People really were giving and doing whatever they could. And then there was also a third dormitory established by the Catholic 'Good Place'. This was where over 100 families could move in quickly.

Soon afterwards, we developed a new operational model. And here, I want to underline that this model was possible thanks to the massive contribution from our young people, especially high school students. They were so incredibly committed and they kept working non-stop, 24 hours per day, not going home from school but sleeping there too.

I myself moved to the town hall, to be on the spot, to be continuously available, to work as much as I could and to be closer to everyone and everything. I slept just a few hours a day because there was always so much to do. The transport with the refugees also kept arriving in the middle of the night, at one or two o'clock in the morning; the donations needed repackaging; and the district issues were there too, of course. So, I would grab some sleep probably between 11 o'clock and whenever the buses with the refugees arrived.

We needed to take care of those people. And they were arriving in very different shape. Those from the first wave were in much better shape, physically and psychologically. Some of them managed to bring some personal belongings with them and some documents. In the second wave, the refugees were already from the areas directly affected by the war. And a large percentage of them found shelter in our district. They were from areas such as Kharkiv. And they told us terrible stories. And later, several of them also decided to testify and to state on record what had happened. They were extremely traumatised. Especially children who had been forced out of their homes by the Russian Army. Even today, recent surveys show that about 40% of the Ukrainian children currently residing in Poland are suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Consequently, our volunteers and our young people have all been working to help those children feel a sense of safety. The moment the transport with the refugees arrived, people would be offered clean clothes, children would be changed and offered the possibility to shower or take a bath – if they were in a condition that would allow them to do so. They were offered meals. All of them were incredibly exhausted, as they were fleeing and had been on the move for several days. Some of them reached the Polish border by foot, as that was the only way they could hope to escape. They were suffering from incredible cold, as it was February and March, which are usually still very cold months. Many had terrible frostbite and thus wounds. So we needed to provide additional medical points to help those we could, and also to provide transfers to hospital for those who needed them. That meant we had to mobilise more doctors, medical personnel and other members of care services.

Let me come back to the young people who engaged as volunteers because for them this was a tremendous effort to bear and very intense work. They were 16, 17 and 18 years old. And they were not only helping but soon took over bigger responsibilities of organising help themselves. What is more, they did so in an incredibly professional manner. This was a very formative experience for them, and a life lesson of what civic society is about and what citizenship means. They saw firsthand that the world could turn into turmoil at any

time really, that things we take for granted may be gone in a mere moment. And the only way to persevere is through common action that is based on solidarity and responsibility for one another.

LA: *Let's speak further of the people whom you met and helped. Are there any particular personal stories you would like to share?*

GP: There are so many pieces that make this story... But there's one that I would like to share here. It concerns the young people in my district, whom I have already mentioned. Among the high schools in my district, there is one named after Domejko, which is very strong in teaching mathematics and physics. It is one of the best in the country. Its students organised a reception centre in the school, transforming the sports hall into a dormitory. Step by step, the whole school became a refugee centre, and within a couple of days, these young people themselves put in place a system to manage arrivals, relocations etc. They developed software to assist them, thanks to which they were able to collect addresses for relocation and check the safety criteria of these places. This was more sophisticated than what many cities came up with. I have been there many times, and it was humbling to observe them. They were so incredibly hard-working, intelligent, empathetic, open and always there to offer a helping hand, an ear and a shoulder to the refugees. At a certain point, their parents arrived at the town hall. I had very little time for any meetings back then, but I was told this was an emergency. So, I received them. They entered and said "Mr Mayor, you have to come and talk to our children now". I was not sure I understood them properly, so asked what they wanted me to talk to their children about. These were young people of 16, 17 or 18 years old, already with voting rights themselves. Their parents replied that these young people had stopped listening to their parents and had told them not to disturb them while they were helping refugees. The young people had also said that when the crisis was over, they would resume their education – which they had temporarily laid aside. For these young people, the most important thing was what they were able to do at that very moment. I agreed to go to their school and meet these young people. But before I left, I told the parents that they should be proud to see what kind of incredible, responsible and engaged citizens their offspring were becoming. As promised, I went and talked to these young people, who assured me that they would work hard to pass their end-of-year and final high school exams. And they did – incredibly well. Many were able to choose whichever further course of study they wanted to pursue, and others went abroad. But all in all, they also showed how much of an awakening the situation was for them. This taught me something too. There are so many complaints about how apathetic this new generation is – that they do not care and do not engage – but that simply is not true. The heroism, creativity and passionate engagement I have seen in my district are the best proof of that.

LA: *You spoke about the two waves and how quickly you needed to get ready. But did you realise that there would be so many people?*

GP: I don't believe that anyone in Poland was prepared for such a huge number of refugees. Without the support and engagement of individual citizens, we would never

have been able to welcome them. In my district, Bielany, I have people who have very much been focused on building a community that would be strong thanks to the mutual relations between inhabitants – a community that would forge a sense of civic duty among one another. And this is very important because, in the contemporary world, we work so intensely and we live so intensely that often there is a lack of space and of time for personal relations, or even for neighbourly relations. People who have lived next to each other for years remain strangers to one another. So, we have actually been working for many years to make sure that people not only exist alongside each other, but that they feel they belong together, that they engage with one another and find ways to bond. This can be achieved through small steps, through small things. And this all led to a situation last February, in which hundreds of inhabitants declared readiness to open their houses and receive Ukrainians into their households. This was a grand gesture, and we then followed up on it. The social care centres have been working tirelessly, including on checking the apartments that have been made available. They also took charge of establishing connections between Polish families and the Ukrainian families who were directed to them.

And this was really an immense wave of incredible, positive energy. I have never seen anything like it in my life. The kindness and generosity were in such contrast to the backdrop of all the terrible things that were happening. And it was so genuine, so humane, so natural. There was no calculation behind it, no speculating. It was clear that from helping people in need, one couldn't possibly draw any personal benefits. And it was important to work hard to help those people, who were in shock, who had just lost everything and couldn't stop thinking about their normal lives, their homes and the jobs they used to have. All those things that had been taken away from them.

Then we also had people from places like Mariupol and Kramatorsk. And all of them had their stories. We created a sort of map where our friends, our brothers and sisters from Ukraine had come from. And we put pins on the map of Ukraine and those pins covered the whole country. But the biggest waves were from eastern Ukraine, with refugees coming from very small villages and towns. It was heartbreaking to see – especially the elderly people who had lived a very calm life, just from one day to the next, somewhere in the countryside. They included Russian-speaking people, who also had been displaced and pushed out. They came to seek refuge, and they were sitting in these large dormitory rooms of ours, on their beds, unable to move. They were in a state of absolute apathy and depression. They wouldn't eat. They wouldn't speak. They were unable to function. Because only a week ago, they had still been leading a normal life back on a farm somewhere, and now they were in a foreign country. Yes, our district may be very beautiful – but it is unlikely that in any other conditions they would have taken a journey to Warsaw or to Poland. And instead, they were here, unable to understand what had happened and why; why people whom they considered friendly, even brothers – the Russians – could treat Ukrainians in such a manner. What they saw was brutal, and it is only now perhaps that we realise the scale of their terror – now that we see the reports from the territories liberated by the Ukrainian army. But even so, it is still hard for us to grasp the barbaric things that have happened.

LA: *Would you say that different waves had different destinations in mind?*

GP: There were groups of refugees who would come to us and say that Poland was a transit country. When asked where they would like to go, their answer would be “as far away as possible from Russia and from Putin”. This is how they chose Spain and Portugal, and we tried to ensure that they had these relocation possibilities. In this particular context, I would wholeheartedly like to thank all countries of the European Union for their support and help because their cooperation in giving refugees an opportunity to relocate was incredibly important for us.

Those refugees who were willing to flee a long distance warned us that we should not feel safe and that we should get ready to seek refuge soon as well. They said: “when the Russians are done with us in Ukraine, they will come to get you”. The refugees who asked to be placed as far away as possible were really afraid that Putin’s army would follow them and could get them beyond the Ukrainian borders. Because let’s not forget that within the first weeks of the invasion, the Russian army conquered many places and was quickly moving forwards in the direction of Kyiv and central Ukraine. And this kind of awareness, this kind of feeling of anxiety is still present in Poland, among the Polish. We had never trusted the Russians, and we had never believed Putin. But these warnings, which Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe had been giving at the EU level, were ignored and seen as simple Russophobia. In 2022, the expectations became a true scenario. This is an incredible tragedy for the entire continent. But for our region, it’s of course being felt even more intensely. We do not know how this is all going to end. It is a war that the Ukrainian nation is very bravely fighting in defence of the country, and during war different things happen and it can end in many different ways.

But while some asked to be relocated to as far away as possible, others had reasons to stay closer to home. Many had their family members somewhere in Central, Eastern Europe or Western Europe and wanted to be able to go and stay with them. So, for some, Poland was indeed a stopover, while for those who knew someone here, it was their destination.

But we, as a district or as the city of Warsaw, were not able to receive such an incredibly large group of refugees. We couldn’t provide the help that was needed, as there were hundreds and thousands of people arriving, even just in Bielany. We could not assist or offer a more permanent shelter to all of them, so we needed relocation somewhere else in Poland. This was another thing we needed to organise, first only using our direct personal contacts with other town halls, mayors and alderpersons across the country. There were no legal provisions, so we had to improvise – and thanks to the solidarity and prompt reactions it worked. Imagine, 70-80% of all the refugees reaching Poland’s borders came to Warsaw, which quickly turned into a hub and a relocation centre.

We therefore had another responsibility, which was to make sure that at every reception point, every destination was checked and secure. There were criteria, and we were very firmly committed to them, to prevent any further dramatic situations. We never sent refugees to any place that had not been verified, that was under any suspicion of any kind – this would have been inadmissible.

That said, there were also many people, who arrived in a shape that would not allow them to go any further. They thought Warsaw could provide them with stability and safety, and they wanted to stay. And we also needed to find a way to accommodate them.

To illustrate the current numbers, in December 2022, I have over 1,200 Ukrainian children in nurseries and schools in my district. During the absolute peak, we had 1,500 children. For a while, we had 1,000. Now, we are seeing trends of growth, and we expect them to continue, depending partly on the temperatures in January and February. Winter in Ukraine can be very tough and very cold. But now we feel prepared. We have reception places, stores with essential supplies, and effective relocation mechanisms. We are in a position to send cargos to Ukraine, knowing how dire the situation is there.

LA: *When we were sitting down for this interview you said you were loading a lorry last night.*

GP: Yes, indeed. We loaded a lorry with donations, and these parcels need to reach families in Stanislawow. The lorry had to leave at midnight to avoid the traffic. So we had a meeting of the District Council until about 9pm. After that, I went to work with some councillors and town hall colleagues. In Ukraine, there is a shortage of everything. We continue collecting various goods, then repacking them – just like at the beginning of the crisis – and sending them off. The donations come from individuals, but also from entrepreneurs who have their companies in my district. As the town hall, we are also involved in mobilising resources. Everyone helps as much as they can. More transport will set off soon thanks to our common endeavour. This time, it will be a convoy with a few hundred packages for Ukrainian children, which needs to reach them before Christmas. A little joy – especially for those who have been made orphans or half-orphans by this military conflict. In the end, this is about small gestures. It is about making sure that those kids, who have been so heavily impacted by the tragedy of war, have another kind of experience, at least this Christmas season.

In fact, we have never stopped and keep on working as we did in spring. The aid is now more directed to Ukraine. We know that there is a shortage of everything – of electricity generators; of pocket lights; of warm clothes; of food, especially food you can conserve. Remembering this is still very important, and we therefore keep on loading these lorries here in Warsaw.

We have not forgotten about those who arrived here and remain in a precarious situation, either. Here in Bielany, we take care of ‘our’ kids from an orphanage in Ustka. I say ‘our’, as we really see them as our kids – who came here, being moved from orphanages around Kyiv. There are a couple of hundred children who are very small, mostly one or two years old. It is a kind of a miracle that they were not kidnapped by the Russian army, as were many others. It is shocking to realise this, and to see the pictures in the media from the liberated territories in Ukraine, where Russians prepared a torture chamber for children. I cannot comprehend that anything of that kind can be happening, while the world is watching. I cannot understand what kind of a person would do such things. But then, I recall what happened in Bucha. And I remember that

there are many, many places that were drenched in Ukrainian blood. The horror of it makes me feel responsible for each and every child that is here, in search of safety. We promised the Ukrainian people that we would help and support them, and that those children would be safe and comforted. Our solutions are temporary, of course, as there can be no adoption procedures while the war is ongoing. But we will do what we can to provide help, to love and to protect.

LA: *Let us come back to the numbers again. When we visited you with the FEPS Ones to Watch Programme, there were 25,000 refugees in Bielany.*

GP: Back then, at the end of March 2022, we were hosting about 25,000 refugees (the population of the district itself is around 136,000 inhabitants). That was indeed a peak. We also ran out of space and could not, as we say in Polish, squeeze everyone in anymore. Whatever we could put together, every private apartment available, every sports hotel, every bourse, every extra bed in schools or in rest homes – everything was occupied. And the difficulty was, of course, that the refugees needed not only shelter but aid, clothes, food... It was incredibly intense.

I remember the moment when one of the families arrived here. They have remained in Bielany, and we continue to look after them. Back then, when they reached us, there were five of them – a mother and four children. The oldest is 15 years old now. He was holding his little brother and his little sister in his arms. And he was just incredibly exhausted. They came with absolutely nothing. And ever since then, they have been trying to rebuild their lives. Like the other families here, they will soon be able to move into the district apartments which we have managed to provide. The children go to school, but we try to do more for them, and for others too. We therefore try to find ways for them to do extracurricular activities as well, so that they can grow and regain what can be restored from their childhoods. Many of the children need contact with their peers, but they also need further support to persevere through trauma – and that is why at the town hall we also now employ Ukrainian psychologists who are specialised in helping children and young people.

LA: *Do you think that Polish people's attitudes towards Ukrainians have changed over these recent months? The two countries share centuries of common, complicated history and before the war began there had been many Ukrainians living and working in Poland...*

GP: You can certainly see a change, and sadly I have to admit it is a negative one. The shift has been caused by a couple of factors. The first one results from the impact of the incredible Russian propaganda. This is what the Russians neglected in the first month of the war, but has now intensified. You can see massive activity on the internet – it is a channel for many aggressive Russian messages. Personally, I am totally shocked by what you can find there, and by the fact that some Polish parties, like the Konfederacja Polska (Polish Confederation), publicise these messages and openly admit a pro-Russian attitude. I do not understand why we tolerate these parties' despicable activities – it is an absolute scandal. There should be no space in a democratic country for their lies and what they dare to claim about 'the real situation in Ukraine'.

The second factor is the financial and economic side of the refugee crisis, which the Polish have started experiencing more and more. People feel that their living conditions have deteriorated, that it is harder than it was only a year ago and that the prospects are gloomy. Inflation is already 17%. And with our healthcare and social security systems already being challenged before the refugee crisis, and then with further pressure caused by Covid-19, the Polish feel that they are lacking basic protection and care. There are massive problems across the welfare system. Our answer in Bielany is to continue providing public goods and services to all, Polish and Ukrainians, and it works here – but in times of shortage, many people elsewhere would see the solution as being to shift the focus and take care of Poles first.

And then another issue is exhaustion. Not everybody feels it, but there are a good number of people who feel drained by helping others. Yet this is where we need to stand together and keep on going. Here in Bielany, there were several Ukrainian families before the war. They had simply been part of our local community. And consequently, when the refugees started arriving, these families rolled up their sleeves and have been standing arm-in-arm with us ever since. They have been incredibly supportive and they continue to be engaged in the situation today.

Let us also not forget that according to official data from the Institute for Labour, there are now 65,000 refugees in Warsaw alone, who are fully employed and who have regular work contracts. They adhere to our system, they pay taxes and they are employed in different sorts of services. Many of them stepped into the job vacancies that had existed on the labour market before the refugee crisis – for example in domestic work and elderly care. I employ Ukrainian refugees in my Bielany town hall as well, of course. We have seven of them working here, and there are many others working in the different town hall agencies across the district. These people are truly hardworking, competent and lovely work colleagues.

But while some of these refugees are now settled here, many miss their country, and there are some who want to return to Ukraine. Those who can, travel back and forth, holding onto hope that the future will be kinder. Yet they know that they cannot plan seriously for anything at the moment. That is why they declare they would rather stay with us here in Poland. They believe that even if the situation changes, even if there is a ceasefire, the path to peace will be long. What is more, many Ukrainians I speak to say that a ceasefire will be used by the Russians to re-arm, to regroup and to buy time to prepare a final, terminal – one can say – blast. So, any temporary solution that may come will be met with disbelief, and this needs to be taken into consideration.

LA: *We have talked at length about what you have been doing on the local level. What about the national level? What did the government of Poland do to help?*

GP: I'm a left-wing person. And I am in opposition to the current government. But I have to say I appreciate what happened. I have already said that there were neither laws nor rules about how to organise the country in the face of this kind of situation. In other words, there were no guidelines for the government to follow. Consequently, most of the

activities at the beginning of the refugee flows took place outside what would be legally prescribed. This is yet further proof of how unexpected the war and the influx of so many refugees were.

The situation was dire, and help had to be organised instantly. So, we mobilised as self-government. The financial assistance we received in my district from the national government came on the 46th day of the conflict. Before that, we had relied entirely on ourselves. And more importantly, we managed to do this by ourselves too. But when funds eventually came, that made it a little easier.

Then a certain division of tasks came about. The government focused on providing military support for Ukraine, which was key to that country's capacity to fight. This was not only our perception, but also that of the Ukrainian army leaders, who acknowledged that they would have had to surrender and see their country conquered by Russians if it was not for the external aid – from countries such as Poland. And consequently, our self-government took responsibility to help Ukrainians here and abroad.

All in all, I really can only appreciate our cooperation with the government. Whichever issue I had and then signalled to the Voivoda (leader of the region) – like a shortage of beds or bedsheets, which we were always running out of far too quickly – I received backing. Often it came late, or fairly late, but it was there. I cannot complain that it was too small, or too whatever, because it was enough to ensure that kids could remain in the kindergartens and schools, that we could purchase additional food for those in need and cover some other costs. Of course, what we got was not even close to covering the overall costs, but it still offered relief.

But if you are speaking to me as a representative of the self-government, I have always acted according to the rules, as the saying in Polish goes: 'if you can count, count on yourself'. That is why we were not looking for anyone to help us in our actions or for anyone to blame. We were determined to manage, and any additional assistance would be welcome, not expected. I am a mayor, and as mayors, presidents, aldermen and alderwomen, we have been entrusted with a responsibility that we must uphold, not transfer. Self-governments need to be self-sufficient and resilient in such moments of crisis. We are part of the Polish state, and we have to act accordingly. That is why I repeat that the government should continue to do what it has been doing, namely providing military assistance to Ukraine. That is incredibly important. There needs to be an understanding that we must play a part in helping Ukraine and be part of the success of Ukraine, seeing it liberate itself from the Russian army.

LA: *And what about the European Union? Was it present? What should have been done differently?*

GP: I will speak very politically incorrectly, but the EU should unblock the resilience and recovery funds. We are waiting for these funds on the local level, too – but overall, there is an enormous need for them in Poland. Now, economically speaking, we are still this kind of locomotive that has been put in motion, and that continues pushing forward. But it is starting to break. And once this train stops, it will be incredibly difficult to put it in motion again.

Since the war began, international cooperation has intensified and we have been receiving a huge amount of support directly from the different countries in the European Union. It has come on the bilateral level, as I think the European Union and Brussels were also taken by surprise at the scale of what happened, by the number of people who suddenly entered the EU, and by the short time in which it happened. So, coming back to the question of cooperation, it was rather that different cities, provinces and regions contacted us, which has all been proof that European solidarity does exist. And this is something that is heart-lifting.

I want to thank everybody again for the fact that I have been able to count on so many among you. There has been material help, but also other kinds of support – trying to see with us how to deal with the situation further, for example. My counterparts in self-government in the different member states of the European Union shared their experiences with us on how to welcome refugees and to help them. To give an example, I recently welcomed a delegation from Germany, and they shared with me two ideas which I'm definitely going to try and implement in my district. The first is to have an Integration Council. This may be a very empowering body, especially as in my district, we have quite a lot of people who are not Polish by origin. This Integration Council could be an advisory body. It could help us consider and choose the best solutions to given problems, and it could let us work jointly towards improving the lives of everyone in the whole community.

LA: *Today, the media announced the Polish government's decision to block the next aid package for Ukraine. What are the reasons for this decision?*

GP: This is a game that I do not understand at all and I would prefer not to understand. I cannot imagine why or how the Polish government would block any aid, or any resources for Ukraine. The Polish task is to help Ukraine, so that it can defend itself, become independent, be a functioning state, and, in a longer-term perspective, become an EU and NATO member state. Vetoing any aid package is therefore simply absurd. I hope that this is a misunderstanding and that within the next couple of hours, this issue will be resolved.

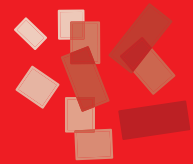
I am also astonished that the government would proclaim such a direction for Polish foreign politics, when there are so many politicians also on the right-wing, within their own camp, who are very much engaged in helping Ukraine. This government's readiness to resort to blackmail similar to that of Viktor Orbán's corrosive veto, and this government's readiness to put Poland on a comparable level to that of Hungary's new law, is something I cannot accept.

LA: *And finally, is there any message that you would like to give the readers of the Progressive Yearbook?*

GP: This war will likely last a very long time. Of course, I hope not, but it seems that we must brace ourselves for the likelihood that it will. So, let me share one more telling story of a family who reached Bielany on one of those long, cold March nights. I was on duty and I of course met them, and we managed to secure their stay here – for a mother, two children and a grandmother. We tried to provide shelter and aid, and then step by step help

them to anchor here. It turned out that the youngest child (aged 3) had been suffering from autism, which made the already hard experiences even more challenging for him. He had a lot of trouble adapting to the new reality, as autism was affecting his cognitive and developmental capabilities. It was tough. Very tough. Thanks to the help of my fiancée, we managed after many, many, many attempts to enable this child's father to cross the border and come to visit for a very short time. And this boy, after 7-8 months of living in anxiety, finally saw his dad. After this visit, everything changed. Today, the boy is in a totally different condition. He can start anew and try to live a life here. He is returning to a developmental path that any other child his age, who is not affected by autism and war, would have – with a normal house, food, and a sense of safety. This shows how relevant it is to keep on taking care, and to keep on looking after the refugees. They may have reached Poland, and they may be safe and secure, but this is not by default a passport to a new life for them. This story shows what kind of a heavy burden these people are carrying, especially children, and that it will take years and much, much effort to bounce back. The dad of the child I just spoke about had to go back to Ukraine, where he is a driver of humanitarian aid convoys now. We hope that we will be able to ensure him a pass again soon. Because his visit was a bright sparkle in these dark days. And there are many families, each with a different story, who need to be recomposed and offered a future – here and hopefully one day also in Ukraine.

And this is my appeal to the European politicians: please, do not leave Ukraine and Ukrainians on their own.



BIG ISSUES



HELEN BARNARD

The cost-of-living crisis and poverty in Europe

The cost-of-living crisis is driving up hardship and financial insecurity across Europe, but it is not affecting all countries or groups in the same way. Overall, countries and groups who entered the crisis facing the greatest risk of poverty have been the worst affected, but differences in energy policies have also driven differential impacts in less predictable ways. Similarly, there is a considerable commonality in the ways that national governments have chosen to support variations in the level of resources and in the priority given to different types of help. This article also explores the immediate and long-term consequences of the increasing hardship created by the cost-of-living crisis and the prospects for some positive impacts through accelerating action on climate change.

Across the whole of Europe, the cost-of-living crisis is pulling more people into poverty, deepening hardship for those who were already struggling and increasing financial precariousness for some on middle incomes who were previously secure.

However, these trends are not playing out in the same way in each country, and they are shaped by three main factors. First, the pre-existing levels and depth of poverty and the strength or otherwise of the protections in place before the current crisis. Second, differences in energy supplies, use and energy efficiency. Third, variations in the response of governments and the level and type of support they are offering households and businesses.

Soaring inflation is at the heart of the crisis, with its rate in the euro area jumping from 2.5% in 2021 to 10% in 2022.¹ It was already climbing even before Russia invaded Ukraine, caused by the post-pandemic opening up of economies and pressure on global supply chains. However, it was turbocharged by the conflict in Ukraine and the sudden restrictions on energy supplies, causing prices to shoot up. The impacts have not only been seen in energy bills, they have also fed into sharp rises in other costs, especially food. On average,

¹ Eurofound (2022) "The cost-of-living crisis and energy poverty in the EU: Social impact and policy responses". Background paper, Eurofound, Dublin.

across Europe, energy costs rose by 42% and food by 11.1%.² Wider pressures have followed, including on public services. In October of this year, the mayors of the Eurocities network wrote to leaders warning that “skyrocketing energy prices, and inflationary pressure is now putting the provision of public services at risk”.³

However, the impacts of these costs vary significantly between different countries. First, because the extent to which higher energy costs have driven rises in the cost of living has diverged sharply. The IMF calculates⁴ that energy bills have raised the cost of living by less than 5% in certain countries including France, Spain, Finland, Sweden and Croatia. By contrast, energy has driven up the cost of living by more than 10% in the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic and the UK.

Both sources of energy and energy efficiency matter, as well as the speed and effectiveness of responses to the current crisis. The UK has fared particularly poorly, seeing the biggest direct cut to households’ spending power in Western Europe. This is in part due to greater reliance on gas for its heating and slower action to control prices. However, it is also suffering from poor home energy efficiency due to its old housing stock and the scaling back of interventions to improve it over the decade leading up to the crisis. Other countries have reaped the benefits of better approaches.⁵ For example, Germany’s long-term programme to improve energy efficiency through grants, loans and advice, and Finland’s use of tax incentives to shift away from oil heating. Overall, though, Europe as a whole is suffering more because it failed to move faster on energy efficiency. Fixing this is vital from the perspective of climate change, but has been given even greater urgency by the crisis in Ukraine: buildings are responsible for a third of Europe’s greenhouse gas emissions, but three quarters (75%) of its buildings are energy inefficient.⁶ There is hope that the intensity of this crisis will accelerate shifts to greater energy efficiency, renewables and even more sustainable food chains and plant-based diets. But in the meantime, it is those on the lowest incomes who are paying the highest price for the continent’s slow progress.

Second, those countries with higher levels of poverty to start with are also seeing much higher proportions of people struggling to cope with rising bills. The fifth round of Eurofound’s “Living, working and COVID-19” survey, carried out in spring 2022, showed that the proportion of respondents reporting being behind with utility bills was as low as 7% in Denmark and Sweden, countries with low pre-crisis poverty, and as high as 50% in Greece, which had started with far higher poverty levels.

Across countries, the nature of these economic pressures means they land especially heavily on those with lower incomes, who spend proportionally more of their incomes on food and other essentials. For those households too, cutting back on the expenses which

² Ibid.

³ Eurocities (2022) “Cities demand a ‘bold and unified European response to the energy crisis’”.

⁴ Kammer, A. (2022) “Europe must address a toxic mix of high inflation and flagging growth”. IMF Blog.

⁵ Hodgkin, R. and T. Sasse, (2022) “Tackling the UK’s energy efficiency problem: What the Truss government should learn from other countries”. Institute for Government, London.

⁶ Goyens, M. (2022) “The cost of living crisis: an opportunity to move to sustainable lifestyles?”. OECD Forum Network, Paris.

have risen most means going without essentials, causing serious hardship, rather than simply reductions in leisure spending.

It is striking, too, that the impacts of these problems vary across different groups in society. Women⁷ and families with children are especially bearing the brunt of the situation. By November, a survey of six countries for the French anti-poverty NGO Secours Populaire⁸ found that nearly half (48%) of parents had cut back on their own food to feed their children, a similar proportion (49%) were worried about not being able to meet their children's needs in the future, and a third (33%) said they were already unable to give their children as varied a diet as they would like. The study also showed that different groups were most at risk of falling into poverty in each country – in Germany retired people were most at risk, in Italy it was young adults, and in the UK it was single-parent families.

Sustained rises in poverty and families having to go without essentials is likely to have consequences that continue far beyond the point at which the immediate economic crisis eases. Worse mental and physical health, higher debt, reduced financial resilience and damaged child development will have consequences that may well last for years into the future. The World Health Organization estimates that a third of the higher number of deaths seen in the winter compared to the summer is due to cold homes.⁹ Tragically, this figure is likely to rise significantly this winter as more people find themselves unable to afford to turn on their heating. People on low incomes are already more likely to be in poor health. Across the EU, among those struggling to make ends meet, over a fifth report poor health, compared with only 4% of people finding it easy to make ends meet.¹⁰ This means that this group is already more vulnerable to the most serious consequences of living in cold, damp homes. Research by the UK's Joseph Rowntree Foundation recently found that 3 million people on low incomes could not afford to heat their homes, and 2.5 million were also unable to afford enough food – around a quarter of the poorest fifth of the country.

Poor mental health is even more closely linked to poverty and financial insecurity. In the EU, 84% of those finding it difficult to make ends meet were found to be at risk of depression, compared to 36% of those who were easily making ends meet.¹¹ Unsurprisingly therefore, as the cost-of-living crisis has tightened and people on low incomes have found themselves unable to afford basic essentials, charities offering mental health support have already reported big rises in the numbers turning to their helplines.

Family relationships are often damaged by such financial pressures and their health consequences, with relationships breaking down and increases in domestic abuse driven by financial strain and recession. There have already been reports of domestic abuse rising as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. The economic situation not only increases abuse but makes it harder for victims to leave because of the risk that they will find themselves facing

7 Eurofound (2022) "The cost-of-living crisis and energy poverty in the EU".

8 Vilain, O. (2022) "Exclusive poll: Europeans on the brink". Secours Populaire, Paris.

9 Finch, D. (2022) "The cost of living crisis is a health emergency too". The Health Foundation, London.

10 Eurofound (2022) "Living, working and COVID-19 in the European Union and 10 EU neighbouring countries".

11 Ibid.

destitution if they do. A survey of frontline staff at one of the UK's main domestic abuse charities, Refuge, found that the cost-of-living crisis is leading half of survivors to return to their abusers.¹²

In Eastern Europe, alarming numbers of children are being forced into poverty by the war. In Russia itself, 2.8 million more children are now in poverty, with half a million more in Ukraine and 110,000 more in Romania. A UNICEF study of the impacts of the cost of living crisis in Eastern Europe and Central Asia has warned that 4,500 more babies may die before their first birthdays and an additional 117,000 children may drop out of school this year.¹³ The UN warns that childhood poverty often has lifelong impacts, with developmental, educational and health consequences leading to a far higher risk of poverty in adult life – a cycle that is all too familiar in every European country as well.

Across European governments, public finances are also taking a serious hit. During the Covid pandemic, many governments spent an unprecedented amount of money supporting their citizens and businesses, expecting to be able to repair their public finances as the pandemic eased and economic recovery took hold. Instead, they were immediately plunged into a crisis of similar proportions and found themselves again spending eye-watering amounts of money helping their populations weather the storm.

The response of most governments in Europe to the pressures caused by rising energy costs has included four components – reducing energy or consumption taxes, regulating retail energy prices, cash transfers to vulnerable groups, and support for businesses. Only four countries – France, Malta, Portugal and Spain – have also imposed wholesale price regulations. However, despite this commonality, the level of funding directed to these measures varies very significantly,¹⁴ with some countries concentrating on direct support for households and businesses, and other countries focusing funding on utility companies.

To support households and businesses, Germany is estimated to be spending 7.4% of GDP, Greece 5.7%, Italy and the Netherlands 5%, the United Kingdom 3%, France 2.8% and Poland 2.2%. By contrast, Sweden is only spending 0.3%, Finland 0.5% and Belgium 0.8% of GDP on this type of support.

Those countries not spending as much to directly support households and businesses tend instead to be directing higher levels of spending at utility companies. Sweden is spending 4.4% of GDP on credit, loans and bailouts for utility companies, with Denmark and Finland close behind at 4%. By contrast, this proportion is far lower in countries whose spending has gone to individuals and businesses – 1.9% in Germany, 1.7% in the United Kingdom and 0.4% in France (although the French government is currently being sued by its main energy provider, EDF, after it was forced to sell energy to consumers at a loss without similar compensation).

12 Refuge (2022) "New data from Refuge warns that cost of living crisis is forcing survivors of domestic abuse to stay with abusive partners".

13 United Nations (2022) "Surge in poverty-stricken children in Eastern Europe, Central Asia".

14 Sgaravatti, G., S. Tagliapietra, and G. Zachmann (2022) "National fiscal policy responses to the energy crisis". Bruegel Datasets, Brussels.

The methods and scale vary, but every country will enter 2023 with its public finances under significant strain. To make matters worse, the hoped-for economic recovery has been knocked off course, making the future outlook for repairing public finance much gloomier. The OECD's economic outlook for September 2022¹⁵ suggests that the world's economy is slowing even more than had been expected, with annual growth in 2023 expected to be just 2.2%. Within Europe, Italy's economy is expected to grow by only 0.4%, and France's by 0.6%, while the UK's is expecting no growth at all next year and Germany's economy is expected to contract by 0.7%. In fact, more than half of countries in Europe are expected to enter a recession this winter. Although inflation should start to decline next year, it is still expected to remain high, at around 6% in advanced economies and 12% in emerging European economies.¹⁶ Pressure on both households and businesses will therefore remain intense.

This will be the third blow to people struggling to get by. First, the Covid pandemic affected people in poverty more heavily than those who were better off before the pandemic, both in terms of health and economic impacts. Those who were already on low incomes found themselves pulled deeper into poverty as economies shut down, while many Europeans who had never faced poverty before were dragged into it. People with secure jobs that could be done from home were more able to maintain their living standards and also stay safe. Those with lower paid and more insecure jobs were more likely to lose them and, if their work continued, they were more likely to have to leave their home and work in ways that put them at greater risk of contracting the illness.

The pandemic particularly drove increases in poverty in around half of EU member states – Portugal, Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Austria and Sweden.¹⁷ In the UK, as in many European states, those on lower incomes used up savings and found themselves in more debt as a result of the pandemic, whilst many on higher incomes increased their savings and financial security as their incomes held up and their leisure spending was curtailed.¹⁸

The second blow was the cost-of-living crisis of 2022, which saw poverty and debt rise and extremely concerning spikes in food poverty and destitution. Now, these same groups face a third blow in 2023 – a blow of recession, continued high prices and governments constrained in their response by both their financial situation and the need to avoid stoking inflation even higher.

High inflation is driving central banks to tighten monetary policy by raising interest rates, with the European Central Bank raising rates for the first time in 11 years. Governments then have to use fiscal policy to protect their most vulnerable citizens. At the same time, however, governments are keen to avoid further stoking inflation through too much or too broad a fiscal stimulus, leaving them with few tools to kick-start economic recovery.

15 OECD (2022) "Paying the price of war: OECD Economic Outlook". Interim Report, September.

16 Kammer, A. (2022) "Europe must address a toxic mix".

17 Eurostat (2021) "Early estimates of income and poverty in 2020".

18 Bell, T. (2021) "The Covid certainty: more savings for the rich, more debt for the poor". Resolution Foundation, London.

This raises the spectre of continued stagflation and the risk that pressures on public finances lead more governments to cut back on social protections, further worsening the poverty and hardship that have already been fuelled by the unequal impacts of both the Covid pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. The experience of the UK should stand as a warning to those contemplating this. After the financial crisis of 2008, UK governments from 2010 onwards imposed swinging cuts to both public services and welfare support. This led to sharp rises in deep poverty and destitution and also contributed to the country's woeful record of productivity and income growth over these years.

There are worries too for many governments about the potential social and political consequences of these conditions. Large majorities in Western European countries believe their governments are handling the cost-of-living crisis badly – from 82% in both Italy and the UK, to more than seven in ten in Germany, Spain and France, and more than six in ten in Denmark and Sweden.¹⁹ And the political risks go beyond general dissatisfaction. Populist governments have already taken power in Hungary and Poland, while many fear that more such governments may be swept into power as living conditions worsen. The governments in both Slovakia and Estonia have collapsed in recent months, buckling under the pressure to do more to help struggling citizens, out of budgets already stretched after the pandemic. A poll of voters in France, Germany, Poland and the UK, which was published in September, found that not only were further rises in poverty likely but also majorities in every country were worried about social unrest. In Poland, three quarters (75%) said this, with 69% in France, 64% in Germany and 57% in the UK agreeing. In France, four in ten respondents wanted to see the return of the 'yellow vests' protest movement that caused such turmoil in 2018 in response to rising fuel costs.

While people across Europe are suffering hardship as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and Russia's war in Ukraine, there are even worse impacts across other, much poorer regions. The UN estimates²⁰ that the crisis has pushed 71 million people from 159 developing countries into poverty, with 49 million people in 46 countries already living in 'near-famine-like conditions' and 750,000 people at immediate risk of starvation. Teresa Anderson, at the NGO Actionaid, warned earlier this year that the wheat shortages caused by the war in Ukraine have exacerbated an already dire situation, with African economies reeling from the pandemic, climate change and political ineffectiveness. "If nothing changes, we could be facing a famine of unimagined proportions [...]. The situation is particularly extreme in the Horn of Africa, where 20 million people are already suffering severe hunger because of the ongoing drought".²¹ This is, of course, an appalling humanitarian disaster. It is also likely to feed into greater instability around the world and increased movements of people. In many European countries, hostility to migrants is a significant issue, with perceptions of uncontrolled migration fuelling far-right parties. This situation is only likely to worsen as the populations of these countries themselves feel poorer and more insecure.

19 Connor, J. (2022) "New cost of living tracker reveals extent of crisis in Western Europe". YouGov.

20 Gray Molina, G., M. Montoya-Aguirre and E. Ortiz-Juarez, E. (2022) "Addressing the cost of living crisis in developing countries: poverty and vulnerability projections and policy responses", UNDP Report.

21 Schwikowski, M. (2022) "African food prices soaring amid Ukraine war", DW.

Perhaps most worrying of all – many predict that next winter will be far worse than 2022. This year, Europe was able to build up its stockpiles while Russian gas flowed over the summer. It was also able to import liquid gas from China. However, there seems little likelihood of either being repeated in 2023. The director of the International Energy Agency (IEA), Fatih Birol, has warned Europeans that next winter may be “more difficult than the winter we are experiencing now”.²² Yet the IEA has also sounded a more optimistic note in its most recent report, noting that the global energy crisis is driving “a sharp acceleration in installations of renewable power, with total capacity growth worldwide set to almost double in the next five years [...] helping keep alive the possibility of limiting global warming to 1.5 °C”.²³

22 McNicoll, A. (2022) “Energy crisis: is next winter going to be worse?”. *The Week*.

23 International Energy Agency (2022) “Renewables 2022”. Fuel Report.



IZABELA SURWILLO

Reflections on the energy crisis in Europe

Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shook continental politics and led to an unprecedented energy crisis in Europe. With Russia no longer considered either a reliable or desirable energy supplier, the EU member states had to rethink their energy policy priorities and seek alternatives as a matter of utmost urgency. In the unfolding energy-climate crisis, the phase-out of Russian fossil fuels and diversification of supply routes with a simultaneous acceleration of the energy transition is a major task that will prove both difficult and costly. How did we get here, what challenges are ahead of us and what should drive the EU's energy policies in the future?

Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shook continental politics and led to an unprecedented energy crisis in Europe. With Russia no longer considered neither a reliable nor a desirable energy supplier, the EU member states had to rethink their energy policy priorities and seek alternatives as a matter of utmost urgency. This is an intricate task. Before the outbreak of war, the EU was heavily dependent on Russia: 40% of its gas and nearly a third of its oil supply were of Russian origin, making the rapid diversification untenable. While oil – by nature – is a more palpable commodity that can be transported via road, rail and sea, thereby enabling imports from various geographical locations, natural gas poses more challenges, as it requires specific infrastructure (pipelines and liquified natural gas [LNG] terminals) and the accessible supply is limited, in both liquified and gaseous form. Therefore, the cut in the Russian gas supply by over 80% this year, which has been a critical energy resource used for heating, industrial processes and power generation in Europe, has triggered a major crisis that will not be quickly resolved. Moreover, although the classification of gas as a transitional fuel (and later as “green” in the EU taxonomy) has been criticised, a number of EU member states enlisted natural gas in their national strategies as a “bridge fuel” carrying the countries towards a low-carbon economy.

Considering the current impact of the war in Ukraine, and the unfolding energy-climate crisis, the phase-out of Russian fossil fuels and diversification of supply routes with

a simultaneous acceleration of the energy transition is a major task that will prove both difficult and costly. For the time being, the EU remains vulnerable to energy blackmail. Whereas the Kremlin's weaponisation of its energy exports, especially gas, since the outbreak of war came as unexpected to some European players, the assessment of the geopolitical threat, including the instrumental use of energy resources by Russia, has been anticipated in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) over the years. So how did we get here, what challenges are ahead of us and what should drive the EU's energy policies in the future?

“Energy as a weapon”

Those in the EU who insisted on the economic dimension of EU-Russia energy cooperation appeared to be caught by surprise when Moscow employed energy blackmail towards the western states and used its gas pipelines instrumentally after the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022.

In parts of Western Europe, most notably in Berlin, there was a belief in strong and growing interdependence between Europe and Russia in the energy sector for many years. This 'mutual dependence' promoted, for example, by the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, was seen as beneficial for both sides. There was also hope that with time, growing economic cooperation with Russia could bring the latter closer to Europe, also in terms of democratic values. Critique of this strategy highlighted the lack of reciprocal behaviour from Russia, as it was gaining access to European customers through new pipeline projects but, at the same time, was not opening its energy market to the same extent, yet simultaneously increasing energy exports to other geographical locations such as China.

Crucially, Germany did not perceive Russia as a threat, but rather as a small country, due to the size of its economy, which was more dependent on Europe than vice versa. The import dependency was also seen in Germany in economic rather than security terms and thought of in the context of increasing gas and oil prices on the global market. The 2006 Ukrainian gas crisis, which closely followed initial developments around the Nord Stream 1 project, served to justify the venture further. The disputes between Russian Gazprom and Ukrainian Naftogaz over natural gas supplies and prices, which culminated in the 2006 gas cut-off episode, affecting Ukraine and several states in the region, sparked the debate on energy security in the EU and prompted many states in CEE to think more seriously about diversification of their gas supply. The crisis had a negative impact on the reputation of Ukraine as a transit country and slightly damaged the perception of Russia as a reliable partner in Germany. At the same time, although the signing of the Nord Stream project without consulting eastern neighbours at the early stage was criticised for its insensitivity, the project was seen in Berlin as a European rather than a national undertaking and a way to improve the energy supply from Russia without interruptions. This contrasted strongly with the energy security considerations of much of Eastern Europe.

For many years the western counterparts perceived countries in CEE as too paranoid regarding Russia due to their troublesome historical relations. Without a doubt, the

perception of the potential threat from Russia in the CEE region is strongly rooted in historical experiences and heightened by geographical proximity. However, the strategic use of energy resources by Russia is not a new phenomenon and has happened on numerous occasions in Central and Eastern Europe over the last three decades.

Following the dissolution of the USSR, Moscow recognised that its diminished military and political power in the region could be partially compensated for by using energy resources as a political tool. Gas and oil became the new currency of power. This was technically possible, as many countries of the former Soviet space remained locked-in in the Soviet-era energy infrastructure that linked them with the USSR, as well as with one another – creating multi-level dependencies in the form of gas and oil pipelines, and electricity grids. After gaining independence in the early 1990s, diversification away from Russian fossil fuels was therefore particularly challenging, especially when it comes to natural gas, as its diversification required alternative costly infrastructure – pipelines to suppliers from other geographical locations (for example, Norway or Central Asia) or LNG terminals. Moreover, in some cases, such as Ukraine, Russia offered gas at heavily discounted rates – keeping Kyiv in a strings-attached state of privilege for years.

In this context, the use of ‘energy as a weapon’ by Moscow to manifest its regional power and prevent states from the post-Soviet space from turning towards the West became possible. From the early 1990s, Russia used its energy resources to exercise political and economic pressure at different points on Belarus, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova and Ukraine, among others. Although Moscow would typically deny that the disputes over the oil/gas deliveries or supply cut-off episodes were politically motivated, these events tend to correlate with political developments in the fossil-fuel-importing states that ran against Russian interests. For instance, Russia periodically limited oil and gas supply to the Baltic states in the early 1990s, after the newly independent states requested the Russian military to leave their territory. The Ukrainian gas crisis of 2006 took place in a new political context, with pro-European president of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko in office. In 2006 Gazprom also more than doubled the gas prices for Georgia shortly after the country expressed its desire to join the NATO alliance. Before opening its LNG terminal ‘Independence’ in 2014, Lithuania experienced gas-price spikes that correlated with its gas diversification plans, and the national gas sector unbundling when the Lithuanian state was buying out Gazprom’s shares. In 2021 Gazprom limited the gas supply to Moldova, causing a domestic energy crisis that coincided with the election of pro-EU politician Maia Sandu as the president of Moldova.

The above examples, as well as numerous others, put the issue of energy supply high on the security agenda across the CEE region early on and prompted diversification policies, especially in the gas sector, via new LNG terminals (for example in Poland and Lithuania), gas pipelines from non-Russian directions (such as the Baltic Pipe) or gas interconnectors between CEE countries. The regional concerns related to different energy blackmail episodes were additionally heightened by the tense political climate. The 2008 war in Georgia and the 2014 war in Ukraine, which resulted in Russia occupying parts of both countries’ territories, made it explicitly clear that Moscow does not intend to lose strategic influence

in its so-called 'near abroad'. Consequently, after 2014 the regional developments in the energy sector were increasingly scrutinised from the security angle, and the construction of pipelines circumventing Ukraine caused strong opposition in CEE and calls for greater European solidarity.

On solidarity

After the 2014 conflict, Russia focused on constructing the TurkStream and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines that would omit the so-far transit states in the CEE region.

These developments were especially important for Ukraine for both economic and political reasons. Apart from the revenues from transit fees, being a significant transit country gave Ukraine certain leverage in conflicts with Russia. Circumventing Ukraine as a transit state would make it ever more vulnerable to gas cut-offs in the future. Moreover, the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline sent a clear signal to Moscow that energy trade with Europe would not cease, even following the annexation of part of Ukrainian territories by Russia in 2014. Not surprisingly then, the project was met with strong opposition from Ukraine and several other countries in CEE.

Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko attempted to stop the development of Nord Stream 2 in Brussels with the help of some European companies, as he considered it a political project against Ukraine and an economic and energy blockade of no economically justifiable basis. He also called Nord Stream 2 the 'Trojan horse for European security', which was threatening both the EU's energy and geopolitical security. In a wider public debate, Ukrainian commentators started to cast doubt on the integrity, motives and values of the EU actors in charge of the project. This debate echoed in the region, as following the outbreak of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict in 2014, the construction of yet another pipeline bypassing CEE raised a red alert. In a joint letter to the European Commission, the governments of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Baltic states pointed out the issue with Ukraine's transit fees, Europe's increased dependency on Russia and an undermined trust in the planned Energy Union, as a result of the project. In CEE, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was frequently regarded as a political rather than a business undertaking that would consolidate the Russian dominant position as a gas supplier, *de facto* prevent the development of the South Stream pipeline and mark the comeback of political realism with national interests of individual member states prevailing over the common one. In the aftermath of the 2014 war in Ukraine, CEE states called for even greater European solidarity with their security concerns and interests. As the Polish president Andrzej Duda commented on the Nord Stream 2 project after the meeting with the presidents of the Visegrad Group in Slovakia in 2018: "We want a solidarity-based European Union that seeks mutual understanding in which every country is treated as equal".

The different views on energy security across Europe in the context of the perceived potential energy blackmail from Russia did not align until the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022. The latter led to a U-turn shift in the EU's energy policy which started to

focus on cutting energy ties with Moscow and accelerating the energy transition. In March 2022, the International Energy Agency outlined a ten-point action plan to reduce the EU's dependence on Russian gas by a third by the end of 2022 while staying on the green transition path, and the European Commission followed suit with 'REPowerEU' – a blueprint to eliminate the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels by 2030. The necessary measures include diversification of gas supply, the introduction of minimum gas storage requirements, increased generation from low-emission energy sources (for example, bioenergy and nuclear), boosting energy efficiency measures and accelerating the development of wind and solar energy. However, the necessary speed of the combined diversification away from Russian energy sources, fossil fuel phase-out and mass scale-up of the low-carbon energy technologies, with policy targets being further accelerated in the "REPowerEU Action Plan" from mid-May, is a huge task. And as the current energy crisis unfolds, the negative impact felt by the European national economies and societies complicates the picture further.

Challenges ahead of us

The current energy crisis poses several key challenges, especially as it is intertwined with wider climate, economic and societal considerations.

By phasing out fossil fuels, including those imported from Russia, and accelerating the transition to a low-carbon economy, the EU could improve its security of supply long-term and address the unfolding energy-climate crisis. However, this task will be costly for European consumers. There are no quick fixes and no one-fits-all solutions, as each member state needs to tackle the challenges within the limits of its own current energy mix and economic situation.

In the short term, cutting energy demand and improving energy efficiency measures are the fastest and most cost-effective ways to partially mitigate the crisis. The adjustment of national energy policies going forward is more demanding, though, and often implies trade-offs between, for example, short-term energy security versus long-term climate-mitigation targets, or security of supply versus cost of energy.

In the current crisis, the International Energy Agency listed burning coal as a possible short-term solution to replace gas in electricity generation, and a number of EU states (including Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands and Poland) decided to extend the operation of the existing coal-fired plants, increase their output or reopen those that were previously shut down in line with the climate-change-mitigation goals. These policy moves are deemed necessary to ensure energy security in the short run, although they do sidetrack the ambitious climate agenda for the time being. In the longer perspective, Russian gas needs to be replaced by other sources of gas, while further investments in low-carbon energy are needed, including key renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, biomethane and green hydrogen. The EU states are currently in different positions when it comes to their individual choices of low-carbon energy technologies and the necessary scale and speed of their deployment to meet future domestic energy demand.

For instance, while the planned mass scale-up of renewable energy in countries like Denmark – a regional leader in wind energy generation and technology – can largely pave the way to a low-carbon economy, this task is more complicated for bigger EU economies. In Poland, for example, where 70% of domestic electricity is still generated from coal, the policy plan for energy transition involves the development of both renewables and big power-generation units, such as nuclear energy, to replace coal. In Germany, where the ambitious *Energiewende* ruled out the use of both coal and nuclear energy long-term, gradually reducing the reliance on Russian gas has posed a major challenge. Although Germany planned to phase out nuclear energy by the end of 2022, the government has already extended that deadline to April 2023 and, given the insufficient supply of energy in the south of the country, extending the operation of nuclear power plants in that region beyond this date remains a possibility.

Moreover, the EU needs alternative sources of gas, which are both more costly than the piped gas from Russia and harder to obtain due to market and infrastructure limitations. Most notably, obtaining additional volumes of liquified natural gas, which is the primary replacement option, requires the construction of costly LNG terminals and ensuring contracts with major suppliers (for example, the US, Australia, Qatar), who are already operating at near full capacity and on the basis of long-term contracts. As such, securing LNG on the global market comes with a heavy price tag, which has more than doubled since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The only way forward is together

The combined costs of the accelerated pace of energy transition and diversification of gas add to the strained economic situation and skyrocketing energy prices that hit European consumers and businesses alike. The challenge is multifold. Despite billions spent by governments to shield consumers, the prices for electricity and natural gas paid by households are higher than ever, and the winter can worsen the situation further. National governments started to implement a set of policies to address the crisis, which involved retail price caps, regulated tariffs and support for companies, as well as policies aimed at improving energy-saving measures and increasing supply. Some of those measures are not without significant downsides, as uncoordinated action in different member states can negatively affect the EU as a whole. For instance, energy subsidies in one country might stimulate consumption and result in higher wholesale prices across the Union – negatively impacting customers in other states. Therefore, as some recent expert analyses point out, the best way forward involves a coordinated effort by the member states to lower energy demand and increase supply while keeping internal energy markets open and implementing measures to shield the most vulnerable consumers.

Cooperation and widely defined solidarity are, in fact, needed at different levels of policy and should inform not only domestic measures aimed at energy-crisis mitigation, but also joint projects in energy infrastructure, and dealings with external suppliers, as well as

the efforts to establish a common future energy policy outlook. To start with, it is crucial to increase the interconnectedness of energy infrastructures, such as gas and electricity networks. Whereas in some areas, such as the Baltic Sea Region (BSR), a number of important gas interconnectors (for example, Balticconnector adjoining Finland and Estonia, GIPL adjoining Poland and Lithuania) interlinked the national gas markets and improved regional energy security, similar projects should be prioritised across the EU (for example, connectors adjoining southern EU's gas networks). Cooperation is also key to avoiding uncoordinated investments (for example, current plans for multiple LNG terminals in the BSR) that will become stranded assets once the transition to green energy progresses further in the future. Hence, the new gas infrastructure should be also hydrogen compatible.

Equally important is the cooperation of member states on gas storage requirements for the winter season. Although in November 2022, gas storage across Europe was filled up to 95%, 2023 will pose a bigger challenge, as the storage facilities will need to be filled with sources other than Russian gas. Therefore, member states need to use the available coordination tools at the EU level, such as aggregating demand and partaking in joint-purchasing mechanisms, to facilitate the process and avoid excessive prices. In this regard, the recently established EU platform for the common purchase of gas, LNG and hydrogen to secure the best deals with external suppliers is a useful initiative that can maximise the EU's collective political and market power, and that could also be extended to other sectors, such as renewables.

This increased multi-level cooperation between member states needs to be driven by a heightened sense of solidarity. In policy terms, the solidarity agreements between countries in line with the Gas Security Supply Regulation are some tangible examples of this principle in practice. However, if the past is any indication, it is easy to envision how the interests of individual states might overshadow common energy policy outlook, especially in times of crisis. As the potential gas shortages occur and prices continue to rise, 'my country first' policies might surface. Even more so, as the worsening economic situation affects European societies, potentially stirring societal unrest and influencing domestic politics across the continent. The loss of political momentum constitutes therefore a real risk. Both at the societal level, where despite the enormous sense of solidarity with Ukrainians in the first months of the war, Europeans might get tired of the high economic costs and lean towards softening the policy towards Moscow to get a quick solution to the energy problem. And on the policy level. Here, the negotiation of energy sanctions toward Russia has already exemplified a lack of unity, as oil sanctions have been marked by exceptions (excluding one third of piped oil deliveries and allowing for emergency seaborne oil purchases), a relatively long timeframe, and a lack of urgency in the future, as no clear date has been set for the total ban on Russian oil. Negotiating gas sanctions will prove even more challenging, especially with countries such as Hungary potentially making use of their veto power.

However, despite all the challenges of the current energy crisis, it is also a unique opportunity to learn from past mistakes, cooperate on mitigating the unfolding energy crisis, and plan for a more secure future based on a common energy policy approach. And if we want to succeed in that, then the only way forward is together.



ROMAN KUHAR

The rise and success of the anti-gender movement in Europe and beyond¹

The so-called anti-gender phenomenon is relatively new. It began in Europe and then spread elsewhere, including to Latin America and Africa. It goes beyond earlier forms of resistance to gender equality and tries to attract a broader audience by putting new forms of mobilisation in place, and by promoting international networks and coalitions among different groups (such as family and pro-life associations, radical nationalist parties and right-wing populists) as well as by making reference to a vague 'gender ideology'. Experts believe the phenomenon's spread and success are to be ascribed to a number of political and socioeconomic developments, such as the perceived failure of liberal democracy, and in particular to its ability to appeal to and reinforce people's deep-rooted fears, anxieties and identity-related uncertainties.

In 2012, Slovenia held a referendum on the Family Code, which sought to modernise legislation in the context of partnership and family life, including the legal regulation of same-sex partnerships. Although the Slovenian parliament passed the law, it was later rejected in a referendum initiated by a newly formed association of 'concerned citizens' called *Citizens' Initiatives for Family and Children*. As a sociologist, I actively participated in the expert group that drafted and promoted the law. Although we had anticipated that some people would oppose the legalisation of same-sex partnerships, none of us was prepared for what awaited us during the months of the referendum campaign. The citizens' initiative addressed the public with a series of new methods made possible by social networks, and most importantly, it constantly repeated the claim that the Family Code was part of the so-called 'gender theory'. When I first heard this term, my initial thought was of a gap in my own knowledge: is there a specific theory called 'gender theory' that I obviously

¹ This text is based on the author's keynote at the final conference of the EC Horizon 2020 project "Gearing Roles", Brussels, 18 October 2022 (<https://gearingroles.eu/gr-final-conference/>).

do not know about? There are various theories about gender, but none of them has such a general name as 'gender theory'. Only later did it become clear that 'gender theory' is a new discursive strategy that establishes the idea that there is a 'secret plan' by radical feminists and LGBT+ activists to destroy 'our families' and 'brainwash our children'.

Shortly afterwards, mass protests erupted in France against the Hollande government, which had legalised marriage for all. Among other things, the demonstrators carried signs saying "Non à la théorie du genre". The message was the same as in the referendum in Slovenia. It became clear that we were dealing with something new. Today, this phenomenon is known as the anti-gender movement. After its initial successes in Europe, the movement soon spread to Latin America, Africa and elsewhere.

The anti-gender movement should not be understood as a continuation of earlier forms of conservative resistance to gender equality and sexual politics. Rather, it is new resistance based on new forms of mobilisation, new types of actions and new discourses that portray anti-gender actors as rational, active citizens whose actions are based on common sense. In this way, the anti-gender movement seeks to appeal to a broader audience, not just the traditional circles of conservative groups.²

The roots of the anti-gender movement

The anti-gender movement alternately uses three terms – 'gender ideology', 'gender theory,' or 'genderism' – to indicate the danger posed by issues related to intimate/sexual citizenship. Gender equality policies, they argue, no longer aim to guarantee equal rights but to deny biological facts about men and women, promote gender fluidity, and abolish traditional gender roles, including the role of mother and father. 'Gender ideology' is thus understood as a kind of conspiracy theory, a form of social engineering that interferes with the 'natural order'. It can be understood as an empty signifier that can be filled with very different and sometimes contradictory meanings.³ As an empty signifier, 'gender ideology' is a marker for same-sex marriage, reproductive rights, sex education in schools, adoption, abortion, political correctness, as well as for questioning democracy, social sciences, the functioning of international organisations (UN, WHO or EU) and the adoption of international treaties (such as the Istanbul Convention), all of which are perceived as an attack on the 'silent majority'. In Eastern Europe in particular, the anti-gender movement represents 'gender ideology' in terms of a neo-colonial logic, according to which the decadent West seeks to impose its 'sexual delusion' on the rest of the world.⁴ Related to this is the idea that 'gender ideology' is a sign of former communist elites trying to establish

2 Kuhar R. and D. Paternotte (eds) (2017) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield).

3 Mayer S. and B. Sauer (2017) "'Gender Ideology' in Austria: Coalitions around an empty signifier" in R. Kuhar and D. Paternotte (eds) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield), pp. 23-40.

4 Graff A. and E. Korolczuk (2021) *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*, 1st ed (London: Routledge).

a new cultural revolution after the failed political project of socialism. The assumption is that the struggle is no longer in the relationship between capital and the working class, but in the relationship between men and women. Indeed, 'gender ideology' is often classified as new Marxism or Marxism 2.0.⁵

The movement has Catholic roots and is based on the conflict between two concepts: equal rights (gender equality) and the equal dignity of men and women. The emergence of the term 'gender ideology' can be traced back to developments following the 1994 UN Conference on Population in Cairo and the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. During these two conferences, the term 'gender' began to appear in official United Nations documents, replacing the more essentialist term 'sex'. At that time, the Vatican and several other countries expressed explicit reservations about the term 'gender'. For them, the idea that the roles of men and women are socially constructed is at odds with their notions of a 'natural family' in which both men and women have their own roles defined by their biological differences. For these reasons, the Vatican has sought to promote the idea of the 'equal dignity' of men and women, rather than equality regardless of gender.⁶

Actors and strategies of the anti-gender movement

Today, the anti-gender movement goes beyond specific religious affiliations. As Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim⁷ point out, the vague notion of 'gender ideology' acts as a symbolic glue that enables cooperation between different actors despite their many differences. The network of the anti-gender movement, therefore, includes family associations, pro-life groups, radical nationalist parties, right-wing populists, and allies from the media, academia, or the business world. In some countries, such as Poland or Hungary, anti-gender ideology has become the official ideology of political elites in power.

The anti-gender actors also form international coalitions, as in the case of the European Citizens' Initiative for the Protection of Marriage and Family "Mum, Dad and Kids"⁸ or the "One of Us"⁹ initiative. There are advocacy networks and organisations such as the European Centre for Law and Justice, Alliance Defending Freedom International, and Agenda Europe. The latter links 150 organisations and individuals in 30 different countries. Their goals are to ban same-sex marriage, ban divorce, ban same-sex adoption, ban artificial insemination, legalise home-schooling and abolish equality legislation at the EU level.¹⁰

One of the first transnational tools to promote the alleged danger of 'gender ideology' was the creation of the CitizenGO platform in 2013, whose goal is to 'defend life, family and freedom around the world'. According to its website, it consists of over 17 million

5 Strehovec T. (2013) "Zakonska Zveza v Perspektivi Drugega Vatikanskega Koncila". *Bogoslovni Vestnik*, no. 2, pp. 233-249.

6 Case, M. A. (2016) "The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Vatican's Anathematization of Gender". *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2, pp. 155-172.

7 Kováts, E. and M. Põim (2015) *Gender as Symbolic Glue* (Brussels: FEPS, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung).

8 "European Citizens' Initiative: Mum, Dad & Kids" (2015).

9 "European Citizens' Initiative: One of Us" (2012).

10 Datta, N. (2018) *Restoring the Natural Order* (Brussels: EPF).

active citizens who “prevent radical lobbies from imposing their agenda on society”.¹¹ It operates in 12 different languages primarily on the basis of collecting signatures for anti-gender petitions.

In most cases, the movement tries to hide its religious connections and creates a secularised self-image. It presents itself as a rational, reasonable actor raising its voice because things have simply gone too far. Often this movement also employs a strategy of self-victimisation, portraying itself as the true defenders of oppressed people, a majority that is silent or even silenced by powerful lobbies and elites. They also present themselves as the saviours of national authenticity in the face of international powers. An important part of their activity is the so-called ‘walk through the institutions’, in which they try to have their representatives occupy important positions in consultative or decision-making bodies of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the like. They also use the tool of amicus briefs and other forms of strategic litigation to intervene in legal cases involving issues of intimate or sexual citizenship in an attempt to influence the decisions of the courts.¹²

If we look at the logos of anti-gender campaigns, we can notice many similarities. Most often they are depicted with a silhouette of what they consider a natural family. All of them have two children – a boy and a girl – except Russia and recently Mexico, where they have three children. In some other cases, the logo consists of a hand protecting the children from gender-based threats. What seems to unite them is the image of the ‘innocent child’ – and thus of the family and the nation – which are at the heart of anti-gender discourse (Picture 1).



Picture 1 – Logos of anti-gender organisations

11 “CitizenGo: Defending Life, Family, and Freedom across the World” (2013).

12 Kuhar R. and D. Paternotte (eds) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*; Graff A. and E. Korolczuk, *Anti-Gender Politics*; Kováts, E. and M. Põim, *Gender as Symbolic Glue*.

The discourse of anti-gender actors is based on what Ruth Wodak¹³ calls the politics of fear. The alleged danger posed by gender is translated into short messages that incite fear, moral panic and a sense of threat, but also allude to essentialist notions of what is normal and natural. The notion of ‘gender ideology’ plays on people’s deep-rooted anxieties about sexuality, especially homosexuality, and gender roles. In this way, it creates the desired populist effect: aversion, but also anger and moral panic.¹⁴

The success of the anti-gender movement

From this brief description of the contemporary anti-gender movement, it can be concluded that gender and sexuality are now at the centre of struggles for cultural and political hegemony. But what makes the anti-gender project such a successful platform for populist politics in the 21st century?

The most general answer to this question is that the anti-gender movement strategically reinforces the uncertainties associated with the fundamental ontological questions of humanity, including gender as one of the most basic and important indicators of our identity. At the same time, it offers a very simple but reassuring and strategically formulated response to these uncertainties and, more generally, to the current political, economic, social and cultural changes that are being presented as a crisis. In fact, the anti-gender project, both in terms of political movement and discourse, can be understood as a response to four interrelated crises: the crisis of liberal democracy and the problems caused by neoliberalism, the crisis of masculinity, the crisis of equality and the crisis of knowledge (epistemic crisis).

Most current research links the anti-gender movement and anti-gender ideology to the negative economic and social consequences of neoliberalism. The assumption is that the collapse of the welfare state and the culture of commercialisation of our everyday lives, as well as the rise of individualism, have caused anti-gender discourse to fall on fertile ground, especially among the victims of neoliberalism, those who were left behind. Graff and Korolczuk claim that anti-genderism is “structured and legitimised as a conservative response to the excesses of neoliberalism”.¹⁵ Their main argument is that the people are the victims of corrupt elites and gain a sense of agency by adopting anti-gender rhetoric. They become proactive citizens and defenders of traditional values.

Some scholars who see the anti-gender project as a response to the crisis of neoliberalism specifically link it to the failures of liberal democracy and democratic representation. In the context of the European Union, the anti-gender project is interpreted as a reaction to the image that the EU conveys – namely that the EU is based on human rights, which is understood primarily as the protection of minorities, while at the same time social provisions are being dismantled. According to Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető (2007), anti-genderism is a rejection of the current socioeconomic order, which prioritises “identity

13 Wodak, R. (2015) *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage).

14 Kuhar R. and D. Paternotte (eds) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*.

15 Graff A. and E. Korolczuk, *Anti-Gender Politics*.

politics over material issues and the weakening of people's social, cultural, and political security [...]"¹⁶

Specifically in the context of Eastern Europe, Elena Zacharenko points out that the anti-gender movement feeds on disenchantment with the creation of equal economic standards with the rest of Europe – a project that has obviously failed. "What was imported instead", she claims, "often with a patronising attitude, were lessons on 'correct' attitudes and values".¹⁷ This is precisely why LGBT activists and feminists are considered elite; it is the success of equality and identity politics that sets them apart as such.

However, this is only part of the story; the success of the anti-gender movement and the viewing of feminists and LGBT people as elites is also related to societal homo-/transphobia and non-acceptance of lifestyle diversity, which is only reinforced by economic and social dissolutions. Legal protection of sexual minorities is seen as 'ideological colonisation' – a term often used by Pope Francis when referring to 'gender ideology'. The antipode of ideological colonisation is tradition, including the traditional family and traditional relationships between men and women. This is where the anti-gender movement and the radical right meet: in the family. For the anti-gender actors, the traditional family is in opposition to 'abnormal' LGBT+ lifestyles or radical feminism, and for the radical right, the traditional family is the core of their nationalism and nativism.

The second stream of studies interprets the success of the anti-gender movement as a response to the crisis of masculinity. Some men are seen as the losers of equality policies and the successes of feminism and gender mainstreaming. The crisis arises from the new and not entirely clear position of men in contemporary society and in the family. This manifests itself in many ways – from the claim that boys are disadvantaged in school because of female teachers and gender equality policies, to the threat to heterosexual men from the normalisation and legal protection of homosexuality, to the interpretation that migrant workers are taking 'our jobs', etc. The anti-gender movement is therefore seen as an attempt to restore the supposedly natural role of men as patriarch of the family. It is an attempt to restore the authority of men who believe that they have been replaced by women, LGBT+ people and migrants. Birgit Sauer¹⁸ calls this "masculinist identity politics", which is largely based on creating a crisis situation, a situation of fears and anxieties, and on the other hand, facilitating the generation of anger and rage at 'the others', at those who are held responsible for this situation, including the advocates of so-called 'gender ideology'.

This is related to yet another line of explanation of the successes of the anti-gender movement, which can be called 'equality fatigue'. Equality fatigue is a position of being fed up with equality politics, 'woke culture', political correctness... – and seeing them as

16 Grzebalska, W., E. Kováts and A. Pető (2017) "Gender as symbolic glue: How "gender" became an umbrella term for the rejection of the (neo)liberal order". *Political Critique: Long Reads, Network 4 Debate* (blog).

17 Zacharenko, E. (2019) "The neoliberal fuel to the anti-gender movement". *Green European Journal*, pp. 1-5.

18 Sauer, B. (2020) "Authoritarian right-wing populism as masculinist identity politics. The role of affects, in G. Dietze and J. Roth (eds) *Right-Wing Populism and Gender* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag), pp. 23-40.

excessive. Equality fatigue is the belief that equality has already been achieved and that feminists and other minorities seek special protection and additional – not equal – rights and benefits. This claim can be understood as tapping into broader forms of ‘fatigue’, particularly in terms of disillusionment with discourses of human rights as spearheaded by transnational organisations and state-sponsored programmes, and broader disillusionment with the promises of democratic transformation in post-socialist societies.¹⁹

The fourth crisis from which the anti-gender movement capitalises is the epistemic crisis, a growing distrust of science, especially the social sciences. It is a struggle over the legitimacy of academic work, especially gender and related studies. Anti-gender actors are important contributors to this crisis because they are concerned not only with political power but also with epistemic power.²⁰ Alternative knowledge production is one of their main political strategies. In some countries, gender departments and gender studies at universities have been attacked and denounced as nests of ‘gender ideology’ and unscientific work. Often dismissed as a waste of public money, gender studies are constructed as ideological, unscientific and in contradiction to the supposedly indisputable findings of the natural sciences, especially biology. For this reason, the anti-gender movement seeks to develop into an alternative field of knowledge production that aims to dismantle post-structural research in the social sciences and humanities.²¹

More recently, anti-gender actors have also begun to establish their own universities. One example is the Polish ultraconservative think tank Ordo Iuris, which produces so-called alternative facts for the Polish government, or what Erzebeta Korolucz²² calls “ultraconservative gendered knowledge” framed by legal and medical discourses and supported by conservative experts with law or medical degrees. Among other things, Ordo Iuris prepared anti-abortion legislation in Poland and recently established the ‘Collegium Intermarium’, which began its work in the fall of 2022. According to its website, “Collegium Intermarium was founded as a response to the deepening crisis of academic life. It refers to the classic perception of the university as a space of free debate and courageous search for truth”.²³ However, it is also true that the alternative knowledge produced to trigger anti-gender actions has its weak points, the most important being the discrepancy between this knowledge and the actual experiences of women and other groups.²⁴ Mieke Verloo rightly claims that in the face of the production of alternative knowledge, it is not “the truth that disappears, but rather the facts and arguments producing it”.²⁵

19 Ghodsee, K. (2014) “A tale of ‘two totalitarianisms’: The crisis of capitalism and the historical memory of communism”. *History of the Present* 4, no. 2, pp. 115-142.

20 Korolczuk, E. (2021) “Counteracting challenges to gender equality in the era of anti-gender campaigns: Competing gender knowledges and affective solidarity”. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 27, no. 4, pp. 694-717 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxaa021>).

21 Paternotte, D. and M. Verloo (2021) “De-democratization and the politics of knowledge: Unpacking the cultural marxism narrative”. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 28, no. 3, pp. 556-578 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab025>).

22 Korolczuk, E. “Counteracting challenges to gender equality”.

23 “Collegium Intermarium: A new university connecting academics from Central Europe” (2021) .

24 Korolczuk, E. “Counteracting challenges to gender equality”.

25 Verloo, M. (2018) “Gender Knowledge, and Opposition to the Feminist Project: Extreme-Right Populist Parties in the Netherlands”. *Politics and Governance* 6, no. 3, p. 23.

Conclusion

The anti-gender movement is successful because, like populist parties and groups across Europe, it appeals to people's fears about the future – first and foremost, the future of the family, and especially the future of children. With its focus on corrupt elites, the anti-gender movement gives people the promise of a better future. The future, however, lies in the past: our societies, it is claimed, should return to the natural order of things.²⁶ Bauman²⁷ called these demands for a return to the past “retrotopia”: utopian longings today are directed toward an ideal past rather than a better future. The anti-gender movement is a typical retrotopian project. However, the success of the anti-gender movement should not tempt us to create a grand narrative of a global backlash against everything that has been achieved in the last decades in terms of gender equality and sexual politics.²⁸ Indeed, many anti-gender campaigns and messages of hatred toward gender and sexual minorities have led to countermeasures or perhaps even increased public support for equality.

In the summer of 2022, Slovenia, with which we began this text, became the first post-socialist country to introduce marriage equality, including the possibility of adopting children. The claim that the anti-gender movement in Slovenia has contributed to equal rights may seem a little far-fetched, but the fact is that all of this was possible in part because the adoption of the marriage equality law was a reaction to the radical activities of the anti-gender movement.²⁹ We cannot naively say that the danger of the anti-gender project is not real – it is. But the success of the anti-gender movement should not be discouraging. Rather, it should be seen as an opportunity to critically engage with the current problems of feminism and the LGBT+ movement, and to move away from the complicity of gender equality and sexual politics with neoliberal ideology. Instead, the role of feminism and the LGBT+ movement in the 21st century should be to create new spaces of freedom based on strong social politics and solidarity.

26 Kuhar R. and D. Paternotte (eds) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*.

27 Bauman, Z. (2017) *Retrotopia*, (Cambridge: Polity Press).

28 Paternotte, D. and R. Kuhar (2018) “Disentangling and locating the ‘global right’: Anti-gender campaigns in Europe”. *Politics and Governance* 6, no. 3, pp. 6-19 (<https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i3.1557>).

29 Kuhar, R. (2022) “How the anti-gender movement contributed to marriage equality in Slovenia”, *Cultural War Papers (Illiberalism Studies Program)*, no. 36, pp. 1-10.

JAVIER ÁLVAREZ-GÁLVEZ

Social inequalities in mental health in a post-pandemic Europe

The Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected mental health and has also contributed to widening existing social inequalities. In this chapter, we provide an overview of how the pandemic has led to increased rates of stress, anxiety, depression and other mental disorders among the general population, but especially among the most vulnerable groups. In particular, we analyse social inequalities in mental health and show how factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic status (based on income, educational, or occupational differences), ethnic or migrant status, or disability have determined mental health in our societies. Finally, specifically focusing on the situation in European countries, we offer some clues as to what strategies could be used to buffer the impact of the social and health crisis in which we are still immersed.

Mental health impact of Covid-19

The repercussions of Covid-19 on mental health have varied substantially among EU countries. However, there are multiple studies showing increased rates of mental health conditions such as stress, fear, anxiety or depression in the European population, particularly during the initial periods of the pandemic when the harshest containment measures were put in place.¹ The pandemic has also led to changes in lifestyles and risk behaviours. In fact, rates of alcohol and tobacco consumption were initially reduced, although we can find studies indicating an increase in drug use. Furthermore, although there is still no clear evidence pointing to an actual rise in suicide rates during the pandemic, recent work suggests an increase in suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and self-harm.¹

1 World Health Organization (2022) "Technical Advisory Group on the mental health impacts of Covid-19 in the WHO European Region briefing: mental health impacts of Covid-19 across the European Region and associated opportunities for action". No. WHO/EURO: 2022-6108-45873-66068, World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe.

It has furthermore become clear that it is not only the existence of the pandemic that has caused mental health problems, but that actual Covid-19 infection also increases the risk of developing subsequent mental health conditions. Indeed, a significant proportion of people who have contracted Covid-19 end up experiencing prolonged symptoms of mental illness.¹ In addition, the pandemic has also indirectly affected the mental health of the European population through the progressive dismantling of mental health services. In fact, when the new virus became the priority in terms of public health, mental health services took a back seat (even bearing in mind that mental health services have commonly played a secondary role in national health systems). In many countries, both within and outside the European context, cuts in health personnel and closures of health services (including primary care, hospital and community care services) have taken place, leading to a progressive reduction in patients' access to mental health services (a trend that has also occurred in other pathologies and health units).

However, although at certain points in the pandemic, we may have had the feeling that the mental health impact was equally distributed among the population, data have revealed that the existence of social inequalities has led to differences in morbidity and mortality among different groups in our societies. These differences have also been observed in mental health outcomes. The following is an overview of the social inequalities in mental health that the pandemic has generated.

Gender and age inequalities

As in previous crises, the Covid-19 crisis has had a greater impact on certain social groups, including women and older adults. Different studies show that women have been more likely to report adverse mental health conditions than men.^{2,3} In fact, women have consistently reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, and lower levels of resilience,⁴ and this trend has been even more pronounced among pregnant women.⁵ Furthermore, although the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic on mental health have been widespread among the population of our societies, women have also been disproportionately affected by job losses and reductions in income due to the new health crisis,⁶ and this impact has been harder among economically disadvantaged women. To explain these differences in mental

2 Iob, E., A. Steptoe and D. Fancourt (2020) "Abuse, self-harm and suicidal ideation in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic". *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 217, pp. 543-546.

3 Liu, C. H., E. Zhang, G. T. F. Wong, S. Hyun and H. C. Hahm (2020) "Factors associated with depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptomatology during the Covid-19 pandemic: Clinical implications for U.S. young adult mental health". *Psychiatry Research*, 290, Article 113172.

4 Farhood, L., S. Fares and C. Hamady (2018) "PTSD and gender: Could gender differences in war trauma types, symptom clusters and risk factors predict gender differences in PTSD prevalence?". *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 21, pp. 725-733.

5 Berthelot, N., R. Lemieux, J. Garon-Bissonnette, C. Drouin-Maziade, É. Martel and M. Maziade (2020) "Uptrend in distress and psychiatric symptomatology in pregnant women during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic". *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica*, 99(7), pp. 848-855.

6 Gibson, B., J. Schneider, D. Talamonti and M. Forshaw (2021) "The impact of inequality on mental health outcomes during the Covid-19 pandemic: A systematic review". *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 62(1), p. 101.

health, several reasons have been put forward in the literature, including dual workload (that is, professional activities and additional housework), differences in gender roles and responsibilities (for example, lower pay at work), domestic violence and harassment in working environments.⁶

Given that the impact of the pandemic on the different social strata has been complex and varied, sexual inequalities related to the Covid-19 pandemic have not been well identified. However, according to recent evidence, this health crisis has possibly had a higher impact on specific sexual minority groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, as it is typically their members who experience the most stigma, discrimination and subsequent mental health problems.^{3,7}

The effect of the pandemic has been unequal among different age groups. Although older adults (specifically those over 65) have been at higher risk of severe illness and death during Covid-19, the pandemic has particularly affected the mental health of young population groups.⁸ Despite the social restrictions and quarantines carried out in the different European countries affecting the lives of all their respective inhabitants (from children to the older population), teenagers and young adults were likely the ones who suffered the most from the new situation (e.g., with adaptation from face-to-face to online learning, restrictions on sporting and leisure activities and the interruption of social and interpersonal relations, higher job insecurity, and more time on social media platforms). In short, the pandemic created a situation of socioeconomic uncertainty at a critical age for personal and professional development, which led teenagers and young adults to experience greater stress, fear and anxiety, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and additional reported symptoms of depression.⁶

Socioeconomic inequalities

While the Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact in terms of morbidity and mortality in European countries as a whole, one of the most significant ways in which it has affected the population is by widening existing socioeconomic inequalities. The pandemic has increased economic inequalities through widespread job losses and economic disruption, with some industries and sectors being more affected than others (for example, the closure of non-essential economic activities such as tourism and leisure companies). This has resulted in increased economic difficulties, including evictions and homelessness, among small entrepreneurs and the self-employed, as well as among those who had insecure employment (for example, younger groups that were starting their professional careers).⁶

7 Alonzi, S., A. La Torre and M. W. Silverstein (2020) "The psychological impact of preexisting mental and physical health conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic". *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12(S1), pp. 236-238.

8 Cowie, H. and C. A. Myers (2021) "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of children and young people". *Children & Society*, 35(1), pp. 62-74.

However, the problems have not only been of economic character. For instance, the closure of schools and universities during the lockdown periods and the following shift to online education also disrupted the education of millions of students, which again severely impacted low-income families, either because they could not access material resources (webcams, personal computers, software) or because they had difficulties in handling technology, a lack of time for teaching support, or a lack of adequate skills for distance learning.^{6,8}

The pandemic has also induced profound changes in ways of working. The shift towards teleworking and online learning has highlighted the continuing digital divides in our societies. While many people have had the opportunity to enjoy the flexibility of teleworking and continue social relationships through diverse online communication platforms, less digitally skilled communities have nevertheless demonstrated limited access to the technology and internet connectivity needed to participate in these activities.⁸

In addition to the health inequalities that Covid-19 may have generated, these social and economic inequalities appear to have had a profound impact on the mental health of the population. Socioeconomic problems such as unemployment, job insecurity, part-time work, lower access to essential products, child adversity, higher parental workload, family and gender violence, lack of social relationships, reduced access to healthcare facilities, physical inactivity, alcohol and drug abuse, insomnia and increased screen time have impacted differently on the health of the various population groups. However, the greatest impact in terms of mental health has been on the most vulnerable groups in our societies – that is, marginalised communities, individuals with the lowest incomes, those with the lowest educational levels and, in general, those with the lowest occupational status. Accordingly, people who were unemployed or lost employment during the pandemic reported worse mental health.⁹

It is important to consider, however, that higher-status groups have also had their mental health affected. For example, the new telework routines may have increased the load and pace of work meetings in contexts that are sometimes not entirely under the worker's control (it is not the same participating in a work videoconference from the office as from home with children). Likewise, we found studies that suggest that groups of highly educated professionals have also seen their stress increase due to new workloads and the loss of control of everyday work situations.⁶ Moreover, the impact of the pandemic has been unequal in terms of the different occupations. Professionals in the health sector, such as medical doctors or nurses, as well as other frontline workers in the primary and service sectors, have been more greatly exposed to the virus, which has increased stress, anxiety and depressive disorders among these groups.¹⁰

9 Gloster, A. T. et al. (2020) "Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on mental health: An international study". *PLoS One* 15.12, e0244809.

10 Kassianos, A. P. et al. (2021) "Mental health and adherence to covid-19 protective behaviors among cancer patients during the covid-19 pandemic: An international, multinational cross-sectional study". *Cancers*, 13(24), 6294.

Finally, in relation to the place of residence, evidence suggests that living in an urban area could worsen the mental health of the population, since, in these contexts, it seems more difficult to isolate oneself from the disease (with the need, for example, to take public transport and end up in occasional crowds during everyday activities).¹¹

Race and ethnicity

Ethnic minorities and, in general, people with immigrant status have also seen their socioeconomic situation worsen during the pandemic. Indeed, as has recently become evident, immigrants are now facing particularly difficult times in the labour market because many of the gains of the past decade in employment rates among immigrants have been wiped out by the pandemic. In all countries that have data available, unemployment among immigrants has increased more than among the native-born population. The largest increases in immigrant unemployment have been observed in Canada, Spain, the United States, Norway and Sweden. In fact, in Sweden, almost 60% of the initial increase in unemployment was accounted for by immigrants. In the United States, immigrant unemployment was lower than that of their native-born peers by almost one percentage point before the pandemic and is now two points higher.¹²

In this context, the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly affected immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities, as a large portion of these communities reside in economically disadvantaged areas with inadequate healthcare. They are usually also employed in essential jobs with a higher risk of exposure to Covid-19 and, consequently, with a higher risk of suffering from diseases that make them even more vulnerable to serious illnesses and consequent inequalities caused by the virus. These disadvantages can lead to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among racial and ethnic groups such as Black, Asian, or Hispanic communities.^{6, 13}

Chronicity and disability

Chronically ill people with physical and mental disabilities, and people with pre-existing mental conditions, have also demonstrated a greater predisposition to suffer from mental illness in the context of the pandemic. On the one hand, the conditions of isolation and the new regulatory context may have generated problems in groups that needed a daily routine to maintain their health and social well-being (for example, in the case of people with dementia or under treatment requiring close medical follow-up). On the other hand, the new context of health emergency created by the pandemic led to changes in health

11 Carozzi, F., S. Provenzano and S. Roth (2020) "Urban density and Covid-19". Discussion Papers Series, IZA.

12 OECD (2022) "International Migration Outlook 2022". OECD Publishing, Paris.

13 Smith, K., K. Bhui and A. Cipriani (2020) "Covid-19, mental health and ethnic minorities". *Evidence-Based Mental Health*, 23(3), pp. 89-90.

services (even closing or, at best, modifying the pace of care in the various units). It has also increased waiting lists and postponed healthcare for serious diseases (such as cancer, diabetes, HIV, cardiovascular disease). Indeed, recent studies point to a future increase in mortality in diseases that were neglected during the pandemic period. This context of uncertainty has also had a significant impact on the mental health of these groups.¹⁴

On the other hand, it is also possible to find studies that offer a different view. For example, a recent study carried out with people with cancer showed that these individuals were less stressed, more psychologically flexible, and had higher levels of positive affect compared to non-cancer participants.¹⁰

Mental health challenges in a post-pandemic Europe

As described, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of people around the world, contributing to the widening of existing social inequalities (including gender and age, income, educational, occupational, health and disability, ethnic and racial inequalities). People who were already marginalised or disadvantaged in some way, such as those experiencing discrimination, homelessness, or living in poverty, have indeed been shown to be more vulnerable to the potential negative effects on their mental health as a result of the pandemic. In addition, the fear and uncertainty of the pandemic have contributed to increased rates of stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders among the general population.

Furthermore, it has become clear that the different measures taken to control the spread of Covid-19, such as confinement and social distancing, also had a negative impact on mental health. These measures led to isolation and loneliness, which in turn led to the deterioration of mental health conditions, especially of the most vulnerable groups (that is, those less able to be resilient in the face of adversity during this period). Moreover, the economic recession resulting from the pandemic led to job losses and financial insecurity, which has not helped these most socially vulnerable groups either. Consequently, the health crisis has exacerbated existing social inequalities in mental health, and added new challenges and risk factors that are likely to increase mental health gaps in the near future. What is more, the disruption of access to mental health services due to the pandemic has made it difficult for many people to receive the support they need. It is, therefore, critical that national governments, healthcare providers, and public health and social researchers in the EU address these issues and provide support to the most vulnerable groups.

From these data, we can say that although at present it may be risky to give a diagnosis of the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the European population – since, in fact, many of the effects are still being suffered and even exacerbated by the ongoing war in Ukraine – current evidence shows that the health crisis has had a major

14 Mauro, V., M. Lorenzo, C. Paolo and H. Sergio (2020) "Treat all COVID 19-positive patients, but do not forget those negative with chronic diseases". *Internal and Emergency Medicine* (advance online publication).

impact on the mental health of: 1) the young population; 2) women (including pregnant women); 3) groups of lower socioeconomic status (although negative effects have also been experienced in middle classes and those with high occupational statuses); 4) ethnic minorities and immigrants who have suffered rejection in a context of rising unemployment rates, worsening working conditions and scarcity of material resources; 5) people with long-term illnesses and physical or mental disabilities, who in countries like Spain were still suffering from gaps in care resulting from the financial crisis of 2008.

While the socioeconomic context of the different European countries is too varied and complex to offer recommendations adjusted to the reality of the different local situations, from the existing evidence, we can deduce many regularities that have been reproduced in the vast majority of countries. During this period of health crisis, many young Europeans have experienced moments of uncertainty that could affect their development in adulthood. Millions of teenagers have seen their face-to-face personal relationships put on hold, while young adults have seen their professional training processes postponed and/or slowed down. University students have had to return to their parents in many cases by switching to online learning. Even if this has allowed them to continue their studies, it has broken their contact with their peers and professors. These, however, are relationships that are fundamental for their future personal and professional development. As has been observed, women seem to have suffered to a greater extent from social inequalities in health and, particularly, in mental health (given that they are the most vulnerable group in terms of the role that they still retain in some countries of ‘family caregivers’). Women have indeed been both workers and caregivers during the pandemic, taking care of the home as well as having to act as improvised health professionals and teachers in the family environment, taking care of the health and education of dependent members of the household. In addition, although the pandemic may have affected people of lower socioeconomic status to a greater extent, it has also had a big impact on upper-middle-class professionals who have seen their lifestyles changed. Furthermore, the pandemic seems to have opened the old wounds of racism and xenophobia, which in today’s context of scarce resources have become arguments for political parties.

The recent FEPS policy brief series on „Mental health and suicide during the pandemic“¹⁵ provides new evidence of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of the population in several European countries. From the data collected, a generalised worsening of mental health and especially of suicidal ideation can be observed. In particular, a higher propensity to suicide is observed among the French population. In countries such as Germany and Spain, there is a clear association between socioeconomic inequalities (particularly in working conditions) and worsening mental health. In countries such as Ireland, which have suffered some of the most stringent measures in the EU, there is an increase in feelings of depression. Meanwhile in Sweden, despite having had more open and relaxed policies to control the pandemic, negative effects on mental health have also been noted, even though it is a country characterised by a strong welfare

¹⁵ <https://feeps-europe.eu/publication/suicide-during-the-pandemic-series/>.

state. In countries such as Poland, where there were already high rates of depression and suicide, the mental health context has also worsened. And Spain had the highest suicide mortality rates in the country's history.

In this context, several steps should be taken to improve the mental health of the European population after the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the most important is to provide adequate access to mental health services, including therapy, counselling, and social support. This could help people who are struggling with mental health problems to receive the support they need to cope with the social and economic challenges they are facing today. In addition, it is important to address the underlying social and economic factors, such as unemployment or bad working conditions among vulnerable population groups, which could contribute to poor mental health. This may include measures to support people who have lost their jobs or experienced financial hardship as a result of the pandemic, as well as policies to promote social connection and combat loneliness, in particular among the older groups of our societies.

It is therefore also crucial to raise awareness about the importance of mental health and to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. This could help create a more supportive and understanding environment for those who are suffering mental health conditions associated with discrimination. Overall, improving mental health in Europe after the Covid-19 pandemic will require a coordinated effort from governments, healthcare providers, researchers, and local community organisations in order to promote a more supportive and inclusive society to be able to address the mental health challenges of the post-pandemic era.

KATARÍNA KLINGOVÁ

Information operations

Information and data are the new driving forces and currency of modern times and warfare. Spreading particular (dis)information and waging information operations can be equivalent to firing a missile. Disinformation is a cheap and more subtle form of influencing operations or hybrid threats. Various malign and disinformation narratives targeting whole societies or a specific audience, among others, undermine democratic processes and trust in institutions or increase the polarisation of society. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia went hand in hand with the Kremlin's intensive and large-scale information operations waged not only in Ukraine, but also in Europe and in numerous other countries around the world. Regulation of social media platforms, increased transparency of media ownership and limitations of advertising are legislative initiatives driven by the EU. Whether these measures, including the adoption of the new Code of Practice on Disinformation, will reduce the impact of information operations remains to be seen.

Spreading disinformation, smear campaigns or waging various information operations is not a new phenomenon. Lying is as old as time and various scholars have theorised the use of information manipulation since antiquity. Among them are Plato's *Dialogues*, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Pascal's *Art of Persuasion* and Arthur Schopenhauer's *The Art of Being Right*.¹

With the development of television and radio, state actors have increasingly utilised information operations and propaganda in the 20th century. One of the most successful state disinformation campaigns, which still resonates with various audiences worldwide, was the KGB Operation *Infektion* in the 1980s. The USSR and its allies spread the narrative that the HIV/AIDS virus was man-made and invented as a part of a research project on biological weapons at a US Army installation in Maryland. The aim of the operation was to sow distrust towards the US, foster anti-Americanism, isolate the US abroad and cause tensions in countries with the presence of US military bases, which were often portrayed

¹ Jeangène Vilmer, J.-B., A. Escorcía, M. Guillaume et al. (2018) "Information manipulation: A challenge for our democracies". Policy Planning Staff of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM) of the Ministry for the Armed Forces.

as the cause of AIDS outbreaks in the local populations.² The development of new information communication technologies, social media platforms and internet access have, however, significantly increased the speed with which propaganda and disinformation are disseminated within societies. A widely accepted typology of Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan differentiates between three forms of false information based on the intent of actors that disseminate the messages:

- *misinformation*: when the information is not true, but it is not created and shared with the intent of doing harm;
- *disinformation*: when untrue content is created and shared with the intent of doing harm; and
- *malinformation*: when the information that is based on reality is used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country. (The authors include some types of hate speech and harassment under the category malinformation, as people are often targeted because of their personal history or affiliations. For example, when private information is made public or when people's affiliations, like their religion, are used against them).³

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has been accompanied by what the World Health Organization (WHO) describes as 'infodemic':⁴ an information chaos brought on societies through the accelerated dissemination of misinformation, disinformation and all kinds of conspiracy theories, which have had devastating consequences on individual lives and societies.

Information operations are one of many tools used within hybrid threats or foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).⁵ They include, among others, the spread of disinformation and propaganda; the systematic suppression of information and internet takedowns; the manipulation of social media platforms and the use of their algorithms to create information bubbles that are polarising society and inciting hate against societal groups. In addition, paid advertisement and targeted content; hack-and-leak operations during electoral processes; threats and harassment against various members of society, including journalists, political opponents and representatives of civil society organisations, are used in information operations.⁶

Investigations of national security authorities and the work of numerous researchers have provided evidence that malicious and authoritarian (foreign) state and non-state actors, such as Russia, China, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have spread disinformation, conducted information operations and deployed other interference tactics to influence democratic processes in the EU and other parts of the world, including Africa and Latin America. As Peter Pomerantsev wrote in his book *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against*

2 Boghardt, T. (2009) "Operation Infektion: Soviet bloc intelligence and its AIDS disinformation campaign". *Studies in Intelligence*, 4(53), pp. 1-24.

3 Wardle, C. and H. Derakhshan (2017) "Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making". Council of Europe Report DGI(2017)09.

4 1st WHO Infodemiology Conference. Online, 30 June and 1, 7, 9, 14 and 16 July 2020.

5 "Tackling disinformation, foreign information manipulation & interference". European External Action Service, 27 October 2021.

6 Kalniete, S. (2022) "Report on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (2020/2268(INI))". European Parliament, 8 February.

Reality, while autocratic regimes once controlled the narrative by silencing opponents, now they seek to confuse their populations by bombarding them with false information, half-truths and competing narratives. It is a strategy that Pomerantsev describes as “censorship through noise”.⁷ Individual countries, or institutions such as the EU, consider these FIMI activities as violations of international law, aiming, for example, to manipulate and deceive citizens and affect their voting behaviour; divide, polarise and exploit the vulnerabilities of societies; and sow distrust in national governments and public institutions, and thus, democratic processes. FIMI, therefore, constitutes a severe threat to the security and sovereignty of individual states as well as international organisations, such as the EU and NATO.⁸

One of the most eye-opening cases of state-funded subversive efforts in the past few years was Russian interference during the 2016 US presidential election. According to Facebook’s testimony at the US Senate,⁹ Russia’s information operations with Kremlin-planted ads and fraudulent posts, only on Facebook, reached more than 126 million users in the US.¹⁰ Furthermore, researchers at the Oxford Internet Institute, who analysed over 19 million posts on Twitter before the US presidential election, found high automatised (and thus, inauthenticity) of the most active accounts. According to this research, the 100 most active Twitter accounts posted an average of 500 tweets per day.¹¹ These tweets, polarising US society, spreading false information about election fraud and supporting particular candidates, were disseminated by networks of bots on Twitter.

In addition, the Kremlin used hackers to get hold of the Democratic party’s emails and its media and propaganda¹² machinery, including RT and Sputnik, to wage a smear campaign against Democratic representatives and Hillary Clinton, who was the Democratic presidential candidate. Similar methods of Russian information operations were observed during elections across numerous EU countries, including in the French presidential elections, the 2021 German federal election and the Brexit referendum. Ironically, it is the openness of democratic institutions and society that have provided various venues and tools for malign domestic or foreign actors to undermine democracy.

7 Pomerantsev, P. (2019) *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War against Reality* (New York: Public Affairs).

8 Kalniete, S. (2022) “Report on foreign interference”.

9 Committee on the Judiciary (2017) “Extremist content and Russian disinformation online: Working with tech to find solutions”. US Senate, 27 October.

10 Solon, O. and S. Siddiqui (2017) “Russia-backed Facebook posts ‘reached 126m Americans’ during US election”. *The Guardian*, 31 October.

11 Kollanyi, B., P. N. Howard and S. C. Woolley (2016) “Bots and automation over Twitter during the U.S. election”. Project on Computational Propaganda, Data Memo 2016.4.

12 For the purpose of this paper, the term ‘propaganda’ is understood as the dissemination of information – facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths or lies – to influence public opinion. Read more in Jack, C. (2017) “Lexicon of lies: Terms of problematic information”. Data & Society Research Institute, 9 August.

Incentives to spread disinformation

There are a plethora of reasons why particular people, organisations or states pursue information operations and spread disinformation. Different motivations for pursuing information operations and spreading false narratives depend on whether such activities are conducted by state-sponsored or state-led actors, or if it is insurgent disinformation disseminated by non-state actors.

Information operations pursuing *geopolitical goals* are usually the most insidious; they require multiple actors and tools and can be conducted for years or even decades. A historic example is the USSR's propaganda campaign during the Cold War in Eastern Europe. The goal of geopolitical and subversive information operations or propaganda could be the creation of a sphere of influence, the projection of power, change of the political orientation of a country, delegitimisation and corrosion of state institutions or the creation of a so-called fifth column within a country.¹³

Politically motivated disinformation is pursued by particular individuals, groups, political representatives or even foreign subversive actors with the aim of provoking domestic conflict or spreading particular narratives to promote their cause, to delegitimise a particular politician or political party or to influence public debate. While smear campaigns or attempts to discredit opponents are common and normal in politics, the utilisation of inauthentic social media accounts, pretending to be ordinary people or the use of paid supporters and commentators have become increasingly normalised. Automated networks of bots and armies of trolls might systematically produce a particular point of view. This can create a bias perception, suggesting that there is organic grassroots support for a given candidate, while, in reality, it is all artificially generated.

Another motivation to conduct information operations is an attempt to persuade a selected audience or nation to adopt the ideological worldviews of the propagator. Convincing the masses of one's own ideology or dogma has always been part of every political, religious or societal system. The ability to achieve this by peaceful means and in a way that the recipients of the message give up their values and adopt those of the foreign actor is the ultimate goal of hybrid threats.¹⁴ Access to the internet and information communication technologies became, for example, perfect tools for operations and recruitment for right-wing or Islamic extremist groups.¹⁵

The spread of disinformation is also a lucrative business model. For actors producing disinformation, for social media platforms and other companies providing services to amplify malign and polarising content, the hope for financial gain is among the incentives for spreading disinformation and conspiracy theories.

13 A clandestine group or faction of subversive agents who attempt to undermine a nation's solidarity by any means at their disposal, usually in favour of an enemy group or another nation.

14 For more information on hybrid threats/war, see: Giannopoulos, G., H. Smith and M. Theocharidou (2020) "The landscape of hybrid threats: A conceptual model". European Commission, Ispra, PUBSY No. 123305.

15 Lia, B. (2007) "Al-Suri's doctrines for decentralized Jihadi training – part 1". *Terrorism Monitor*, 1(5), pp. 1-11.

The interest of social media platforms is to keep their users on the platforms for as long as possible. As a result, massive amounts of personal data are used and monetised in the social media business model solely based on advertising. Harvard Professor Shoshana Zuboff refers to this trend as the “age of surveillance capitalism”.¹⁶ In 2021, Facebook earned \$114 billion from ads.¹⁷

Disinformation websites, as social media platforms, use ‘clickbait’: content attracting attention and encouraging visitors to click on a link to a particular web page and online advertising. PR experts estimate that approximately 60% of the revenue generated by ads goes to owners of websites. According to the Global Disinformation Index, in 2019, approximately \$235 million of advertising ended up on 20,000 domains flagged for disinformation.¹⁸

Various companies or individuals that provide services of paid trolls, false followers or automated bots, in order to promote particular content or to generate likes or reshares, are equally attracted by potential gains. The NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence, in cooperation with the Ukrainian social media analytics company Singularex, mapped the online market for social media manipulation tools and services. Their research revealed a thriving black-market infrastructure for generating fictitious accounts and providing various proxies. This market and its services are open and accessible – just a few clicks away from their potential customers – and often promoted via advertisements on internet search engines or social media platforms. This research also found that Russian service providers seemed to dominate this social media manipulation market.¹⁹

All this contributes to a huge industry, with giant political-economic profits, dedicated to intentionally fuelling disinformation. Therefore, the regulation of big tech platforms and social media companies is necessary. The EU has launched a series of legislative processes and initiatives, including the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act and the new EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, aiming to establish accountability, algorithmic transparency, and the openness of advertising patterns and business models of big-tech companies. The EU is thus establishing oversight of and enforcement mechanisms for social media platforms. The recent layoffs at Twitter, Meta and other big-tech companies, however, raise concerns for whether these social media platforms will be able to comply with new EU regulation.²⁰

16 Kavenna, J. (2019) “Shoshana Zuboff: ‘Surveillance capitalism is an assault on human autonomy’”. *The Guardian*, 4 October.

17 Dixon, S. (2022) “Meta: Advertising revenue worldwide 2009-2021”. Statista, 27 July.

18 „The quarter billion dollar question: How is disinformation gaming ad tech?”. Global Disinformation Index, 1 September 2019.

19 NATO StratCom COE and Singularex (2019) “The black market for social media manipulation”. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

20 Lomas, N. (2022) “Twitter layoffs trigger oversight risk warning from Brussels”. TechCrunch, 24 November.

The Kremlin's disinformation and propaganda machinery

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin, aiming to restore its regional supremacy and weakening the West, has been successfully waging information operations. Among the narratives it uses is that of a decadent, liberal West, which is falling apart. Other narratives depict the West as trying to destroy the traditional values of certain countries or calling for the cooperation of Slavic countries. The Kremlin, its media machinery and various pro-Kremlin actors have been exploiting various polarising and sensitive issues, such as migration, the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine – inflation, increased prices of food and energy, and hunger in various regions of world – to discredit and undermine western democracies. For many years, Russian representatives have been accusing western and US operations of being responsible for a deteriorating security environment and international relations. In addition, Russia portrays itself as a victim that is unjustly accused by the West or as the protector of small nations.

In 2020, the US Department of State's Global Engagement Center (GEC) outlined the five pillars of Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem: 1) official government communications; 2) state-funded global messaging; 3) the cultivation of proxy sources; 4) the weaponisation of social media; and 5) cyber-enabled disinformation. This machinery reflects both the sources of disinformation and the tactics used by the Kremlin. Its backbone is, however, state-controlled media, TV and news agencies, with RT (formerly Russia Today) and Sputnik being the most important of these state-funded global messengers.²¹ In 2021, the budget for the Kremlin's media machinery was more than \$1.5 billion. Furthermore, in the first quarter of 2022, it was tripled in comparison to the same period in 2021.²²

RT is a multilingual network of television stations, websites and social media channels operating in six languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Arabic and Russian). It serves as a Russian state-controlled media agency and political influence tool in the world. Its budget in 2022 was more than \$350 million. RT, with its social media accounts, has become a popular source of information in Latin America, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic: RT's Spanish-language Facebook page has more followers than the English one. In November 2022, RT Balkan was launched in Serbian. Another avenue targeting foreign audiences is the international news service Sputnik. It runs radio broadcasts, websites and social media channels in more than 30 languages. By October 2022, the East StratCom Task Force of the European External Action Service had debunked over 14,000 articles from disinformation websites tied to the Kremlin on its EUvsDisinfo database.²³

According to the US Department of State, apart from its media machinery, Russia has also spent over \$300 million since 2014 on covert information operation operations

21 US Department of State Global Engagement Center (2022) "Kremlin-funded media: RT and Sputnik's role in Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem". GEC Special Report, January.

22 Michałowska-Kubś, A. and J. Kubś (2022) "Coining lies. Kremlin spends 1.5 billion per year to spread disinformation and propaganda". Debunk.org, 8 August.

23 "Disinfo database". EUvsDisinfo.

in Europe, with Brussels being identified as a “hub for foundations and other fronts” to support various political representatives with pro-Russian affinity.²⁴ In recent years, various political parties and their representatives were revealed to have close ties to the Kremlin or Russian oligarchs, including Marine Le Pen and her National Rally party, Italy’s Matteo Salvini with his far-right League party²⁵ and Viktor Orbán, who was described in the past as the Kremlin’s Trojan horse in the EU.²⁶ In 2022, several Bulgarian politicians, as well as other opinionmakers, including prominent journalist and analysts, were paid by the Kremlin for spreading propaganda and malign narratives, according to the Bulgarian secret service.²⁷

In recent years, an increasing number of domestic political parties and their representatives have been taking on board pro-Russian narratives and spreading various polarising narratives that are undermining democratic processes. Indeed, Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, Matteo Salvini, Viktor Orbán and other populist, far-right or anti-system politicians have been effectively spreading disinformation, pro-Russian narratives or malign narratives at the centre of public debate in various countries. Believers in various conspiracy theories, disinformation and polarising narratives have thus moved from the fringes of the information environment to prime-time debates.

In September 2022, EU DisinfoLab, a Belgian NGO analysing and countering disinformation, reported on an ‘operation Doppelgänger’, an information operation during which the websites of at least 17 media providers, including the German tabloid *Bild*, French newspaper *20minutes*, Italian news agency Ansa, UK newspaper *The Guardian* and news agency RBC Ukraine, were cloned using very similar internet domain names and used to spread pro-Russian war propaganda and disinformation, targeting both Ukraine and the West. False content from the Doppelgänger websites was further amplified via false accounts of these alleged media on various social media platforms. This cross-platform information operation, which impersonated authentic and investigative media, also focused on instigating fear in the populations of Germany, Italy, France, Latvia and the UK that sanctions against Russia would ruin their lives.²⁸

Another avenue through which the Kremlin attempted to influence public opinion in western European countries was various influencers. In 2021, several French and German YouTubers and bloggers were approached by the allegedly UK-based PR agency Fazze to spread false information about the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine among their followers, and thus, discourage them from being vaccinated. Researchers eventually found out that the alleged PR agency was tied to a Russian entrepreneur.²⁹

24 “Russia covertly spent \$300 million to meddle abroad - US”. BBC, 10 October 2022.

25 Horowitz, J. (2019) “Audio suggests secret plan for Russians to fund party of Italy’s Salvini”. *NY Times*, 10 October.

26 Coackley, A. (2022) “Putin’s Trojan horse inside the European Union”. *Foreign Policy*, 3 August.

27 Nikolov, K. (2022) “Bulgarian secret services: Russia pays public figures to spread propaganda”. *EurActiv*, 4 July.

28 Alaphilippe, A., G. Machado, R. Miguel et al. (2022) “Doppelgänger – media clones serving Russian propaganda”. *EU DisinfoLab*, 27 September.

29 Henley, J. (2021) “Influencers say Russia-linked PR agency asked them to disparage Pfizer vaccine”. *The Guardian*, 25 May.

In March 2022, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU took the unprecedented measure of suspending five Russian state-owned outlets (Sputnik, Russia Today, Rossiya RTR, Rossiya 24, TV Centre International) from broadcasting into its territory;³⁰ these outlets were just a few actors in a well-oiled propaganda machinery and widespread networks of pro-Russian websites and actors operating at national and international levels. Although these outlets' websites and TV channels were blocked in the EU, their activities remained unchanged in other parts of the world, including the Western Balkans. The impact of such takedowns can thus be questioned and requires further investigation.

The war in Ukraine and the impact of year-long information operations

Russia was waging various information operations against Ukraine, even before the annexation of Crimea or the occupation of the eastern part of Ukraine in 2014, undermining the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and distorting citizens' trust towards it. These operations were accompanied by narratives depicting the West and the US as 'bloodthirsty' and needing to wage war to secure their economic primacy, and narratives accusing Ukraine of conducting a genocide against the country's Russian-speaking minority and being a Nazi nation.

The EU has blocked five Russian outlets and some member states have actively taken down or blocked numerous disinformation outlets spreading the Kremlin's war propaganda. However, the impact of Russia's long-term information operations on public perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) or in countries of the Western Balkans is visible, especially when it has been systematically eroding citizens' trust in public institutions and democratic processes.

In 2018, a flash Eurobarometer on fake news and disinformation revealed that 85% of respondents believed fake news to be a problem in their country and 83% perceived false or misrepresentative information as a problem for democracy.³¹ A survey conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs and the Centre for International Governance Innovation in 2019 found that, due to the spread of disinformation, many citizens have less trust in media (40%) and government (22%). Furthermore, 83% of respondents agreed that disinformation had a negative impact on their country's politics and political discussions.³²

The impact of information operations and pro-Russian propaganda in CEE was also revealed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While for a majority of central and eastern Europeans the February invasion was a wake-up call, and now they perceive Russia as a security threat, 30-40% of the CEE population remains vulnerable to the Kremlin's

³⁰ European Commission (2022) "EU sanctions against Russia explained".

³¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (2018) "Fake news and disinformation online". Publications Office of the European Union.

³² Ipsos Public Affairs and Centre for International Governance Innovation (2019) "CIGI Ipsos Global Survey: Internet security and trust".

propaganda and information operations.³³ A well-established network of pro-Kremlin actors, including domestic political representatives, social media pages and malign websites, are successfully disseminating Russian war propaganda and disinformation in central Europe. According to Detector Media, a Ukrainian NGO, Kremlin war propaganda and disinformation about Ukraine have been successfully spread, especially in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland.³⁴ Furthermore, increasing apathy for the war in Ukraine, rising social and economic implications of the war for EU societies, as well as the Kremlin's information operations are slowly undermining support for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. In August 2022, 32% of respondents in Germany thought their country providing weapons to Ukraine went too far,³⁵ but, so far, support for Ukraine remains stable among Germans, despite the rise in energy prices. On the other hand, rising energy prices are undermining support for Ukraine in the Netherlands.³⁶ In Slovakia, where 37% of respondents still considered Russia to be a strategic partner after the invasion in February, one fifth of the population preferred Russia to win the war, and 24% of respondents did not care when asked the question "how would you want the war in Ukraine to end?" in September.³⁷

Rising anti-government protests in central Europe organised, among others, by people with connections to the Kremlin underscore the fact that domestic politics pose a parallel battlefield for the war in Ukraine. Addressing domestic issues and social policies is as important as maintaining a united foreign policy front and support for Ukraine. Therefore, the information war for 'hearts and minds' in the EU and beyond is far from over.

Ukraine fights back

The success of Ukrainian efforts to counter Russian information operations in Ukraine surrounding the full-scale invasion in February is closely tied to prior systematic investments in public infrastructure, the capability building of Ukrainian civil society since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and a mobilisation of the entire population. As targets of intensive smear and disinformation campaigns, the political leadership of Ukraine has understood the importance of good strategic communication by public institutions, building societal resilience and an approach concerning the entire population in the fight against disinformation. The Ukrainian Centre for Countering Disinformation, of the National Security and Defence Council, the Ministry of Culture and the Information Policy's Centre for Strategic Communications, along with President Volodymyr Zelensky and his office, have

33 Hajdu, D., K. Klingová, J. Kazaz et al. (2022) "GLOBSEC trends 2022: CEE amid the war in Ukraine". GLOBSEC, 31 May.

34 Detector Media (2022) "Ukrainian Nazis for the Czech Republic, bio laboratories for North Macedonia, and Russophobia for Georgia. Analysis of Russian propaganda in 11 European countries". 12 September.

35 Statista (2022) "Opinion on German government's policy on the war in Ukraine August 2022".

36 DG Communication's Public Opinion Monitoring Unit (2022) "Public opinion on the war in Ukraine". European Parliament, 6 October.

37 Klingová, K. and D. Hajdu (2022) "New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, not Russia". GLOBSEC, 5 October.

been leading strategic communication and counter-disinformation activities at the state level. In addition, each ministry has a special unit focusing on strategic communication. However, it was the years-long activities of civil society organisations, researchers, journalists and activists that made a big difference in the increase of Ukraine's resilience between 2014 and 2020.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, coupled with the spread of narratives of a "special operation" and the need to "de-Nazify" Ukraine, has dehumanised 45 million Ukrainians, resulting in a Ukrainian 'no surrender' and 'fighting till the end' mentality. The all-hands-on-deck approach of Ukrainian society, which was not an easy target of the Kremlin's propaganda, resulted in Ukrainian strategic communication and countermeasures being compared to a tireless beehive. From powerful videos of citizens fighting back against occupiers and providing important logistical information on the movement of Russian soldiers to stories of soldiers on the frontlines; real-time evidence of atrocities conducted by Russian soldiers; and President Zelensky regularly addressing his fellow Ukrainians and the international community, despite being bombed – all these stories, pictures and videos have showcased the Ukrainian determination. Everyone became a communicator and witness to the Kremlin's atrocities and war crimes in Ukraine.

With support from the international community and big-tech companies, Ukraine was able to take down Russian trolls, withstand cyberattacks and successfully communicate its narratives and achievements to both its citizens and the wider international audience. Videos or recordings of telephone conversations of captured Russian soldiers calling their families, who often did not know that their relatives were deployed and fighting in Ukraine, as well as recordings of phone calls of Ukraine officials informing Russian families that their sons had been killed, revealed the information bubble and impact of the Kremlin's propaganda on its own domestic population. They have been an important part of Ukraine's psychological tactics.

Creative content produced by both Ukrainian citizens and public channels showed the importance of humour for the morale of the whole society. Trolling the enemy and its trolls has been an important element of Ukrainian information operations, often supported by armies of 'elves'.³⁸ And while the Kremlin has used a plethora of tools in an attempt to discredit Ukrainian political leaders, including AI-generated deepfake videos of President Zelensky surrendering, Ukrainians are still standing strong in the information operations' battlefield of the war.³⁹

While Ukraine and the West might be winning the battle of narratives in Europe and the wider transatlantic community, the Kremlin has used its propaganda machinery to undermine international order and confuse audiences in numerous countries of the Global South about its actions in Ukraine.⁴⁰ As the war in Ukraine continues, it is necessary to understand and address its various battlefields.

38 Abend, L. (2022) "Meet the Lithuanian 'elves' fighting Russian disinformation". *Time*, 6 March.

39 Wakefield, J. (2022) "Deepfake presidents used in Russia-Ukraine war". BBC, 18 March.

40 Flores-Saviaga, C. and D. Guerrero (2022) "In Latin America, fact-checking organisations and cross-regional collaborations attempt to counter Russia's disinformation". Power3.0, 6 July.



NATIONAL FOCUS



ERIC SUNDSTRÖM

The shining city on the hill? A case study about Sweden

Sweden is no longer only a shining city on a hill, but rather a tale of two cities, where an impressive green transition is happening next to record levels of assassinations and gang violence. When elections were held in September 2022, the underlying challenges in the former shining city proved to be a stumbling block for the popular social democrat Magdalena Andersson, who lost the election to Ulf Kristersson – a conservative backed by the extreme far-right Sweden Democrats. The new government has agreed upon the so-called Tidö agreement, which might imply radical changes to Sweden’s migration policy and even the rule of law. As the new government also delivers a killing blow to Sweden’s climate and environmental policy, an obvious red-green opportunity presents itself to the social democrats: a green transition combined with reforms of the same magnitude as the problems in the former shining city.

To progressives around Europe, Sweden often seems like a shining city on a hill. And they are right: in many ways, we are a shining city on a hill. But the hard truth is that not everyone shares in this city’s splendour and glory. And in 2022, it became evident to everyone that this nation is more a ‘tale of two cities’ than it is just a ‘shining city on a hill’.¹

Let us start with the shining parts. The best country to raise a family in? Sweden is first on the list, according to UNICEF – and what can possibly be more important? Moreover, the world’s most innovative country? Sweden comes in second, says the World Economic Forum. The green transition? Sweden is fifth on the Environmental Performance Index. Leading countries for startups worldwide? Fifth again, given research by Statista. The OECD Better Life Index, based on multiple dimensions of economic and social progress? Ninth place. And the best country to do business in? Sweden comes in tenth, according to *The Wall Street Journal*.

¹ ‘A tale of two cities’ is the bearing metaphor in a speech delivered by New York Governor Mario Cuomo on 16 July 1984, at the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, California.

Moreover, and if you are looking for inspiring political stories in Europe, you should look more closely at the green transition sweeping across Sweden. When Social Democratic prime minister Stefan Löfven took the floor at the Paris Climate Conference in 2015, he spoke about his former job as a welder – and promised that Sweden would lead the way for a green, industrial revolution. “He has the burden of proof”, replied the then second-biggest political party in Sweden, Moderaterna (conservative).

Fast forward to 2022, and *The Washington Post* is walking around outside Boden (population 16,832) in the very north of Sweden, guided by the local Social Democratic mayor Claes Nordmark. In this little town, H2 Green Steel (H2GS) will construct the world’s first “fossil-free” steelworks: “It’s a multibillion-dollar project that would make a multimillion-ton impact on the climate, cutting over 90 percent of a regular steel factory’s carbon dioxide emissions”, wrote the *Post*, which concluded:

A boom of renewable-powered industries has given rise to what has been dubbed a “green revolution”. A massive revamp is underway to decarbonize the state-run mines. Besides steel mills, the region hosts Europe’s first battery mega factory, called Northvolt Ett, along with fossil-free fertilizer and aviation biofuel factories. [...] An estimated \$100 billion to \$150 billion will be invested and up to 100,000 jobs created in this sparsely populated and often overlooked region.²

So, the shining welfare city on a hill addresses climate change and regional inequalities through a green industrial revolution – the brainchild of a former welder/union leader/Social Democratic prime minister. What could possibly go wrong? Well, quite a lot, unfortunately.

The tale of two cities

Income differences in Sweden decreased until 1980, but since then, inequality has increased dramatically. During the past 40 years, economic inequality has continuously increased in the shining city – and this development has accelerated. According to a research report by Oxfam and Development Finance International, Sweden was still regarded as the best country at countering economic inequalities in 2017. But by 2022, Sweden had fallen through the roof to 20th place. And it should be noted that Sweden has had governments led by Social Democratic prime ministers from 1982 to 1991 (Olof Palme and Ingvar Carlsson), from 1994 to 2006 (Carlsson and Göran Persson), and again from 2014 to 2022 (Stefan Löfven and Magdalena Andersson).

One reason cited by Oxfam was changes to the tax policy; for example, the abolishment in 2019 of the ‘austerity’ tax which gave a tax cut to Sweden’s 345,000 highest earners. One legitimate question is why a social democratic government handed out an extra €1,600 (on average) to its richest. The answer: a tricky situation in the Riksdag with no clear

² Liljas, P. (story) and J. Gratznerin (photography) (2022) “The green revolution sweeping Sweden”. *The Washington Post*, 29 June.

majorities, which in 2019 forced the Social Democratic Party (SAP) and the Green Party into the “January agreement” with two liberal parties – the Centre Party and the Liberal Party – who still happen to believe in the trickle-down economics of the 1980s.

The main underlying dynamic when inequality grows has been well described by Thomas Piketty: the rate of return on capital exceeds the rate of economic growth. Put simply: rich people’s earnings from capital grows faster than your wage. In 2022, a new book, *Greedy Sweden: How the People’s Home became a Paradise for the Super-rich*, was nominated for our national book award, the August Prize (named after Strindberg, of course). Written by the economic journalist and author Anders Cervenka, the entire book is filled with graphs and examples of how Sweden is being torn apart by economic inequality:

A country where the number of billionaires has risen from 28 to 542 in 25 years and where they have collectively become 30 times richer while the proportion of households with low financial standards is increasing; a country that tops the list of dollar millionaires’ assets as a percentage of GDP (in second place is Russia); a country where billionaires are often taxed less than low-income earners; a country that has abolished wealth tax, inheritance tax and gift tax – in short, a tax haven for the rich where inequalities are widening.³

Let us add a few other troubling developments. Sweden is the only country on earth where ‘free schools’ (voucher or charter schools) can be owned by for-profit companies that happily share large dividends with the shareholders. If you glance at the stock exchange, you will notice that the largest educational consortium, AcadeMedia, has annual revenues of over €1 billion. This revenue is solely based on taxpayers’ money since the state guarantees your funding. And guess what: pupils born in families with strong resources – economically, academically – tend to choose ‘free schools’ more often. And if a school run by the municipality – perhaps in a disadvantaged neighbourhood where no ‘free schools’ are established – ends up with a budget deficit, the ‘free school’ in the nice part of town must be compensated economically. More than 25% of Sweden’s 290 municipalities have paid extra compensation to ‘free schools’ because their own school operations were forced into a deficit. Furthermore, some municipalities were forced to transfer money to ‘free schools’ that no longer have any operations.⁴

At the same time, the famous Swedish welfare state is facing important challenges. A new report states that the welfare sector needs to be strengthened by over €20 billion during the coming four years, and an additional 100,000 people must be employed in the sector. The report has some revealing statistics, describing a sector with precarious working conditions and profitable private companies providing different forms of care. If we take a two-week period, elderly people in Sweden with home care receive help from an average of 16 different people. And the return on equity for companies within healthcare, schools and elderly care in Sweden was an average of 24.5% in 2019.⁵

3 Björk, N. (2022) “Så blev Sverige ett extremt orättvist land”. Book review in *Aftonbladet*, 19 April.

4 “Granskning: Var fjärde kommun betalar “straffavgift” till friskolor”. Skolvärlden website, 22 September 2021.

5 Herlitz, J., U. Lorentzi and E. Sundström, “Välfärdsgapet. LOs prognos 2022: Resursbehov i vård, skola och omsorg till 2026”.

The marketisation of the school sector especially has become a vehicle for segregation at a time when Sweden is changing demographically. First things first: our country would not be functioning at all without all the people who have come to live here. But the pace of change has been rather rapid. In 2000, 11% of Sweden's population was born outside of our country. By 2022, this number had grown to 20%. In the greater Stockholm region, 27% of the inhabitants are born in other parts of the world.

The challenge to accommodate people who come to your country becomes harder when the economy is hit by turmoil: a pandemic, a war in your neighbourhood and a possible global recession. In 2022, Swedish unemployment stands at 7.2%. Unemployment among those born abroad amounted to 16.2% (18.4% for women; 14.2% for men) – with long-term unemployment being a challenge, specifically among foreign-born women.

Another development that must be mentioned in relation to the labour market – which is constantly affected by globalisation, the EU's internal market and frivolous companies and employers – is the lack of security and basic law and order. In October last year, the government saw the need to establish a new delegation to fight work-related crime, which can come in many different forms: “the criminal exploitation of subcontracted employment, tax avoidance, breaking migration law and the rules for labour immigration – including sometimes pure human trafficking”.⁶

During the last couple of years, 4,000 businesses have been inspected without warning in the workers' former paradise of Sweden: “One in ten were either completely or partially shut down, while half were found to be in breach of legislation and told to fix it”.⁷

Another problem in paradise – a cleavage that indeed is debated across the Western world – is the dynamism in some urban regions, and the stagnation in more rural parts of the country. A new study has found that 67% of Sweden's population lives in dynamic regions that are very important for growth. A fifth of the population lives in Sweden's ‘stable centre’. 13% live in areas with significant outmigration and an ageing population. Of Sweden's no fewer than 290 municipalities, almost half have seen a decreasing number of inhabitants in the last 30 years. The closing of stores, the postal office, the police station, and other symbols of a living community have followed.

Inequality, immigration and discrimination, struggling schools, unemployment and an indiscriminating labour market, and regional differences – these might be some explanations for a phenomenon that is hard to nail down. Maybe one must conclude that some things take root, then grow more than you could ever have imagined. But here we go: in 2022, 61 Swedes were killed by gun violence, almost exclusively in gang-related activities. In comparison: four people in Denmark, two in Finland and four in Norway. During the last three years, there have been 700 shootings close to schools in Sweden. This means that “16% of Sweden's primary school students – 196,000 children – attend

6 Wallin, G. (2021) “New Swedish delegation to fight work-related crime”. *Nordic Labour Journal*, 13 October.

7 Ibid.

a school where there have been one or more shootings within a 500-metre radius in the last three years”.⁸

These two stories – both the shining city on the hill and the tale of two cities – must be considered when analysing the big political event in Sweden in 2022: the general election on 11 September.

You want it darker? The Swedish elections 2022

In 2018, the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) made a brilliant ad. Then prime minister Stefan Löfven walks up to a quaint hotdog stand and is asked: “What do you want?” Löfven looks into the camera with a warm smile: “I want a society where safety comes before tax cuts”. He continues with the priorities of the election campaign (that was eventually won, Löfven was re-elected). He then concludes: “And I want a hotdog as well”.

In 2022, a YouTuber made a parody of the ad. When asked “What do you want?”, the YouTuber goes on a rant for almost three minutes. He wants returned IS warriors to walk around freely; sky-high electricity prices and an extra tax on petrol; the lowest number of police in the EU and soaring gang criminality; children, teenagers and police officers shot dead in the streets; the highest taxes on earth and low wages for burnt-out teachers and nurses; long queues to access hospital care, beggars everywhere but no midwives – and a hotdog, of course.

The election campaign became the darkest in living memory. The conservative Moderate Party proposed compulsory tests for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) for all 5-year-olds in immigrant-heavy suburbs (to counter crime later in life). The Liberal Party suggested mandatory language tests for 2-year-olds “who are not enrolled in preschool” (code for children of immigrants). The SAP talked about a cap on residents with a “non-Nordic background” in immigrant neighbourhoods, and Magdalena Andersson promised a country without “Somali towns”.

This agenda suited the party of the extreme right – the Sweden Democrats – who calmly put up election posters depicting aeroplanes (metaphor: repatriation). Such a poster makes sense if you ever cared to read their party platform, which states that democracy is difficult to keep in a state inhabited by “several peoples” – language that brings the 1930s to mind.

And still, the SAP increased its share of the vote by 2% to 30.3%, and almost won a general election for the third time in a row. The main reasons for the ‘close but no cigar’ situation are the following:

- Magdalena Andersson was a trusted and highly popular prime minister, scoring popularity points not seen since the best days of previous Moderate Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt.

8 “Dödsskjutningar i Sverige når nya högstanivåer”. SVT Nyheter website, 11 December 2022, including the data study “700 skjutningar nära skolor - på tre år”.

- The backdrop (albeit absent in the actual campaign) was the national unity during the pandemic – eventually replaced by war in our neighbourhood.
- The Moderates had a quirky candidate for prime minister (Ulf Kristersson) and ran a bad campaign that lacked a larger ‘time for change’ narrative. They focused on an agenda owned by the Sweden Democrats (immigration and crime) to which they mainly added nuclear power and tax cuts. It was surprisingly narrow and lame after being out of office for eight years, and they lost their position as Sweden’s second-biggest party (the Moderates got 19.1%, compared to 20.5% for the Sweden Democrats shrewdly led by Jimmie Åkesson).
- Ulf Kristersson promised a prominent Holocaust survivor to never, never, never cooperate with the Sweden Democrats. He broke that promise, and the Moderates have still not figured out how they will handle the xenophobic gang that they now rely upon in government. This danger was obvious to many urban, liberal voters who would subscribe to a quote from John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address: “Those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside”. As a result, many centrist voters in big cities voted for the sitting Prime Minister and Social Democratic Party leader ‘Magda’.
- The Swedish labour movement is not what it used to be, but it is still a movement. The Social Democratic Party broke previous records and completed 761,000 verified conversations with voters (canvassing and phone). The unions within the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) talked to over 620,000 of their members.

However, the election was lost. To understand why, let us revisit the steps any social democrat campaign should include:

1. Neutralise what stands between yourself and the voters. To do so, the Social Democratic Party has adopted a tougher stance on migration, beginning in the autumn of 2015. Now, Magdalena Andersson promised to “leave no stone unturned” in the fight against criminal gangs.
2. Present breathtaking reforms that will improve welfare and schools for working families. Add green transition and new jobs to underline that you embrace the future with hope.
3. Hit your opponent hard. If their candidate for Prime Minister comes with problematic political luggage, make sure to have surrogates that can unpack and show voters the dirty laundry.

The Social Democratic campaign completed the first step, but never managed to move the election to their own turf. This was an opportunity lost. As voters walked out of the polling booths, they said that healthcare was their most important issue, with schools as well as law and order in second place. 52% of voters who went for the Sweden Democrats said in an exit poll that they agreed with the statement “Profit distribution shall not be allowed in tax-financed operations in healthcare, schools, or elderly care”.⁹

The election ought to have moved beyond immigration and crime; big reforms were lacking; and key ministers could have done better. In short, given the magnitude of the

9 SVT, Valu 2022, “Väljarnas viktigaste frågor”.

problems facing the shining city on the hill, the SAP did not present reforms in corresponding magnitude – for example in areas concerning inequality, schools and welfare. The SAP tried to turn a parliamentary election into a presidential campaign with ‘Magda’ as a safe pair of hands, and they almost succeeded. Campaign workers shared photos on Facebook in their purple ‘MAGDA’ baseball hats (for the nerdy political observer, it was close enough to MAGA – Make America Great Again, but the hats were not red). But at the start of 2023, it is difficult to remember a single concrete promise or welfare reform in the SAP campaign.

However, and if we put our Marxist glasses on, we can see how more significant trends among the factors of production were at play. The cleavages in the emerging tale of two cities were dominating the campaign – not least segregation and gang violence. In such a scenario, it becomes awfully difficult to get elected for a third time in a row – even if you had the most popular politician in the land. As a result, urban voters (successful ‘anywheres’) trusted Magdalena Andersson to keep their lives sunny in these uncertain times. Small-town Sweden (displeased ‘somewheres’) has had a disproportionate share of the flip side of the negative trends and sent their signal by voting for the Sweden Democrats.

The urban-rural political divide should be analysed in tandem with the gender gap. If only women voted, the social democrats would have received 34% of the vote. If you include their allies (Greens, Left Party, Centre Party) the victory would have been rock solid: 56%. But with only men at the ballot box, the SAP and the Sweden Democrats are tied (26% and 25% respectively). And if we only count the male vote, the right-wing bloc (Sweden Democrats, Moderates, Christian Democrats, Liberals) collects 56% instead.

As a result, polarisation (for or against the Sweden Democrats) and cannibalism (among the red-green parties) walked hand in hand. The SAP (notably ‘Magda’) gained votes from their allies (Greens, Left Party, Centre Party) but the bleeding to the Sweden Democrats continued in this election as well. Winning votes from your friends, and not moving voters across the aisle by completing steps two and three of an election strategy, proved fatal.

Like in the rest of Europe, the overriding challenge for social democrats is to find bold reforms that can reverse the strong trends that divide our country and allow populists to grow. Ideally, this should be done while building sustainable societies at the same time. Lack of progress in this regard during the last eight years of governing with a very divided parliament should be added to the list of explanations. The divide kept growing, and voters took note.

It can therefore be argued that the working class decided the outcome, and the SAP lost: among self-described ‘workers’, the SAP received 31.8%, while the Sweden Democrats received 28.8%. Among trade union members within LO, the numbers were better but not good: 42.4% voted for the party led by ‘Magda’, and 27.2% for Jimmie Åkesson’s party. It should be noted that the share of votes for the SAP among LO members was about one percentage point higher than in 2018. But 42.4% in 2022 can also be compared to the share in 2002: 59%.

The gender gap is staggering also within the trade union vote: 45.7% of LO women voted for the SAP, but only 38.9% of the LO men. The Sweden Democrats are now at 32.2% among LO men, but remain at 22.6% among LO women.

These numbers also pose the question of which kind of party the SAP is becoming, and which kind of party it would like to be. As we have seen, 31.8% of self-described workers voted for the SAP. Among voters with a postgraduate university education, the support for the SAP was just slightly lower: 30%.

In any election, there are additional trends to account for. The stance in favour of nuclear power within the right-wing block paid off as the energy crises emerged. And Sweden's new immigrant party 'Nyans' gained ground in immigrant suburbs and won 20% of the vote in some districts, as the SAP lost heavily. 'Nyans' won two local seats in the municipality Botkyrka, south of Stockholm, and one in Landskrona, and received 2.88% of the vote in Malmö. It seems likely that many voters of immigrant background were fed up with the harsh rhetoric confusing and mixing immigration with gang violence, which led to either abstention or a vote for 'Nyans' instead of the SAP. Electoral participation went down in general by almost three percentage points to 84.2% – and the drop in one part of Botkyrka was no less than 22 percentage points. It can be said that a new party with Islamic ties helped the former Nazis to beat the social democrats.

It should also be noted that a growing number of voters with an immigrant background are voting for the far right, like in other European countries. Among voters who grew up in Europe but outside of the Nordic countries, or have a mother/father with that background, the Sweden Democrats received 19% of the vote.

Young voters vote heavily for the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats, while the left seems absent in the digital world where young minds are formed. Among 18- to 21-year-olds, the Moderates received 26% and the Sweden Democrats 22% – with the SAP in third place with 20%. In the home country of Greta Thunberg, only 5% of the youngest voters chose the Green Party.

As the final votes were counted, Sweden had ended up with an extreme right-wing party that has grown in nine consecutive elections – a party that is bigger and much more extreme than those in other European countries. We tried to expose their Nazi roots, but they continued to grow. The centre-right parties in Sweden offered them a warm embrace – but were surpassed by them. All the traditional right-wing parties – the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals – received a smaller share of the vote than in 2018. But together with the Sweden Democrats they obtained 176 seats in the Riksdag, compared to 173 for the SAP, the Left Party, the Centre Party and the Greens.

On this basis, a government needed to be formed.

The Tidö agreement and the road ahead

After the election, as negotiations started behind closed doors in the Riksdag without signs of initial progress, senior representatives from the four right-wing parties eventually checked in at a well-preserved castle from the 17th century called Tidö, south of Västerås, about 100 kilometres west of Stockholm. They negotiated, there were apparently late nights infused with alcoholic beverages in different parts of the castle, and eventually

the 62-page “Tidö agreement” was presented – heavily focusing on immigration and crime.

When it comes to the actual government, it was decided that it would be formed by the Moderates, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals. Ulf Kristersson, party leader of the Moderates, became prime minister. But the Sweden Democrats earned the right to appoint no less than nine officials who will work in the government offices. In this way, they can make sure from the inside that their favourite parts of the Tidö agreement are enforced – and from the outside they can complain about everything else. They were also given the chair of four of the 16 parliamentary committees: foreign relations; labour market; industry and trade; and justice.

The Swedish public service television company – SVT – closely followed two of the political parties during the entire election campaign. They chose the parties at the opposite end of the political scale: the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats. The result, a behind-the-scenes documentary called “The Power Game”, starts with a closed meeting featuring the very top leadership of the Sweden Democrats.

During this meeting, Jimmie Åkesson has been briefed about the Tidö results by staffer Gustav Gellerbrant, who will head the squad in the government offices. Åkesson called Gellerbrant “the architect behind Sweden’s new and very tough migration policy” and asked him to elaborate. Gellerbrant’s answer is revealing – pure TV gold – and fortunately captured by the camera: “This means a paradigm shift in the view of asylum. No one thought we would get this far. It is..., it is incredible. Really”. The room bursts into humming laughter.¹⁰

The Civil Rights Defenders (CRD), an international NGO based in Stockholm focusing on civil and political rights, has studied the Tidö agreement closely:

The agreement is clearly repressive. It is focused on detentions (including those of children and young people), harsher sentences, increased opportunities to monitor and deport people, and measures that undermine the rule of law and human rights. [...] There is also a recurring confusion, or equation, between migration and criminality, that singles out people with migration experience as the cause of Sweden’s problems. [...] We also note that several of the measures would directly conflict with international and regional obligations and conventions to which Sweden has committed itself, as well as with our own constitution. If the agreement’s proposed measures become a reality, we will have a society that no longer rests on the rule of law’s basic principle of everyone’s equality before the law. [...] The Tidö agreement shows that the global trend of dismantling democracy has come to Sweden.¹¹

The Tidö agreement was presented on 14 October, and since then the new government has also presented its first budget. They have failed to act on several of their major election promises, not least regarding the soaring prices of electricity and petrol. In order to analyse the new government and the changing political landscape, one might place the developments into three different categories.

10 SVT, “Maktspelet”, by Mari Forssblad and Kalle Segerbäck.

11 Civil Rights Defenders (2022) “Our review of the Tidö Agreement (Tidöavtalet)”, 16 December.

First, the analysis by the Civil Rights Defenders of the Tidö agreement must imply a clear line in the sand. The words and ideas in that document lead to a society that is unpleasant to live in. The use of penal populism in Sweden – focusing on penalties rather than prevention – has finally gone too far. Social democrats who have disagreed about immigration policy and exactly how tough you ought to be on crime should now be able to agree on the following: we all remember how Tony Blair said that New Labour should be “tough on crime, and tough on the underlying causes of crime”.¹² The Tidö agreement is a natural turning point from where the main focus must always be the fight against the underlying causes of crime – think of all the challenges in the tale of two cities – including the avoidance of language that mixes crime with migration. Even if we will be as tough as nails on all the activities of the criminal gangs as well.

This first category also means that you ought to be a careful observer of reforms and actions that might undermine the basic idea of a society based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

A second category consists of all the proposals and reforms in the ‘ordinary’ areas of economics, welfare, and so forth. So far, we have seen unfortunate cuts to labour-market policy, undermining necessary re-skilling and the fight against long-term unemployment. Government support to municipalities and regions in order to maintain services in the welfare sector has been increased – but far from sufficiently (the SAP wisely promised more resources in their alternative budget proposal). And most notably, the new government’s budget has been called a ‘killing blow’ to Sweden’s ambitious green policy by researcher Mikael Karlsson from Uppsala University. Karlsson added: “It is almost skillful to be so bad at environmental and climate policy”.¹³ Sweden is now projected to miss the binding EU emissions goal, as well as our own ambition to achieve net zero emissions by 2045.

On the positive side, it should be noted that big tax cuts have mostly been put on hold because of the dire economic times, and the slight improvements to the unemployment benefit scheme made during the pandemic have been kept.

Finally, when a right-wing government takes control, you must also be aware of the risk that they might weaken the institutions and structures built by the labour movement during previous decades. All four right-wing parties have previously introduced proposals in the Riksdag that would make the unemployment benefit schemes – which are administered by the trade unions – mandatory and run by the state instead. Such a change would severely undermine the traditional Swedish model with strong social partners – a system that encourages the worker to join both the union and the unemployment benefit scheme. Another proposal would weaken the role of safety officers in the workplace, disassociating their important function from the trade unions. So far, no such measures have been decided upon. On the other hand, cuts in the foreign aid budget mean that Sweden will no longer meet the target of giving 1% of its GDP in development aid. This will limit Sweden’s work for the world’s most vulnerable through international

12 New Statesman (2015) “From the archive: Tony Blair is tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”. *The New Statesman*, 28 December.

13 “Forskare: Budgeten är ett dråpslag mot miljön på bred front”. *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 November 2022.

development cooperation – which traditionally has been an essential act of solidarity for the Swedish labour movement.

So, if progressives were to follow the advice to use these three columns – Tidö; reforms; institutions – to monitor the new government's actions during the coming years, what actions could be expected from the left side of Swedish politics?

First, one should note that the last decade has been characterised by governments without clear majorities in the Riksdag. As a result, the partners on the labour market – unions and employers – have risen to the occasion, delivering agreements on, for example, labour law reform as well as a new flexible study-support system for adults in the middle of their working life, encouraging transition into new jobs.

In December 2022, yet another reform by the social partners was handed over in its final form to the government – 'entry agreements'. This initiative aims to move newly arrived immigrants and the long-term unemployed into jobs which are partly paid by the employer and partly subsidised by the state, before the job eventually is turned into a full-time 'normal' occupation.

The pressing economic conditions – the war in Ukraine and soaring energy prices, inflation, and interest rates – have also encouraged LO to present its "crisis winter programme". The programme focuses on compensation for the energy prices; improved unemployment benefit; lower gas prices and subsidies for long journeys to work; lower amortisation requirements; and state support to companies introducing shorter working weeks. It also proposed an extra child allowance in December, to be provided right before Christmas. The programme has hitherto not been acted upon by the new government.

To conclude: is there obvious homework for the SAP to do, that will lead the way back to power in 2026? One answer is that it is still early days: the party's election analysis has not even been presented yet. However, a few obvious strategic observations can be made. Magdalena Andersson remains the most popular politician by far and the SAP is lucky to have her. The Centre Party is about to elect a new leader, and they should be courted as a possible ally – because the alternative is to fight five parties to the right. The new government is dependent on a party formed by Nazis and will most likely face severe problems that will make your own poll numbers soar. When that happens, remember that the SAP had 45.9% in a poll in 2007, and still lost the subsequent election. Focus on your own policies and what you would like to achieve in order to make a difference.

If personal privilege can be invoked, I would like to conclude with a lesson I learnt during a study trip to Berlin in autumn 2022. I was lucky enough to have a meeting with an advisor to the German Social Democratic chancellor Olaf Scholz, and, curious, I asked if they had a secret plan to win the next election.

I got the impression that my counterpart did not understand my question, because there was no need for a secret plan. The task is obvious: transition, as my new German friend had already explained. We progressives must fight for the future of the planet, only we understand that this green project must be red and built on fairness and equality. And while doing it we must use Europe and our union to achieve security in this uncertain world of ours. If we fail, populists will continue to grow.

As it happened, I was in Berlin on 9 November 2022. On my way back to the hotel I stopped on the sidewalk in front of a grave candle and two 'stumbling stones' honouring victims of the Holocaust. I was only wearing a shirt and a jacket; it was the warmest autumn in Germany since measurements began in 1881.

Our common challenges could not have been more obvious: the darkness we must avoid. The transition we must make.

LOUKAS TSOUKALIS

Greece and the EU: A turbulent love affair, now more mature?

Greece has had a turbulent relationship with the EU, marked by many successes and failures, the latter being mostly the result of a weak economy, made worse by populism. The relationship with Europe is both existential and transactional: Greece wants a strong and united Europe, and its main political parties are now all strongly pro-European. But ambition has not always been matched by domestic capacity to deliver. Bouts of Greek euroscepticism were directly related in the past to punishing economic policies imposed by Brussels and/or Greek frustration with insufficient lack of support in foreign policy and migration. The relationship has matured, and Greece may be expected to actively support Europe's transition to political adulthood, difficult though such transition promises to be.

The fundamentals

Greece is an old member of the European family. The country joined the bloc in 1981 as the tenth member of what was then the European Communities. Membership had been preceded by a long, yet interrupted association agreement. It has been a turbulent relationship all along, with more than its fair share of crises, but it has matured with time. The odds are that this more mature relationship will continue in the near future, although in times when big crises have become the norm, one may quickly regret any predictions based on continuity.

Let us start with some fundamentals. Greece is a medium-sized country by European standards, with heavy historical baggage which has always been there in the background, influencing the way the rest of the world treats the proud descendants of Plato, Aristotle and Alexander the Great.

In its modern incarnation, Greece has had a rather long but unstable democratic history. Its democratic institutions have been through a crash test in recent years in a succession of big crises, and they have proved their resilience. Greece has a cosmopolitan elite and

the ever-present traces of a Balkan state. It is also a country with many inequalities and a vulnerable economy relying heavily on tourism. Domestic oligarchs co-exist with a very large number of small businesses, many of them at risk of extinction in times of rapid economic concentration. Shipping constitutes the biggest world success story of Greek entrepreneurship, albeit always footloose in search of favourable tax treatment.

The level of education in the country is generally good, and there is a long tradition of many Greeks studying abroad. This adds further to the cosmopolitan nature of the educated classes, yet it also contributes to the brain drain which accelerated even further during the recent economic crisis. Too many of Greece's best and brightest live and work abroad. High life expectancy, combined with low birth rates and net emigration, has in turn produced an ageing population and one that is declining in numbers. However, poor Greek demographics are not as bad as those of its northern Balkan neighbours, or those of several countries in central and eastern Europe, which have witnessed a substantial reduction in their populations in recent decades. Free mobility inside the EU has been a mixed blessing, although it may not be politically correct to say so.

Greece has a gladiatorial tradition in its domestic politics: strongly confrontational with little room for compromise, which is almost a dirty word in Greek. Coalitions and consensus are the exceptions, not the rule, and virtually everything is heavily politicised. Winner-takes-all is the predominant tradition in Greek politics, reinforced by electoral laws that usually give a big bonus of seats to the party with the largest number of votes. Clientele practices have strong roots in Greece and corruption remains a real problem, although, again the Greek experience in this respect is not necessarily among the worst in Europe today.

Greece's close neighbourhood is difficult and highly unstable. In south-eastern Europe, nationalism is rife in many places, democratic traditions weak and irredentism ever-present. By far the largest and most populous country in the region is Turkey, which now entertains ambitions to play big on both the regional and the global stage. With an authoritarian ruler today, Turkey has an imperial past and a revisionist agenda: it tends to behave like a regional bully. Public threats repeatedly addressed to Greece by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that he may arrive uninvited at night point to a new low in Turkish diplomacy. Turkey is also a big gateway for people seeking to emigrate to Europe, and for most of these people, Greece is the inevitable next stop on the way to a better life in Germany or elsewhere. Many of them, however, get stuck in Greece.

Five countries of the Western Balkans have been waiting forever to become members of the EU, while many of their citizens try to emigrate and leave behind poor living conditions and bad governance. In the words of Ivan Krastev,¹ it is easier today to change your country than to change your government. Meanwhile, foreign powers continue to foment trouble and buy influence on the cheap in the region.

It should be no surprise that instability in Greece's immediate neighbourhood often breeds insecurity and/or feeds into nationalism at home. On the other hand, Greece enjoys

1 A much-quoted phrase. See also Krastev, I. and S. Holmes (2019) *The Light That Failed* (London: Penguin).

the highest standards of living in the region, despite the unprecedented fall in income during the economic crisis of the last decade. It also enjoys the highest standards of democracy and individual freedoms, despite domestic failings. It is all relative, after all.

An existential and transactional relationship

Greece's relationship with European integration has been both existential and transactional.² It is existential because in this difficult part of the world, Greeks need strong allies, and they look to the EU for an additional protective shield. EU membership counts, of course, although Europe's role in foreign and security policy remains limited. Hence Greece's repeated bouts of frustration. However, Greeks could also try to be more consistent in their support for a common European foreign policy by dropping their attachment to the right of veto.

NATO cannot be an effective shield either as long as the main threat to Greece's security is perceived to come from neighbouring Turkey, itself also a member of NATO. You might think that being protected from an ally is an oxymoron, but not necessarily so in real life. Both Greece and Turkey have long vied for the attention of the United States. The leader of the Atlantic alliance, although less keen nowadays to play the world policeman, continues to exercise by far the strongest influence in the neighbourhood.

Greece has also been looking for a European shield in the form of a common migration policy to include control of external borders and internal solidarity. It has received financial assistance and support from Frontex and other EU agencies, but relatively little in terms of relocation of refugees inside the Union. Greek expectations (and frustrations) on this topic are very similar to those of Italy. Being a European gateway on the refugee/migration trail poses some very difficult choices between respect for humanitarian values and hard political reality. In recent years, Greece and many of its EU partners have gradually adopted a 'Fortress Europe' mentality which does not always dare speak its name in public.

The relationship with the EU is existential in a different way as well. Europe has always been perceived as a high benchmark and external catalyst for higher standards of democracy, good governance and internal reforms. Modernisers in Greece have long seen the EU as a strong ally in their domestic struggle against conservative forces and the inward-looking attitudes of *la Grèce profonde*; admittedly, not always with much success.

At the same time, it is also a transactional relationship because of the enormous importance of European funds and the transfer of know-how for Greece's economic development. Funds and know-how on the one hand, but strong competition within the European single market on the other, where rules often reflect the interests of the more advanced economies: it has not always worked well for Greece. The early years of EU membership were marked by a rapid process of deindustrialisation to which domestic

² See also Tsoukalis, L., "Greece and the European Union: Strategic vision, diplomatic finesse and poor domestic delivery" in Featherstone K. and D. A. Sotiropoulos (eds) (2020), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Greek Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

policies surely contributed. Greece has traditionally run large trade deficits and remains today one of the least open economies in the EU. This is especially true of trade in goods, since Greece's two most important exports are in services, namely tourism and shipping.

For all the above reasons, Greece needs – and generally supports – a strong and united Europe that will function more like a federation, with a strong budget and common policies, including a common foreign and security policy, as well as internal solidarity. In this respect, Greece's European policy is more consistent than the European policies of some of the EU's more recent members. Greek consistency, however, has its own limits, because ambition is not always matched by the domestic capacity to deliver. This helps to explain Greece's troubled relationship with the EU, a relationship marked by big successes and big failures.

The credit for successes goes mostly to a relatively small number of political leaders, backed by an able diplomatic service, who took bold initiatives and negotiated skilfully with their European counterparts. They delivered the first association signed by the EEC, an early membership of the EU, and later the euro. They also secured a place for the Republic of Cyprus in the 2004 big bang enlargement, and generally, they had an influence in European affairs more than the relative size of the country might justify. They made clever use of Greece's geopolitics, often succeeding in turning internal weakness into diplomatic strength. With exceptions, however: for example, Greece's policy towards its small, northern neighbour, now called North Macedonia, does not count among Greece's most enlightened policies, to put it mildly. The compromise reached in the UN-brokered Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia in 2018 was surely imperfect as all compromises are, but most importantly, it was too long in the waiting.

Most failures during Greece's turbulent relationship with the EU can be attributed to the weakness of the domestic economy coupled with a long tradition of populism. The latter was made worse with the arrival of mass parties, which in turn led to the intensification of the domestic struggle for income shares and further increased the tendency of the Greek political system to produce budget deficits and resist change. The result was a recurrence of economic crises followed each time by stabilisation programmes under the oversight of Brussels. The latest, and by far the worst, was when Greece found itself at the epicentre of the euro crisis and escaped Grexit at the very last minute, albeit at a huge price for the Greek economy and living standards. The country then found itself on the receiving end of punishing policies imposed by its creditors and was often treated no better than a colony.

Greek public opinion has been broadly pro-European, with no strong hang-ups about the sharing of sovereignty. Being part of Europe is generally a source of pride for Greeks. It is also seen as an opportunity for a better life, especially among the younger generations who feel more European and are certainly more mobile than their parents. On the other hand, in times of crisis when European solidarity was deemed to be insufficient in matters of foreign policy or immigration, even more so when Greeks found themselves under the Brussels economic diktat, public opinion turned eurosceptic and trust in EU institutions hit rock bottom. Support for the EU has recovered substantially since then, going hand in hand with the recovery of the Greek economy.

The domestic political scene

After the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, Greek politics were dominated for a long time by two main parties alternating in power: New Democracy, right of centre, with a conservative and nationalist hardcore sprinkled with liberals and reformists, being also the party of Constantine Karamanlis who almost single-handedly brought Greece into Europe; and PASOK, left of centre, which started as a radical party and progressively turned social democratic and pro-European.

This duopoly broke down when the country went bankrupt in 2009-2010 and was finally saved by its European partners with the assistance of the IMF – but at what a price! Strong austerity programmes led to an economic implosion (as much as a quarter of Greek GDP was lost in a few years) and a huge rise in unemployment. Austerity programmes unavoidably met strong resistance in Greek society, which was quickly translated into the rise of anti-systemic movements and political parties.

The radical left coalition Syriza was the main beneficiary starting from almost nowhere and combining old communist influences with a strongly populist message. Syriza won two elections in 2015 and chose to govern with a nationalist right-wing party: an unorthodox combination in a country of Orthodox Christians! When it came to power, Syriza had a crash-landing with European reality. It organised a referendum to reject European austerity policies, which it won handsomely, only to be forced to succumb to its European creditors a few days later as the only way to prevent Grexit. It was a real shambles, but luckily short of an irreversible catastrophe. After that, the coalition led by Syriza became a ‘responsible member’ of the eurozone respecting agreements signed with European institutions and dutifully accumulating budget surpluses. Syriza also delivered the Prespa Agreement which broke an old deadlock in Greek foreign policy.

Syriza has essentially replaced PASOK in the new political duopoly that emerged as a result of the economic crisis, and there are no signs of this being reversed. PASOK ended up as the main victim of the economic crisis, which was arguably unfair since New Democracy bore a bigger part of the blame for irresponsible economic policies that had led to bankruptcy in the first place. But such is politics. PASOK was also tainted by scandals and corruption, which certainly did not help either. In the process, it lost many of its bright and less bright stars who sought refuge in the other two parties, or simply went home. In a political system that now consists basically of two and a half parties, plus a few smaller ones including a communist party of the old era, PASOK represents the half that hopes to find a role as a junior partner in a future coalition government.

Another beneficiary of social discontent in times of economic and social hardship, which partly coincided with a refugee crisis reaching its peak in 2015, was the extreme right. The party of the Golden Dawn was one of the ugliest and most violent far-right parties in Europe with strong neo-Nazi traits. It reached a peak of 7% of the popular vote in 2015 before its leaders were charged with running a criminal organisation and found guilty in court. Other far-right nationalist parties are now trying to plough the same political field, though they are not as extreme in their rhetoric and methods and certainly not as effective as Golden

Dawn had been some years back. Luckily, the conditions today are not as favourable. It is usually big crises that breed extremism.

New Democracy won the 2019 elections and has been in power ever since. It has been led by a liberal reformist and pro-European prime minister who brought with him to power several technocrats mostly of PASOK origin. They ended up co-existing in government a few hardcore right-wingers. The government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis has handled a succession of crises competently including the pandemic, a new refugee wave, an increasingly aggressive Turkey, and now the war in Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis.

The government has promoted investment. It has also dished out considerable amounts of money in subsidies to deal with the effects of prolonged lockdowns, and now the energy crisis, while trying to please political friends and potential voters. In doing so, it took advantage of the relaxation of EU fiscal constraints. In terms of foreign policy, it has been firm with Turkish provocations, sided wholeheartedly with European and allied support for Ukraine, and invested a great deal in strengthening ties with the US, as well as France.

The Mitsotakis government has introduced some reforms, most notably in the digital liberation of Greek citizens from an often Kafkaesque state. And it has now begun to spend the funds made available through Europe's most ambitious recovery programme adopted in 2020 at the peak of the pandemic. Greece will be among the biggest beneficiaries of NextGenerationEU with a total of more than €30 billion in grants and loans: a true game-changer in integration, a most welcome manifestation of European solidarity and a (once-in-a-lifetime?) opportunity for Greece to reform and invest in the future.

Greece's resilience and recovery plan puts the emphasis on growth much more than on distribution. This is after all consistent with the overall economic policy of the New Democracy government, which represents a clear shift from the policy pursued by the previous government led by Syriza. How to reconcile growth with social justice remains one of the biggest challenges in Greece's increasingly unequal society.

The next parliamentary election will be held in the first six months of 2023. Opinion polls give New Democracy a clear lead over Syriza, albeit short of an absolute majority of seats because the next election will be held under a system of proportional representation introduced by Syriza when they were in power. It will be different, however, with the election after next, whenever it takes place. New Democracy has changed the electoral law once again by restoring the bonus of seats that go to the party with the most votes. The electoral law keeps changing in Greece, but majorities can only legislate on a new system for the election after next: a constitutional check that is meant to restrain the urge of any parliamentary majority to cook the electoral law as it pleases.

The party of New Democracy is expected to go for an absolute majority in the parliament and may therefore force a second election very soon after the first to achieve this goal. It will most probably attempt to do so under conditions of high polarisation by presenting the electorate with a binary choice: Mitsotakis or Tsipras. Opinion polls have consistently given a clear lead to Mitsotakis over Syriza-leader Alexis Tsipras, although the image of the present prime minister has been tarnished recently by a big wiretapping scandal. We have not yet heard the whole story, if we ever will.

The prospect of two parliamentary elections in quick succession in 2023 introduces a strong element of uncertainty in Greek politics and may lead to instability. On the other hand, it could impose upon reluctant political parties a new experiment in coalition government.

Does Greece want Europe to become a political adult?

We live in a world in which the geopolitical tectonic plates are shifting, a world of growing strategic rivalry where security takes over from economics. Nationalism is rising, and international cooperation is in woefully short supply despite being essential for the provision of global public goods such as a liveable environment and basic conditions of health for all not to mention peace. It is also a world of large asymmetries among state and private actors in which individual European countries, even the big ones, no longer count for very much. The post-cold war order in Europe is now dead and buried after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. War is back in all its ugly manifestations and close to our borders, while the energy crisis presents a new, big challenge for our economies in a state of permacrisis, and also for our increasingly fragmented societies.

Europe's Coming of Age is the title of my new book in which I try to look at the bigger picture and address the main challenges and political choices facing us Europeans today: from the euro as an instrument to strengthen European strategic autonomy to new ways of tackling growing inequalities, from technological dependence to the fight against climate change, from the fraught search for a geopolitical role for Europe to ways of extending democracy beyond the nation state. The key message of the book is that Europe needs to become a political adult as the only way to be able to define autonomously and defend effectively common interests and values in a rapidly changing world with little order and too many weapons around.

Political adulthood should mean among other things that European institutions begin to play an important role in trying to reconcile international economic interdependence with domestic social contracts precisely when European integration and globalisation are moving in opposite directions. It should also mean endowing a mostly inward-looking peace project, which was the case of European integration for many years, with the attributes of hard power. Industrial strategies, taxation, foreign policy and defence should reach the highest echelons of the European political agenda. And we shall of course need institutional reforms and new ways of reaching decisions together. This is a tall order indeed. But are those realists, who treat such ideas as pie in the sky, ready to face up to the likely consequences of collective European failure? Peace and prosperity, democracy and our fundamental freedoms will be at stake.

Would Greece be ready to play its part in Europe's coming of age? And how much difference will it make to Greece's European policy as to who is in power at home? To put it somewhat provocatively, to what extent does nationality trump ideology about the way we approach European integration? The three biggest political parties in Greece today are all strongly pro-European. The ones from the left were Europeanised mainly when they came

to power. But nowadays, there is not much difference among them regarding their overall European policy, unlike what happens with some of Greece's European partners.

As one moves from right to left of the political spectrum, the relative emphasis placed on growth and redistribution, market solutions and state intervention of course differs. Such differences among Greek political parties are no longer extreme, but they surely still exist. They become smaller once Greeks come to Brussels. After all, a Greek liberal in economic terms is more likely to be in favour of a European unemployment scheme than many German social democrats. Guess why!

Moving left of centre, one usually finds more liberal attitudes on identity issues, more openness towards refugees and migrants and smaller doses of nationalism – arguably, not so much difference on climate policy, where the key problem is how to reconcile lofty ideas with hard measures. The archetypal Greek European or European Greek is to be found mostly around the centre and left of centre of the political spectrum. Yet, to be fair, it is New Democracy that navigates more easily in European waters. They have a sense of ownership through inheritance. They also belong to the biggest European political family today, namely the EPP, which gives them more margin of manoeuvre in European negotiations. PASOK is no longer able to compete on an equal basis.

The capacity of Greece to play an active role in Europe's transition to political adulthood will largely depend on political stability at home, the strength of the economy and peace in its neighbourhood. It will also crucially depend on the capacity of Greek political leaders to make Greek interests an integral part of European interests and vice versa. Think Greek and think European: it has not always been easy to do both.



GLOBAL FOCUS



MARIA JOÃO RODRIGUES

For a New Global Deal to transform the global order

While the global order is undergoing deep transformations, it is high time to renew the global governance system, the shortcomings and fragilities of which have been exposed by the sequence of crises that have shaken the world in recent years. A reform process of the United Nations system, initiated by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, is currently underway. Given the global dimensions of the challenges ahead, the UN and EU's agendas should be aligned in the definition of a new multilateralism and in pursuing a New Global Deal.

The current global order is undergoing a large-scale transformation: existential challenges emerging for all of humankind; increasing inequalities within and between countries and generations; competing global strategies between great powers; fragilities of the multilateral system; and powerful, disturbing triggers such as the Ukraine war.

There is a clear gap between the global challenges in front of us and the current global governance system. A Summit of the Future to reform global governance and to adopt a Pact for the Future with commitments related to policy goals and solutions to deliver them was convened by the United Nations Secretary-General, to take place in September 2024. This will be preceded by a Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals, in 2023, and followed by a Global Social Summit in 2025.

This unique political sequence should be fully used by progressive actors to launch a political dynamic to change the global order in the right direction. The compass for this endeavour should be a New Global Deal, meaning a progressive concept of the Pact for the Future.

Starting with the report "Our Common Agenda", presented by the UN Secretary-General for his second mandate, a preparatory process is now underway, with a High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism of personalities from all continents and a plethora of contributions, which will come from UN member states and regional organisations such as the EU, as well as from civil-society stakeholders, NGOs, business, trade unions, think tanks and academia.

Regarding civil society, a large coalition is being built to be part of the process, driven by entities such as:

- Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), with 11,000 NGOs and 58 national coalitions, which will be in charge of the Global People's Assembly;
- the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN), with political personalities, youth organisations and think tanks, which will be in charge of Global Futures Forum; and
- the Global Governance Innovation Network (GGIN) of think tanks, coordinated by the UN Academic Council, Plataforma CIPÓ in Brazil, Leiden University, and the Simpson Center in Washington DC.

FEPS, as a central hub for European progressive thinking and holding UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) status, is a member of the GGIN network of think tanks on global governance and is taking a role on the steering group of this coalition intervening in this process. A more specific contribution can be given in relation to the Pact for the Future and, more precisely, the kind of New Global Deal which will be necessary to enable many more countries to implement the SDGs (sustainable development goals) and all generations to improve their life chances. Let us underline that, over the last four years, as the last UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Report on Human Development shows, there has been a general backtracking on and increasing inequalities in the implementation of the SDGs. To start with, some key questions can already be identified. A New Global Deal should be a deal, meaning with give and take from all involved parties, with trade-offs and synergies, and with a general win-win outcome. Important questions include:

- In which precise terms should such a deal be formulated?
- How should these terms be translated in key policy fields, notably climate, digital, access to knowledge, education and social welfare?
- How can these terms be translated into trade agreements? And into new financial and tax arrangements?
- What are the main changes to be introduced to the global economic governance system to deliver on this New Global Deal?
- How can foresight on long-term trends and possible scenarios enlighten better choices about all these questions?

In order to better frame the concept of a New Global Deal, some preliminary questions should be addressed.

What are the main scenarios for the global order?

- The first scenario would be a kind of Western revival, particularly due to the replacement of President Donald Trump by Joe Biden in the US. This might not change much as regards the American attitude to trade, but is bringing a new American attitude regarding climate- or human-rights standards, as well as an American re-engagement to the UN system. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia can push for this scenario.
- The second scenario recognises that we have a new world now, and the most likely scenario would be the ongoing fragmentation of the current global order and the

emergence of a polycentric structure with zones of influence, including the new zone of influence connected with China. These different poles and zones of influence can also tend to become more inward-looking and to use a weakened multilateral system for their particular needs.

- Since the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's Russia, a third scenario should be considered, particularly if China is more aligned with Russia: a new cold war and a major internal fracture in the existing multilateral system.
- Therefore, a fourth scenario is needed: renewing international cooperation with an updated multilateral system for the 21st century should be the way to go. The chances for such a scenario depend on building a large coalition of forces involving willing states, regional organisations, civil society entities of different kinds, and also willing citizens wherever they are in the world, even under authoritarian and anti-multilateral political regimes. This would be a global coalition of progressive forces, which could count on a core of strongly committed forces as well as on a variable geometry of partners, according to the different objectives.

Hence, the Alliance for Multilateralism proposed by social democrats and progressive actors remains a good starting point to prevent the risk of a major divide of global governance between the US and China's competing leaderships.

How far are UN and EU agendas aligned to renew the multilateral system?

The European Union and United Nations need each other to fulfil their promises, nowadays more than ever. We have been confronted with a sequence of shockwaves: first of all, the global financial crisis, then regional and development tensions triggering larger migration flows, and increasing manifestations of climate change, recently an unprecedented pandemic bringing a new economic recession, and today an explosive military conflict involving the risk of world war three.

Before the Ukraine war and benefiting from the replacement of Trump by Biden in the US, there was a new hope to renew multilateralism.

A new Common Agenda was presented by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres after his re-election for a second mandate at the helm of the United Nations. At the same time, the European Union started developing stronger instruments of European sovereignty in the budgetary, economic, social and environmental fields, and asserting itself as a political entity with also a vital interest in defending and updating a multilateral system at world level, and in building up a global coalition of allies. Now, with the Ukraine war unfolding with large implications for the European and global orders, we should ask how far it can disrupt the progressive path which progressive actors were trying to open up.

But before addressing this burning issue, let us start by identifying and assessing the bridges between the United Nations "Our Common Agenda" and the European agenda, as they were being designed and they are still needed.

UN/EU about health issues

First of all, the international fight against Covid-19 has strengthened the One Health approach, showing that the health of humankind and the health of the planet are interdependent.

Access to updated vaccination was perceived as a new public good, but there is still a lot to do to ensure global access for full control of the pandemic. The European Union improved its capacity for internal coordination and external cooperation, but has been hesitating over the way to support capacity-building and access to intellectual property rights in the developing countries. The EU might be confronted soon with the dilemma between going for a new booster for its own population or for a stronger effort of global solidarity.

UN/EU about environmental issues

The same dilemma for the European Union is visible regarding climate change. At past COPs it was possible to approve the rules book to implement the Paris Agreement and a new loss and damage instrument. However, it was not possible to strengthen the Global Green Fund to support adaptation and mitigation in developing countries. The European Union is now committed to step up its decarbonisation, but success will depend on its capacity to also support the same efforts in developing countries. Ultimately, this would be a condition for the success of the European Green Deal and the new EU package Fit for 55.

UN/EU about sustainable development issues

The same dilemma occurs over the implementation of sustainable development goals and the United Nations 2030 agenda. In the European Union, the so-called European semester process to coordinate member state national policies is moving from austerity towards recovery, resilience and stronger alignment with SDGs. The national Recovery Plans are being supported by a stronger European budgetary capacity counting on common issuance of debt backed by new resources of taxation. Nevertheless, a qualitative leap is still missing when it comes to supporting developing countries with substantial means to invest towards the SDGs. The most obvious example is the current partnership between the European Union and Africa. Furthermore, the EU trade agreements should be more active in promoting SDGs.

UN/EU about digital issues

The digital transformation is also a policy field where the bridge between the UN and EU can become very fruitful. The UN is promoting a Global Digital Compact to make the best of digital solutions to implement the sustainable development goals.

The European Union is struggling to define its own way for digitalisation, different from the American and the Chinese ways. The differences can be very relevant, first of all because the European way should be particularly focused on providing better products and services to meet people's needs and ensuring universal access to public services. This requires their reorganisation to be supported by reskilling providers and users and by developing artificial intelligence algorithms in line with European values.

Another striking difference concerns the protection of privacy, which should be strengthened through a different business model, particularly in the case of the big digital platforms – in line with the European tradition of regulated capitalism. The same applies to the working conditions, which are being regulated to ensure fundamental workers' rights, including access to social protection. Finally, another big difference concerns taxation, because the European Union is debating the terms of a coordinated digital tax, beyond the minimum corporate tax which was agreed recently at international level.

UN/EU about a New Social Contract

The United Nations Common Agenda proposes two key concepts to improve global governance: a New Social Contract and a New Global Deal. A New Social Contract should involve labour-market regulations as well as social protection to ensure internal cohesion at national level. Regarding the European Union, relevant developments are taking place to implement the recently proclaimed European Pillar of Social Rights. This is paving the way for a phase of social Europe which is based not only on policies for economic, social and regional cohesion, but also on building the foundations of European citizenship in terms of some fundamental rights: minimum wage; minimum income; access to lifelong learning; employment protection in case of crisis; child guarantee; youth guarantee; and work-life balance.

UN/EU about a New Global Deal

The United Nations concept of a New Global Deal aims at translating this social contract at the global level, in order to reduce the gap between developing and developed countries. One lesson might be learned from the European experience: a reduction in social inequalities depends first of all on the effort made by each country, along with good governance, the fight against mismanagement and corruption, and internal wealth redistribution. But better opportunities should also be given to developing countries with better framework conditions, notably by promoting fair trade, fair global taxation, debt relief and global financing, particularly when these countries make a real effort to implement the sustainable development goals.

Hence, in spite of several shortcomings, it is possible to identify several important bridges and synergies between the United Nations agenda and that of the European Union.

Let us come now to the most difficult issue.

How far can the war in Ukraine disrupt all these synergies between the UN and the EU?

How far can the war in Ukraine disrupt all this potential by creating a new global order and a new European order marked by fragmentation and confrontation between great powers?

This will also depend on the way the European Union will be able to react on different fronts:

- First of all, on the humanitarian one, by strengthening the civil protection for refugees and by creating an effective European asylum system.
- Secondly, by developing its defence capacity including peacekeeping and peacebuilding, as foreseen by the currently adopted EU strategic compass, in articulation with NATO. This should also involve the new dimension of war, the cyber-security dimension.
- Thirdly, by putting pressure on Russia with its financial, economic and military weapons with the aim of forcing a ceasefire agreement.
- Nevertheless, it is becoming obvious that the most powerful weapon against Russia is a dramatic reduction in Europe's dependency on coal, oil and gas. This is another reason why Europe needs to step up its transition to renewable sources of energy.
- Finally, the capacity to endure wartime and to fight for a lasting peace settlement will depend on the European capacity to ensure internal social cohesion and to actively protect the most vulnerable groups from the rise in energy, food and living costs, while stagflation is looming.

Furthermore, the European Union should organise itself as a global political actor able to influence the international game, pushing for a rules-based global governance and safeguarding the multilateral institutions. In the current situation, it is vital to isolate Putins-led Russia, build up a large coalition of forces and neutralise other hesitant ones such as China. It seems to me that an approach of the 'West against the Rest' would be a wrong one. We are in a new world, and if we want the multilateral system to have a future, we need to build up a much larger coalition of forces, eventually with variable geometries. Also because compelling common challenges for humankind as a whole do exist and can only be addressed by an inclusive global governance.

In order to preserve the multilateral system and to regain the conditions to implement Our Common Agenda including the planned Summit on the Future of Global Governance, the European Union should actively promote global public good and work for a New Global Deal, while redoubling efforts to bring back peace to the European continent.

PASCAL LAMY

Reshaping the global order

That the world is in the midst of a global ‘polycrisis’ or ‘permacrisis’ has rightly and unfortunately become conventional wisdom. The evidence is everywhere, from the Russian invasion of Ukraine to global warming, from the Covid pandemic to a looming debt overhang in developing countries, from the return of inflation to the rise of autocracies, from the increase in poverty and inequalities to the loss of biodiversity. The main international institutions in charge such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) are paralysed or weakened. Wide governance gaps are also appearing in areas that are of great importance for the future like space, cyber or the Ocean. In short, the previous international order, insufficient as it may have been, is broken and history tells us that such moments in the past have all too often preceded major conflicts, suffering and horrors – the perspective of which had progressively faded away since the end of the second world war nearly 80 years ago. Antonio Gramsci coined his famous sentence in 1930: “The old is dying and the new struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters”. Shaping or re-shaping a global order of some sort has always been part of a progressive agenda for many reasons, the main one being that we trust the capacities of humans to cooperate and to harness their impulse to violence with solidarity in order to improve humankind – which we believe is possible. Internationalism is part and parcel of the progressive movement and cannot remain just wishful thinking. This short chapter on a formidably complex matter will try to analyse the main causes of the current situation and to propose some avenues forward, including for the EU at a time when its international posture is seriously challenged.

The reasons behind the breakdown of the international order are many. Some of them are of a structural nature, others more conjunctural.

The main long-term, structural factors at play can be summarised by sovereignty being a founding principle of an international order, by the obsolescence of the previous order, and by US-China rivalry.

Sovereignty has been, is, and will remain the main obstacle to building a fully-fledged international order as long as it is accepted as the core principle of international law. Indeed,

sovereignty maintains that political legitimacy lies first and foremost with the nation state, hence only the nation state can enter into agreements that constrain or limit this sovereignty, whether in subscribing to collective disciplines or in participating in so-called 'member driven' international organizations. As long as these 17th-century 'Westphalian' principles remain in place, any form of cosmopolitanism will remain a distant dream, and global governance will be intrinsically weaker than national governance as it can only deliver a parcel of the main outputs of any governance system – i.e., legitimacy, leadership and coherence.

Obsolescence has to do with the origins of the current global system, the architecture of which dates from arrangements made after the second world war. The 'universal' nature of these arrangements is increasingly seen as a product of a past pattern of western dominance at a time when new nation states are now reshuffling the old power distribution – hence a growing frustration in the South vis à vis the North, which comes on top of the still vivid memory of colonisation or imperialism in many places.

The intensification of the US-China rivalry is the third main factor shaping the demise of the international order, as this rivalry increasingly pits the two main world superpowers against each other. Indeed, they now believe they have become dangerously vulnerable to each other – hence a change of view on both sides about globalisation. Whereas the US and China previously celebrated the benefits of increased economic interdependence in fostering development and reducing poverty, they are now trying to address what today they consider as overdependence, and have embarked on a decoupling journey which challenges the rest of the world with hard binary choices, and which permeates international life as a sort of 'cold war 2.0'.

These long-term trends are aggravated by recent developments which accelerate and increase the divisions between countries and the shift to more nationalistic power games.

This is obviously the case with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is pitching the US and the EU in support of Ukraine against Russia supported, at least in principle, by China. This can be seen in the United Nations General Assembly votes in March 2022, while a large part of the rest of the world avoids taking sides – a surprise for many of us, which has triggered a big soul-searching exercise.

This aggravation of long-term trends by recent developments was also the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, when vaccines and treatments were reserved for domestic use in many (although not only) developed countries for a long time, thus creating one more North-South divide.

It is still the case in respect of climate change where resources to cope with mitigation or adaptation remain mostly in the North while the biggest impact of climate change is in poorer countries and will keep hurting them in the coming decades. Nonetheless, these countries' responsibility is often minimal in the stock of carbon dioxide accumulated in the atmosphere leading to tensions on the now open issue of 'loss and damage'.

This also risks being the case in the aftermath of Covid, during which rich countries with solid signatures have been able to borrow trillions to support their economies and their populations, while poorer countries do not have access to these cheap sources of finance and are now struggling with a looming debt crisis.

All in all, the previous international order is being shaken by increasing North-South and East-West tensions and frustrations, and by a change in the balance between geoeconomics and geopolitics, the former losing the force it had gathered in recent decades, and the latter regaining its past dominance over world affairs.¹ We are thus moving towards less of a rules-based system, and more of the use of force. This context obliges us to consider new paths, tentative as they may be.

◦ ◦ ◦

For progressives, exploring these paths should start with a fundamental reconsideration of the ‘software’ of a new international order, before looking at various ‘hardware’ options.

The existing outdated order had a foundation in values, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN in 1948. A reshaped global order would need a similar instrument, fit for the 21st century, a sort of new charter of universalism. It would take into consideration the obvious mismatch between some of the principles of the 1948 declaration, and today’s realities, such as ‘periodic and genuine elections’, the ‘right to social security’ or ‘equal pay for equal work’. Not that many of us would disregard them as irrelevant, but they remain too much of an aspiration for too many on this planet to pretend that they are universally implemented.

New issues such as environmental sustainability, the rights of minorities, or inter-generational accountability need to find their rightful place in a re-statement of collective ambitions, rights and responsibilities. This would need to be thoroughly prepared and developed using the model of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in order to reflect a genuinely ‘universal pluralism’, encompassing the views, traditions, cultures and beliefs of countries and people who were not recognised, did not exist or had no say 75 years ago.

Just agreeing to embark on such a journey would give a powerful signal that we all recognise that this world is in need of a new ethic, a new recognition of values that bind us all, albeit in different ways, starting, for example, with human dignity, freedom, equality, justice, openness and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Various initiatives by different stakeholders in different quarters – be they philosophers, or intellectuals for faith representatives – are already working on such streams of thought. These initiatives deserve to be developed.

Such a preamble would facilitate discussion and, later, negotiation about changes in the ‘hardware’ of global governance, not least by entrusting emerging powers with the responsibility of proposing their own agenda in a way that would be commensurate with the new status they are seeking. While a ‘tabula rasa’ approach would probably be unrealistic, several possible avenues should be considered simultaneously, including three

¹ Lamy P. and N. Gnesotto (2019) *Strange New World: Geoeconomics vs Geopolitics* (Paris and New York: Odile Jacob).

approaches to reform of the present broken system: neo-Westphalian, para-Westphalian and post-Westphalian.

The neo-Westphalian option consists of improvements to be agreed between and among sovereign entities, respecting the intergovernmental way of addressing various existing flaws.

Some examples of these improvements are below.

- Reforming the international monetary system by increasing the role and the weight of a ‘world currency’ such as the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) special drawing rights (SDRs) in order to provide the necessary liquidity in a fairer and more predictable way. This would entail a clarification and, if necessary, a redefinition of the respective missions of the IMF and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS).
- Rebuilding the global financial architecture, including the World Bank and regional development banks, around a new priority for green finance for developing countries, as suggested recently by Mia Mottley with her ‘Bridgetown agenda’.
- Creating a ‘global carbon pricing comparability platform’ in order to avoid new trade frictions by improving the articulation between different approaches, policies or instruments for the decarbonisation of production.²
- Realigning under a single roof various requirements of agrifood systems such as availability, affordability, sustainability and resilience.
- Developing new instruments and policies for pandemic preparedness, production and distribution of medicines and treatments as a follow up to the Covid crisis.
- Revamping ocean governance by breaking down the silos which prevent an adequate response to the systemic nature of the hydrosphere.³
- Creating a ‘global digital stability board’, modeled on the financial stability board, to oversee the development of digital ecosystems governance in a way that properly balances their convergence and concomitant benefits with their coexistence in case of various legitimate limitations to openness.⁴
- On a more logistical side: reforming the diplomatic nature of the selection process of most leaders of international organisations in order to adopt state of the art professional and transparency criteria.
- Mandating a review every ten or 20 years of the content of international agreements and the goals of international organisations to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, inserting, where appropriate sunset clauses for their continuation.
- Building on the relative success of innovations such as the G20 deal on corporate taxation or the nationally determined contributions of the Paris climate agreement which provide for more flexible arrangements than hard law, thus allowing a wider participation of countries.

2 Lamy P. et al., Greening Trade article series, Europe Jacques Delors (www.europejacquesdelors.eu/policy-areas/trade-environment).

3 Lamy P. et al., Ocean Governance article series, Europe Jacques Delors (www.europejacquesdelors.eu/tags/ocean-gouvernance).

4 Lamy P. and B. Liebhager (2022) “Global governance for the digital ecosystems”. CERRE.

- Launching the negotiation of a new global settlement, reviewing memberships, weights, composition of boards (or their equivalent) and rotation arrangements, including the UNSC, the IMF and many other bodies in need of a serious update of their representation.

The para-Westphalian option starts from the idea that today's real stakeholders in the international order go way beyond traditional sovereign states and include a wide variety of actors, many of whom have more weight and influence than many of the members of the UN: NGOs, multinational businesses, sub-national entities such as large cities or regions, major philanthropic or academic organisations, to name a few. These bodies are often able to deploy major resources in coalescing and working together to find solutions to many of the unresolved issues of our times. This concept of 'poly-lateralism' was behind the creation of the Paris Peace Forum⁵ in 2018 as a new and innovative mode of international cooperation, building, nurturing, monitoring and upscaling purpose-led multi-stakeholder coalitions to deliver impactful solutions. The ambition is not to create a brand new global 'order', but to address the causes of more disorders in a pragmatic, efficiency-driven mode. It can lead to quite impressive progress in a relatively short time.

Some examples of achievements through that method are below:

- Surrounding the Antarctica continent with marine protected areas.
- Creating a global fund to help develop independent media.
- Collecting in just a few weeks, \$200 million for Covid vaccines for specific purposes.
- Midwifing a coalition of major digital companies, NGOs and certain governments to protect children on the internet.
- Incubating a common taxonomy for a large number of multinationals to help them benchmark their trajectory towards the SDGs.

The third option, post-Westphalian, is advocated by the promoters of regional integration as a sort of 'minilateralism', which is meant to be easier to achieve given geographical, historical, cultural, religious or linguistic proximities – a supposed fertile ground for unification of various kinds of collective preferences. Unfortunately, the experience shows that the main reference point of this model – i.e., European integration – is and has good reasons to remain quite exceptional. Nowhere else, with the exception of the ASEAN grouping, has regional integration really prospered according to plan: no Latin American attempt has succeeded yet and some have failed; intra-African regional communities are still struggling, as are the even more ambitious projects of African continental unification. The European Union itself still has to pass further tests before it can be considered as a long term historical success, even if it has, so far, delivered reasonably well on its initial economic unification purpose. It is still unclear whether economic union will morph into a genuine political union, a step without which the ambition of the EU to become a global player is likely to remain in limbo, especially in the present increasingly brutal geopolitical context.

5 Paris Peace Forum, <https://parispeaceforum.org/>.

Finally, what should or could be the contribution of the EU to reshaping a global order?

At first sight, it can put to good use the benefits of its unification experience and knowhow. The EU has already reached a level of 'European order' much tighter than any sort of possible global order. It can also serve as a demonstration of the possibility to combine the benefits of integration with those of diversity and pluralism: *in varietate concordia*.

But Europe also has handicaps in taking the lead of such an ambitious agenda. These have to do with Europe's past worldwide dominance and with the scars this has left, many of which persist. These handicaps also have to do with Europe's demographic decline, and with its current relatively low growth potential.

Yet, if one wants to remain faithful to the very purpose of European integration – i.e., keeping the 'European option' (broadly defined as a specific way of life and a particular mix of political, economic and cultural values) available for other humans – Europeans must engage, even if the present circumstances, dominated by the Russian war in Ukraine, challenge the relevance of Europe's recent geopolitical ambitions.

Even if the jury is still out on whether Putin's folly will result in a strengthening or in a weakening of European unification, building a new global European agenda seems to have become a must.

Framing such an exercise should start with two basic interconnected considerations:

- The first concerns the narrative: the EU should resist adopting the 'West against the Rest' posture which is in vogue in Moscow and Beijing, as well as in Washington, for good reasons seen from their point of view. This idea is in contradiction with European strategic autonomy ambitions, and it will fuel aggressive nationalism and confrontation rather than cooperation. Unless it opens the way to a new 'non-alignment 3.0' coalition between India (whose population will surpass that of China this year), Brazil, Indonesia and the like, with which case by case, 'variable geometry' type alliances could be built.
- The second consideration has to do with reshaping the EU's own international agenda. If the coming decades are dominated by the US-China rivalry, the most likely scenario, the EU should rapidly reshape its relationship with developing countries around its own new strategic axis, the green deal, thus putting together a new 'green diplomacy'. In this case, a priority should be given to a coalition with Africa, the continent whose future matters most for the European future.

JACK THOMPSON

Erratic ally: The US midterm elections and the consequences of political dysfunction

The alarming state of politics in the United States complicates efforts to maintain a constructive transatlantic relationship. The system has been destabilised by powerful forces and intractable socio-economic problems and a large minority of Americans question the wisdom of international engagement. The United States will remain a crucial partner for Europe, but it also will oscillate between internationalist and nationalist phases. Europe should bolster its ability to act independently during periods when Washington is a less dependable ally.

It could have been much worse. In the final weeks before the US midterm elections, Republicans eagerly anticipated a resounding victory that would give them a large majority in the House of Representatives and firm control of the Senate. Meanwhile, Democrats – convinced that voters would punish them for high inflation and President Biden’s unpopularity – braced themselves to face a hostile and perhaps even nihilistic Congress. Republicans promised to impeach Biden, reduce funding for domestic and foreign policy priorities, and engage in dangerous brinksmanship over the federal debt ceiling.

But the outcome of the election defied the expectations of both parties. Voters were not happy with the Democrats, who lost the House. But they were also dismayed by the Republicans’ lurch towards radicalism and preferred another two years of Democratic control of the Senate. So instead of the easy win that minority parties typically enjoy in midterm elections, election night ended in a draw. The Republican-controlled House will make life difficult for the Biden administration, but will also be riven by internal disagreements. With Democrats in control of the Senate, Biden will find it easier to obtain confirmations for nominees to the judiciary and executive branches.

Europeans will be relieved that the Biden administration does not have to deal with a Congress dominated by an extremist Republican Party (GOP). Nonetheless, the election

results should reinforce a sobering fact for US allies. The United States is saddled with daunting problems but is so rigidly divided – so calcified – that it cannot agree on solutions. This worrisome state of affairs will not improve any time soon. And it could deteriorate further. This should concern anyone who cares about relations with the United States, because the parlous state of US politics is bad for the transatlantic relationship. In particular, Europeans should be worried about the powerful forces pushing the US political system to breaking point, the ways in which socioeconomic problems are exacerbating political dysfunction and the evolution of the nation’s global role – a process partly driven by domestic factors. Though Europe will hope for improvements on each of these fronts in the coming years, it should brace itself for further deterioration.

A dysfunctional political landscape

Two powerful forces are driving the US political system’s dysfunction. First, the radicalisation of the Republican Party has wreaked havoc on the US political system. The party’s degeneration is linked to the resurgence of right-wing populism – a strain of conservative political culture that first coalesced in the early cold war era around figures such as Joseph McCarthy and organisations such as the John Birch Society. It mostly hovered on the fringes of US politics until the early 1990s, when the impact of rapid cultural change and neoliberal economic policies left millions susceptible to demagoguery. In hindsight, Pat Buchanan’s presidential campaigns during the 1990s presaged the party’s eventual ambivalence about libertarian economics and internationalism. He appealed to whites angry at the status quo by wrapping himself in nationalist themes, namely protectionism, nativism, and unilateralism. Though he never won the GOP nomination, Buchanan demonstrated that there was an appetite in the GOP for radical populism.

Hence, Trump did not remake the GOP in 2016. Rather, he recognised that the nationalist playbook developed by Buchanan could mobilise white voters more effectively than the traditional GOP message of low taxes, free trade, and muscular internationalism. Trump’s other seminal contribution was his understanding that traditional and digital media platforms could be manipulated in ways that would boost his visibility and circumvent the influence of the establishment.

Today’s GOP does not do policy, at least not in the traditional sense. Instead, it mobilises voters by emphasising threats to their sense of identity. Prominent themes in conservative rhetoric revolve around the country’s perceived internal and external decline. These include high levels of immigration, the spread of multiculturalism, rising crime rates, the disproportionate sway of the intellectual and economic elite, non-traditional sexual values, and China’s rise. Because the danger is existential in nature, goes their thinking, taking radical action to preserve the version of America they cherish is justified. Hence, Republicans began raising doubts about the legitimacy of the midterm elections before any votes were cast. Numerous House Republicans have also promised to impeach President Biden and

signalled that they will leverage debt ceiling negotiations to extort major policy concessions from the White House.

The GOP is increasingly susceptible to the influence of conspiracy theories and extremist groups. This is dangerous, given the growing sympathy for political violence in the GOP and on the far left. Recent polling has found that 10% of all Americans – and nearly 20% of Republican men – believe violence against the federal government is justifiable ‘right now’.¹ The fact that Donald Trump and other leading GOP politicians have cultivated the support of groups such as QAnon and Proud Boys – both of which played a role in the 6 January insurrection – is making it more likely that future elections will be marred by violence.

What is often referred to as Trump’s Big Lie – that US elections are rigged, and he was the rightful victor in 2020 – has become a central theme of the party’s identity. The GOP has embraced this falsehood because it dovetails with the party’s desire to restrict ballot access for groups that tend to vote for Democrats. GOP strategists are mindful that the party lost the popular vote in seven of the previous eight presidential elections, but still captured the presidency in 2000 and 2016 thanks to the electoral college. Some GOP officials fear that unless they do something drastic, the party’s growing reliance on white voters will become a recipe for electoral irrelevance. That is because, at some point in the middle of the 21st century, white voters will constitute less than half of the country’s population.

In fact, the GOP is remarkably transparent about its rejection of democratic norms. Indeed, it is common to see Republicans use some version of the formulation ‘America is a republic, not a democracy’ in reference to measures intended to restrict access to voting for young people and minorities and to elect officials who endorse falsehoods about election fraud.²

Democrats face a different set of challenges. They can get to the White House, but need to win congressional elections by massive margins to gain a governing majority. The Senate gives disproportionate influence to predominantly white and conservative states: between 2020 and 2022 it was evenly split, but the 50 Democratic senators represented 40 million more voters than their GOP counterparts. Another problem is that Democrats tend to run campaigns appealing to a subset of voters who are more educated and affluent than most of the electorate, with a focus on cultural issues, including abortion and immigration, and seemingly abstract issues such as climate change and the threat of illiberalism. This limits their appeal to working-class voters, especially men, and has allowed the GOP to make inroads with Latinos and African Americans.

The other forces fostering dysfunction in US politics are polarisation and partisanship. Congressional Republicans and Democrats are further apart ideologically than at any point in the past 50 years.³ Negative partisanship – when voters form opinions based primarily

1 Safarpour, A., J. Druckman, D. Lazer, K. L. Trujillo, A. Shere, M. Baum, K. Ognyanova et al. (2022) “The COVID States Project #80: Americans’ views on violence against the government”. OSF Preprints, 31 January, DOI:10.31219/osf.io/753cb, President Biden.

2 Dobski, B. (2020) “America is a republic, not a democracy”. The Heritage Foundation, Washington DC, 19 June.

3 DeSilver, D. (2022) “The polarization in today’s Congress has roots that go back decades”. Pew Research Center, 10 March.

on dislike or distrust of their opponents – is also on the rise. In 2022, a large majority of Republicans viewed Democrats as immoral (72%), lazy (72%) and closed-minded (69%). Democrats saw Republicans in similar terms. These numbers represent a significant increase from 2016 (47%, 45% and 52% respectively).⁴

Such attitudes make it difficult for Americans to govern themselves. For years, they have been voluntarily sorting themselves into Democratic and Republican parts of the country. This so-called big sort into blue and red areas means that a majority of Americans rarely encounter differing opinions, and their worldviews are continuously reinforced.⁵ This reduces sympathy for opposing viewpoints and, given the tendency to view politics as a zero-sum struggle, boosts willingness to resort to extreme tactics to win elections, pass legislation and reshape institutions.

The electorate is bifurcating into rigid blocs – a problem that John Sides, Chris Tausanovitch and Lynn Vavreck refer to as calcification.⁶ Republicans are typically older white voters living in smaller cities and rural areas. Democrats are becoming the party of younger educated whites and minorities that live in large urban areas and on the coasts. Elections tend to be won or lost in the suburbs and Midwest.

The composition of these electoral coalitions highlights long-term problems confronting both parties. Given the country's growing diversity, Republicans need to increase their share of the minority vote. Meanwhile, the tendency of Democrats to cluster in urban areas and in populous coastal states, such as California and New York, means they need to win the popular vote by large margins to capture the presidency and both chambers of Congress – a prerequisite for passing meaningful legislation.

The wages of despair: linking socioeconomic problems to political dysfunction

The dysfunction plaguing the US political system is partly attributable to intractable socioeconomic challenges. The United States is a wealthy country. It boasts the world's largest GDP, as measured in nominal terms, ranks among the top ten countries in terms of GDP per capita, and is in the top 25 as measured by the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index.

Yet these impressive numbers are counterbalanced by pressing socioeconomic problems so acute that they have contributed to the radicalisation of tens of millions of Americans. Income inequality has reached historically high levels in the United States; only Chile, Mexico and Turkey have higher levels. Uniquely among advanced economies, mortality

4 Abramowitz, A.I. and S. W. Webster (2018) "Why Americans dislike parties but behave like rabid partisans". *Political Psychology* 39:S1: 119-135; Pew Research Center (2022) "As partisan hostility grows, signs of frustration with the two-party system", August.

5 Bishop, B. (2008) *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

6 Sides, J., C. Tausanovitch and L. Vavreck (2022) *The Bitter End: The 2020 Presidential Campaign and the Challenge to American Democracy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press).

rates for white Americans have been rising in recent years, after decreasing for most of the previous century. More specifically, in 2018 alone 158,000 Americans died from suicide, drug overdose, or diseases related to alcohol abuse, or what Anne Case and Angus Deaton call 'deaths of despair'. This is nearly triple the number of such deaths in 1995.⁷

Perhaps most damaging of all has been the failure to account for trade competition. Nearly 4 million jobs were shed, mostly in manufacturing, as a direct result of China's 2001 accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO); millions more disappeared as an indirect result. These losses were concentrated in the US Southeast and Midwest. Though these job losses were devastating for less educated workers in all demographic groups, the political impact has been most apparent in the behaviour of blue-collar whites – millions of whom have turned to nationalist and illiberal politics.⁸

Two additional socioeconomic factors influence voting behaviour in the United States. One is the extent to which the US system struggles to assimilate large numbers of immigrants. In the United States, there are approximately 50 million immigrants – the highest absolute number of immigrants in any country. Of that 50 million, an estimated 10 million are undocumented. The presence of large numbers of immigrants has galvanised right-wing populists. It has increased white support for the GOP and facilitated closer cooperation between Republicans and white nationalists.⁹

The other factor affecting voting behaviour is the perception that crime rates are increasing – a concern that the GOP exploited in their 2022 electoral campaign. There has been a measurable rise in violent crime in large urban areas since 2020.¹⁰ Though the origins of this trend remain unclear, the political impact has been unmistakable. A combination of rising crime rates in big cities and the movement to highlight police violence against African Americans has fuelled a potent narrative – that cities are dangerous because politically-correct politicians want to defund the police.

Coming to terms with gradual decline

For the first time since the early cold war era, a large minority of Americans question the benefits of an internationalist foreign policy. Many voters have concluded that the United States accepted too much responsibility abroad after 1990. They believe that allies must contribute more to international security and that the United States should avoid prolonged

7 Case, A. and A. Deaton (2020) *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press).

8 Petri, P. A. and M. Banga (2020) "The economic consequences of globalisation in the United States". ERIA Discussion Paper Series 311, January; Autor, D. H., D. Dorn and G. H. Hanson (2016) "The China shock: Learning from labor market adjustment to large changes in trade". Working Paper 21906, National Bureau of Economic Research; Autor, D., D. Dorn, G. Hanson and K. Majlesi (2020) "Importing political polarization? The electoral consequences of rising trade exposure". *American Economic Review*, 110 (10): 3139-83.

9 Abrajano, M. and Z. Hajnal (2015) *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

10 Tucker, E. and P. Nickeas (2021) "The US saw significant crime rise across major cities in 2020. And it's not letting up". *CNN*, 3 April.

military entanglements. In addition to acknowledging failed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, these sentiments reflect an awareness of gradually diminishing power. Indeed, US decline is helping to facilitate the emergence of a multipolar landscape in which the United States remains the most influential actor, but is challenged by a multitude of state and non-state actors, foremost among them China. US policymakers will continue to prioritise competition with Beijing and strategic planning for the Indo-Pacific. Washington still cares about European security, but this will receive less attention than during the cold war, the conflict in Ukraine notwithstanding.

Many Americans have also concluded that the globalised economy does not always work for them. Given the extent to which it benefits from international trade, the United States will continue to tolerate a relatively high degree of economic interdependence. However, this toleration will be tempered by domestic politics, especially when it comes to China. Large majorities of Americans believe trade with China weakens US national security and they favour reducing trade between the two countries.¹¹ These sentiments align with Washington's concern about China's technological prowess and will push the world further toward rival trade blocs. There is also scepticism about the value of the rules-based trading system more broadly. Policymakers from both parties have called for US withdrawal from the World Trade Organization.

In the coming years US foreign policy will oscillate, sometimes significantly, based on which party wields power. Democrats tend to favour multilateralism. They view international cooperation as the best way to address challenges and support the promotion of democratic values. Democrats are also more tolerant of immigration. In contrast, Republicans have shifted toward a nationalist worldview. They regard immigration as a threat and trade as a zero-sum competition. They are also more likely to view military power as an effective way to advance the national interest, even if they have little appetite for prolonged interventions.¹²

In the coming years, alliances will be a battleground for the GOP and Democrats. Most Americans still support NATO. However, a significant minority of Republicans are ambivalent about alliances in general and specifically about NATO. In April 2022, 30% of House Republicans voted against a symbolic resolution reaffirming support for NATO. The war in Ukraine is becoming a focal point for unease. In May 2022, 57 House Republicans voted against a \$40 billion aid package for Kiev. A large minority, such as Senator Josh Hawley, think that Europe should be shouldering the cost of arming Ukraine.¹³ And the likely incoming Speaker of the House, Kevin McCarthy, has indicated Republicans will be less willing to approve additional funding for Ukraine.

11 Smeltz, D., I. Daalder, K. Friedhoff, C. Kafura and E. Sullivan (2021) "A foreign policy for the middle class—What Americans think". The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

12 Smeltz, D., I. Daalder, K. Friedhoff, C. Kafura, and E. Sullivan (2022) "Pivot to Europe: US public opinion in a time of war". The Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

13 Hawley, J. (@HawleyMO) (2022) "Spending \$40 billion on Ukraine aid - more than three times what all of Europe has spent combined - is not in America's interests. It neglects priorities at home (the border), allows Europe to freeload, short changes critical interests abroad and comes w/ no meaningful oversight", Twitter, 17 May 12:09 am.

There is growing sympathy in the GOP for authoritarian regimes that espouse white Christian nationalist values. Victor Orbán's Hungary has become a popular destination for conservatives intrigued by the advantages they see in illiberal democracy. Not coincidentally, these politicians and intellectuals are usually hostile to the European project. They see it as a technocratic monstrosity that promotes globalism and atheism. The Conservative Political Action Conference, which is influential with the conservative grassroots, held its 2022 annual meeting in Budapest.

Nationalist and illiberal impulses, combined with ambivalence about Ukraine, have earned Vladimir Putin a modicum of support on the US right. Tucker Carlson, host of the most popular cable news show on US television and a prominent source of white nationalist content, has embraced anti-anti-Putinism and spread disinformation about Ukraine. Joe Kent, a candidate for Washington's third district and part of a younger generation of Republican veterans promoting nationalist foreign policy agendas, called Putin's demands for Ukrainian territorial concessions 'very reasonable'.¹⁴

Though still a minority, there is bipartisan support for ending the war in Ukraine. A group of 30 legislators from the Congressional Progressive Caucus sent President Biden a letter in October 2022 calling for a negotiated ceasefire, though they quickly withdrew the letter amidst widespread criticism. This sentiment on the left is driven by discomfort with the use of military force and concern that, in a tough economic climate, voters will lose patience with aid to Ukraine. Some of these policymakers may join the GOP in seeking to limit funding for Ukraine in the upcoming congressional session.

Implications for Europe

As they ponder the implications of US dysfunction and decline, Europeans should assess three questions. One relates to the staying power of right-wing populism. Is Trump an anomaly or will other Republicans be able to win elections by emphasising nationalist and populist themes? Several high-profile Republicans are betting that they can be Trump 2.0 – that they can appeal to Trump's most ardent supporters with the same rhetoric and policies, but do so in a more disciplined and less corrupt manner. If they can, it will help solidify the hold of right-wing populism on the party. Key figures to watch in this regard are Ron DeSantis, the popular governor of Florida who just won an impressive re-election campaign on the strength of his opposition to so-called woke politics; Senator Hawley of Missouri; and South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem.

Another dynamic that will bear watching is the evolving balance of power in the GOP between true believers, pragmatists, and Republicans willing to defend democratic principles and norms. When Trump rose to power in 2016, the GOP was dominated by pragmatists and included a significant number of principled individuals who were horrified by his illiberalism. At first, most of the pragmatists denounced Trump and, more importantly, the type of politics he embodies. But in just six years, the balance of power has shifted

¹⁴ Leonhardt, D. (2022) 'The G.O.P.'s 'Putin Wing''. *The New York Times*, 7 April.

dramatically. Talented pragmatists such as the Senator-elect from Ohio, J. D. Vance and Representative Elise Stefanik, from New York, embraced right-wing populism when Trump's staying power became apparent. Most who were willing to defy Trump have left the party or been defeated in primary contests, such as former Representative Liz Cheney in Wyoming. There are still a few holdout Republicans in Congress, such as Senator Mitt Romney. He voted to impeach Trump and has been quietly critical of the former president. Yet overall, right-wing populism is ascendant. Many pragmatists would support a less radical version of right-wing politics if the party's mood were to change again, though this seems unlikely. Of course, for Europeans hoping to see a fully democratic and stable United States, such a shift would be welcome.

Finally, the debate between internationalists, on one hand, and nationalists and non-interventionists, on the other, will be closely watched by Europeans. Given the crucial role the US plays in NATO and, more broadly, in upholding the multilateral system, Europeans have a vested interest in a US foreign policy that is firmly internationalist and inclined toward multilateralism. The good news is that a majority of elected officials and voters still favour US leadership, strong alliances, robust international institutions and upholding a rules-based international trading system.

The bad news is that this longstanding internationalist orientation is wobbling. A combination of nationalist Republicans, left-wing Democrats and intellectuals favour unpicking some aspects of the foreign policy consensus. Nationalists are sceptical of alliances, hostile to international institutions, and favour protectionism. Many left-wing or populist Democrats would like to cut military spending or raise trade barriers. And an influential group of foreign policy intellectuals favour a doctrine sometimes referred to as restraint. Such a strategy would entail reducing US international involvement and military spending and shifting some or even most of the security burden in Europe and Asia to allies. Some versions of restraint align with the goals of European strategic autonomy, but others would entail a more antagonistic division of labour.

Europeans have little influence over the direction of US politics. So, while it would behove them to follow US elections closely, at the end of the day their focus should be on putting their own affairs in order. When it comes to doing their part to contribute to a constructive and durable transatlantic relationship, this would mean continuing to cooperate with Washington whenever possible and in spite of frequent frustrations. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the United States makes enormous contributions to European security and prosperity and Europe would do well to seek compromises where possible. Most notably, Europe can and should contribute more to bolster NATO's military capabilities, and political and economic resilience, as well as reach a consensus on how it can best contribute to security in the Indo-Pacific.

At the same time, given the growing unpredictability of the United States as a partner, Europeans should redouble their efforts to develop independent capabilities. This includes in the political realm – in the form of institutions that facilitate collaboration between EU member states and like-minded countries – as well as in defence. It also means bolstering interoperability between national militaries and reaching healthy defence spending levels,

even in the face of pressure for budget cuts. Europe must strengthen its ability to protect and promote its interests and values if the United States turns back to the populist right – a scenario that could play out as soon as 2024.





PREDICTIONS 2023



MACIEJ GDULA

How to transform the fear

Emotions and the struggle of diverging interpretations regarding the nature of the crisis that grips Poland will be of key importance for the 2023 parliamentary election campaign. Neither the political programmes nor interests of certain socio-economic groups will be crucial, rather it will be about the ability of politicians and other social actors to transform emotions and create a narrative framework on how to overcome the current crisis. For this reason, the case of Poland will be an important test of to what extent progressive social and political forces can beat the parties which are hostile to liberal democracy in conditions of instability.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic pushed many to believe that we were dealing with an extreme event that nothing could outperform for a long time to come. From the perspective of the start of 2023, this belief can almost be remembered with some nostalgia. The last two years have seen Belarussian president Alexander Lukashenko's hostile hybrid actions against the EU on the borders of Poland and Lithuania, Russia's attack on Ukraine, hence a full-scale war in Europe, the influx of millions of refugees, and a radical increase in energy costs and inflation. The overlapping of several crises caused the dominant emotions at the beginning of the election campaign to be fear and a sense of uncertainty.

While in the case of positive emotions – joy or hope, for example – politicians compete to strengthen and express them, in the case of fear, they are socially obliged to overcome it. They have to do it by amplifying feelings close to fear and offering responses that trigger other emotions.

If we look at the strategy in recent months of Poland's governing party Law and Justice (PiS), we can see several main lines of action. Firstly, PiS criticises the European Union for withholding money from the reconstruction fund for Poland. Secondly, it alleges that the West, and especially Germany, was wrong about Russia and still does not show due support for Ukraine. Thirdly, PiS politicians emphasise Poland's preparation for the crisis through the construction of the Baltic Pipe, the gas pipeline connecting Norway and Poland, and financial shielding measures prepared by the government that reduce energy costs for households.

We are dealing with a conscious transformation of fear into anger towards the European Union and Germany. On the one hand, the government represents angry citizens, for example when it criticises Germany for its soft attitude towards Russian president Vladimir Putin and the construction of the Nord Stream pipelines. On the other hand, PiS is trying to build a sense of pride in Poland's achievements, both in terms of aid for Ukraine and anti-crisis measures. Fear and uncertainty are to be overcome by a sense of agency.

Over the past few months, opinion polls indicate that if elections were held now, the opposition parties could jointly achieve an advantage over the ruling party. PiS has support in the range of 30 to 35%, while democratic opposition parties have Civic Platform at between 25 and 29%, PL2050 (neo-Christian democratic party) between 10 and 15%, Left from 8 to 11%, and PSL (an agrarian political party) between 5 and 6%. In terms of the distribution of seats, according to the current polls, PiS could win about 200 seats out of 460, and would have no chance of an independent majority. The opposition could count on about 250 seats. An important factor determining the post-election dynamics could be the low results of the Confederation – the alliance of the far-right parties consisting of nationalists and libertarians. The Confederation would be a likely PiS coalition partner, but even if it exceeds the electoral threshold of 5% (which, according to many polls, it does not), it would only win about ten seats: still not enough to provide PiS with a majority in parliament.

If current opinion polls were to decide the outcome of the elections, the opposition parties could already start negotiating the formation of a future government, but ultimately it is the campaign that decides the outcome. And in the campaign, individual parties have to face the issue of dominant emotions and prove that they will cope with the crisis better than those holding power.

Like PiS, opposition parties seek to transform fear into anger. It is not anger at the Germans and the EU, but at the ruling party. People have reasons to be angry. Their wages are shrinking despite the government's promise that inflation will not affect real wages. There is a growing feeling that the government has not been prudent when it comes to the green energy transition. It opposed the development of wind farms and did not create the right conditions for the development of photovoltaics. In addition, there are scandals related to the financing of party campaigns by government representatives working in well-paid positions in public enterprises, which bears the hallmarks of political corruption. All these issues are hotly debated in Poland.

However, the opposition also has an additional task to perform: building hope that the crisis can be overcome. Fear can be overcome through the emotions of solidarity and cooperation. The opposition's attitude towards the EU and European partners works to the advantage of the opposition, as well as the situation in the opposition itself, which is diverse, but willing to cooperate. Over the last few years, opposition parties have made clear that the government's conflictual attitude towards the EU will cost Poland dearly. Today, when problems with disbursing funds from the reconstruction fund are related to the rule of law, the opposition not only gains credibility, but also becomes a guarantor of reaching for these funds in the future and rebuilding good relations with the EU.

The second issue is related to the functioning of the opposition itself. Unlike PiS, which is built around the central position of its leader Jarosław Kaczyński, the opposition remains diverse in terms of programme and leadership. However, it has managed to agree on a common catalogue of basic values, is able to cooperate in specific matters and promises to create a joint government after the elections. This lends credence to the narrative of cooperation. While the government constantly looks for new enemies against which it mobilises its supporters, the opposition mobilises various electorates that are not reduced to the common denominator of their aversion for Kaczyński. Should it be able to form a government, it will be one based on the search for compromises.

The 2023 campaign will show whether it is possible, during the crisis, to inspire hope, integrate societies in solidarity, and focus on social and economic transformation. The alternative is already materialising in the activity of the PiS government: a policy of hatred and hostility, as well as actions aimed only at mitigating the symptoms of the current crisis without introducing deeper reforms. The opposition is determined that the policy of hope and cooperation will prevail.



JOAQUÍN ALMUNIA

Challenges of EU economic governance for 2023

On 9 November, the European Commission opened an institutional debate about the new fiscal rules for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), with its new *Communication on orientations for a reform of the EU economic governance framework*. Almost three years earlier, at the beginning of the pandemic, the enforcement of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) set of fiscal rules was suspended. Now, the end of the suspension is warranted, but the old framework cannot come back into force without substantial reform.

The rationale behind the existence of this SGP framework is well-known. To ensure consistency between the European Central Bank's monetary policy and fiscal policies under the responsibility of national authorities, the EMU needs to coordinate the latter. Agreement was reached on the initial Stability and Growth Pact rules in 1997, before the single currency came into force.

The enforcement of the SGP has never been an easy task. Its rules were revised twice: in 2005, after the clash between the Commission and the Ecofin Council; and in 2011-2012, during the financial crisis. But in neither the period when the rules were designed more rigidly, nor in the period when their interpretation could be considered more flexible, were the results fully satisfactory. Criticism towards the EMU governance framework comes from different perspectives and it points to different aspects.

The SGP rules and the way their enforcement operates show a clear pro-cyclical bias, asking for fiscal adjustments in bad economic times and allowing expansionary policies when the economy grows above potential. Other groups of critical voices have pointed out that the degree of complexity of the rules has become totally excessive, even for those in charge of its interpretation and enforcement. Furthermore, some of the economic variables to be considered are not directly observable, thus increasing the difficulties. Many decisions of the Commission and the Council have consequently given way to serious disagreements among political authorities and experts, and the lack of credibility of the framework was evident when, at the outbreak of the pandemic, the Commission decided to suspend the enforcement of the rules.

The adoption of a revised framework was expected in 2022, but had to be postponed, given the new difficulties with the war in Ukraine and the rise of inflation. On 9 November 2022, the Commission finally tabled its proposal, in a difficult context of inflation, ECB decisions to increase interest rates and looming risks of a recession.

The Communication, to be discussed in the coming months by the Council and the Parliament before the Commission puts forward its legal proposals, tries to accommodate the ideas of the different groups of countries.

On the one hand, the so-called 'frugals' – Germany, Netherlands, Baltics and so on – are generally supportive of the basic elements of the framework that was suspended in 2020, but are also aware of the need for some corrections. On the other hand, the 'doves' – France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and so on – are in favour of more profound changes. Some of them have sent the Commission written documents describing their ideas in detail, and also presenting possible compromises between their original position, like a Spanish-Dutch non-paper for example, which has already influenced the Commission Communication.

What are the main suggestions of the Communication? Regarding the 'corrective part' of the SGP, the reference values for deficits (3% of GDP) and public debt (60%) are maintained. The relevant modifications compared to the present rules are two. First, the path to annually adjust the public debt ratio by 1/20 until reaching the reference value is eliminated. Second, the sanctions for non-compliance with GDP recommendations will be more realistic, given that until now this possibility has never been used.

As far as the 'preventive part' is concerned, the Medium Term Objective (MTO) as a reference also disappears. Debt adjustments, based on Debt Sustainability Assessments, will be attainable over four years, or over seven years if combined with structural reforms and investment programmes. These paths will be negotiated between the Commission and each member state and measured by an expenditure rule. National independent fiscal authorities (IFIs) can participate in these negotiations and assess the degree of implementation of the commitments. The involvement of member state authorities, including IFIs, represents a clear improvement in relation to the unilateral submission of Convergence Programmes prepared by the national capitals. Furthermore, the link of the adjustment paths with reforms and investments negotiated *ex ante*, inspired by the NexGenerationEU procedures, seems more efficient than the previous systems.

Overall, the Commission proposal looks better than the old SGP rules. Nevertheless, the new economic governance deserves further decisions, on top of a new revision of the SGP. The Banking Union still awaits completion through the creation of an insurance deposit mechanism at the euro area level. The Capital Markets Union remains a work in progress. A common fiscal capacity at the euro area level is badly needed to complement the aggregate impact of the different national fiscal policies. And the mutualisation of debt must not remain a one-off initiative.

My prediction for 2023 is that discussions around the economic governance framework will not end during the Swedish presidency of the Council of the EU. Should the agenda not be limited to fiscal rules, even the Spanish presidency will not be able to reach a compromise. These rules are needed, but we must be aware of the importance of having a

sustainable EMU to cope in an efficient manner with present and future shocks. Attention at the highest political level, after or at the same time as the set-up of new fiscal rules, will be of primordial importance.



HEDWIG GIUSTO

Migration: In times of crisis, the EU must abandon crisis mode

It may sound like a paradox, but in an era of permanent crisis, the European Union must abandon its usual crisis-mode approach to migration and asylum. It must finally devise bold, coherent and humane migration and asylum policies that tackle mobility as a regular feature of human behaviour, rather than as an emergency. Yet it is doubtful that in 2023 the EU will be able to shake off the many political obstacles that have so far hindered achieving a broad, deep and structural reform of asylum and migration policies. Nevertheless, a deal on the (New) Pact on Asylum and Migration, the reform package presented by the Commission in September 2020, is possible. But at a great price.

When it comes to the management of asylum and migration, recent years have seen a series of crises emerge. The forced displacement of Afghans following the Taliban takeover in the summer of 2021, the orchestrated border crisis between Poland and Belarus later that year and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 – followed by the most significant movement of asylum seekers in Europe since the second world war, have repeatedly put a strain on the European Union, testing its response capability.

While in the first two cases, the EU has shown its shortcomings and its tendency to look at migration only in terms of security, containment and deterrence, the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis has proved that the EU and its member states (and citizens) are indeed capable of solidarity and of coping with exceptional refugee movements. It is difficult to calculate the number of refugees from Ukraine who are currently in the EU, as the crossing of borders between the EU and its Eastern European neighbour occurs in both directions, and many people have returned home or travel back and forth. Yet it is sufficient to point out that about 1 million Syrian asylum seekers reached the EU in 2015, triggering one of the most profound internal political crises in the EU, while in just the first two weeks after the Russian invasion, over 2.5 million refugees from Ukraine sought protection in the EU, without unleashing any significant xenophobic reactions (a lot could be said about the double standards that this different attitude hardly disguises).

The activation in March 2022, for the first time, of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) to facilitate the reception of a massive influx of refugees, has also demonstrated the benefits of streamlining asylum procedures and has – at least temporarily – sidelined member states’ concerns over secondary movements (that is, the movement of refugees from the country of first arrival, and registration, to another EU member state).

However, the TPD is a crisis-oriented response that can only last up to three years. Its application, in the long run, may have some serious secondary effects that further highlight the need for urgent reforms of the migration and asylum system. As the duration of the war in Eastern Europe is uncertain, and therefore it is difficult to predict how many refugees from Ukraine will eventually stay in the EU and for how long, it is critical to formulate long-lasting measures for the reception and integration of newcomers (both from Ukraine and elsewhere) that take into account and make up for the different reception capabilities of the member states.

The persistence of an approach focused on crisis may also have as a consequence the diversion of crucial financial and political resources from other, longer-term priorities and commitments, such as development and humanitarian aid, with potentially dramatic consequences. Moreover, without a more comprehensive approach, the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis could overshadow other enduring displacement situations elsewhere. The risk here would be a ‘feeling of saturation’ that may induce EU member states to refuse admission to non-Ukrainian refugees and be (more) hostile to resettlement and relocation schemes.

In general, the tendency to adopt *ad hoc* measures to react to crises, as has happened for the Ukrainian crisis, may, in the long term, result in an excessive fragmentation of policies. This could lead, on the one hand, to a ‘cherry-picking’ strategy, where member states choose the policy that better fits their needs and political priorities, and, on the other hand, to less control when it comes to reception and integration standards and respect for human and civil rights.

If there were a positive outcome from the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis, it would be that the European Union has shown a great deal of flexibility and reaction capability. However, there is still a long way to go in the field of cooperation. In June 2022, as a major step forward in the reform of EU migration and asylum policy, and under the auspices of the French presidency, the EU member states agreed on a voluntary scheme for the relocation of migrants from the EU’s Mediterranean member states (the ‘voluntary solidarity mechanism’). As expected, only 13 willing countries have subscribed to it. In the same spirit of so-called ‘flexible solidarity’, the Czech presidency presented at the end of October a document, “Way forward on EU migration solidarity and crisis response mechanism”, with which member states “are invited to consider” a minimum annual threshold for voluntary relocations. The trend seems to be the reliance on smaller coalitions of willing countries and a gradual approach in adopting individual components of the Migration Pact, rather than a comprehensive one.

Therefore, in the course of 2023, the European Union may find the lowest common denominator and be able eventually to cut a weak deal – by April 2024 (as agreed by the

European Parliament and five Council presidencies with the September 2022 roadmap) – on a revised version of the Pact. But this will probably be done with a gradual approach, step by step, first on less contentious chapters, and with actors seeking concessions in other policy areas. Most probably, given the prevailing political atmosphere on the continent, the final deal, rather than incorporating the lessons from the Ukrainian crisis, will maintain a securitarian approach and focus on containment and externalisation; devote little attention to the needs and rights of refugees and migrants; retain some fragmentation; and will provide some ‘escape routes’ for those member states that are adverse to the very same idea of adopting common migration policies and of solidarity. Therefore, probably, even if it will represent a step forward from the crisis-oriented approach, from a progressive perspective, such a deal cannot be considered a success.



ANA CHUPESKA

The Western Balkan enlargement: Unfinished business

In light of the decisions outlined in the Madrid summit declaration – which was agreed upon at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 29 June 2022 – the Atlantic alliance’s “unprecedented level of collaboration with the European Union”, and the security implications of this for the Western Balkans, seem to leave one piece of unfinished business: the integration of the Western Balkan countries into the EU.

The Madrid summit declaration highlights the resolute commitment to the strong alliance between the EU and NATO and reaffirms the enduring transatlantic bond between the two. Indeed, it asserts a common dedication to democracy, individual liberty, human rights, the rule of law, security, and peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic realm.

But one should ask whether these goals are realistic and whether the Madrid declaration can be brought more into play in the present situation – a situation in which the Western Balkans are kept out of the game and do not have a formal chance to sit at the EU table.

This is especially relevant for North Macedonia – first of all because three years ago, the country made risky choices when it decided to change its constitutional name. North Macedonia genuinely committed to the Prespa Agreement (the deal between Skopje and Athens that settled the name dispute between the two countries) in which there are clear references to North Macedonia’s accession to the EU, and which includes obligations for the EU to do its utmost in this regard.

However, following the signature of the Prespa Agreement, the opening of accession talks between the EU and North Macedonia (and Albania) have been blocked twice: first by France (October 2019), which claimed there was a need for deep reform of the way the Commission leads negotiations, and then by Bulgaria (November 2020) over a language dispute. The two humiliating blockades have impacted the socio-political dynamism in North Macedonia and caused abject disappointment among Macedonian citizens. Unsurprisingly, this disappointment has been exploited by eurosceptic and ethno-populist platforms, even to the extent of provoking incidents – such as when massive and violent protests were organised to demonstrate against the French proposal to lift

the Bulgarian blockade in summer 2022. Furthermore, there are indications that these protests were driven by ‘foreign interventions of third sides’ to destabilise this country. And then there are the constant hybrid threats to which North Macedonia is exposed – specifically those related to the ‘hoax bomb threats’ targeting schools in the capital city of Skopje, at least twice a week, for over two months at the end of 2022. One such threat was also witnessed by European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen during her visit to Skopje last October.

Yet despite all this, public opinion in North Macedonia still strongly supports the Allies and their policies. More than half of Macedonian citizens thus believe that Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is unjustified. This therefore begs the question of what kind of response Macedonian citizens need and deserve in return for their commitment to EU accession? The answer is simple: integration into the EU as soon as possible.

Indeed, North Macedonia’s EU integration can be justified firstly because, since its independence after the bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia around 31 years ago, Macedonian politics has been marked by a continuous fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria and the standards they set out for EU integration. Even the authoritarian regime led by Gruevski (2009-2015) was successfully and peacefully overcome, putting North Macedonia back on the democratic track. EU integration is indeed North Macedonia’s first political priority, and the country has made enormous investments in this direction. In addition, Macedonian institutions have indisputably shown their commitment to the same security platform as that of the Euro-Atlantic allies.

Secondly, North Macedonia’s EU integration can be justified because the region is still plagued by security threats linked to persisting regional disputes, such as the tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, and those related to the Republika Srpska. Both, unfortunately, are still open ground for regional destabilisation.

Besides the tensions outlined above, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the ‘value vacuum’ created by the lack of progress in North Macedonia’s EU integration agenda create opportunities for the intervention and influence of third countries.

To put it simply, the EU’s ‘insecurities’ and ‘anxieties’ about the enlargement process have opened the door to the penetration of interests of other foreign actors – and thus to an increasingly visible Russian political interference and to Chinese economic influence.

As long as the stalemate in the EU integration process of North Macedonia (which is also a member of NATO) persists, and against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, this Western Balkan country represents fertile ground for these third-country interferences. Moreover, the risk is the same in other (more problematic) Western Balkan countries, namely Serbia, Kosovo and the Republika Srpska. All of them have a very strong capacity to infect the overall region if their international status is not resolved soon.

A concrete date for North Macedonia’s membership of the EU (for example in 2030) should therefore be put in the EU’s agenda for 2023. At the same time, the EU should provide specific membership forms for the ‘newcomers (for example, by reducing their veto capability in Council’s decisions). Otherwise, the current geopolitical circumstances will

increasingly benefit the presence of third actors that represent a strong political force and that create the perfect conditions for growing eurosceptic sentiment.



E HUN TAN

Navigating the great power rivalries of the 2020s: Exploring Southeast Asia's options

For the first time since the end of the cold war, the world order marked by American dominance in international affairs has been shaken. Against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the continued rivalry between the United States and China, the global geopolitical landscape is becoming increasingly multipolar. To put things into perspective, although tensions had by no means disappeared between the 1990s and the 2010s, the possibility of nuclear war was very remote until 2022. Now, however, we are entering a convoluted phase in the global geopolitical landscape.

As great powers flex their military and economic muscles across their spheres of influence, the 11 Southeast Asian countries are in a precarious position. Located strategically among global competing forces and amid rising global anxieties, the region is fast becoming an area ripe with opportunity and yet also rife with risk.

In recent years, the region has become the epicentre of the economic, strategic and military rivalry playing out between the global superpowers. Most states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a political and economic union of ten member states in Southeast Asia, view the United States and its allies as indispensable partners. However, China is also seen as a vital source of economic and political partnership as many of its neighbouring Southeast Asian states have benefited from its investment. This has helped create a largely favourable investment climate in the Southeast Asian region – making it the first in line to benefit from investors' increased appetite for alternative destinations to China for foreign direct investment due to the latter's frequent pandemic lockdowns, for example.

So how should Southeast Asian countries respond to the ambitions of these great powers and to their actions, inaction and interaction?

Due to the region's limited political and military power to influence the current international order, it is clear that the Southeast Asian countries must find ways to manage global tensions. They must therefore seek to maintain a viable position to avoid full-blown

confrontation and, by extension, unintended negative consequences that would impact the nations socially, politically and economically.

Firstly, and importantly, there is the need to avoid falling into the binary trap of picking sides between the US and China. Instead, the Southeast Asian countries should have an independent foreign policy that is geared towards gaining resilience in economic development, defence and other areas in order to develop strategic autonomy. Strategies such as ‘hedging’ (as opposed to ‘balancing’ or ‘bandwagoning’) are very much under consideration by ASEAN countries and are being pursued vis-à-vis the competing powers.

Secondly, the region can and should move away from one-size-fits-all choices, and engage in a multi-layered and multi-aligned diplomacy that is inclusive, impartial and integrative. Regional dialogues have talked and deliberated about an ‘à la carte’ diplomacy, with countries having multiple strategies in their toolbox as a way of resolving conflicts. This requires a shift in mindset on the part of Southeast Asian states. Beyond simply rejecting the notion of picking sides between the US and China, ASEAN should not conceptualise geopolitics as a battle between western and Asian values. Instead of picking sides, the right approach could entail, for example, attracting enough investment from larger countries such as the US and China so that acts of aggression become counterproductive to their broader strategic plans. Concerning China specifically, Southeast Asian countries should recognise it as a multifaceted nation with its own internal logic rather than resorting to a stereotypical description of the power as a neo-totalitarian state and thus risking a self-fulfilling prophecy where China can no longer be engaged constructively.

Thirdly, to leverage ASEAN’s economic position as a crossroads between global superpowers and economic blocs – those of China, the EU and the US – the region is already beginning to assert its strategic position by entering into deeper economic partnerships with the great powers, including the US, via the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, and China via the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a free trade agreement among 15 countries in the region. Economically, there is therefore great potential here for ASEAN states to coordinate further, not only to promote more intra-ASEAN trade on the back of stronger regional value chains, but also to strengthen ASEAN’s position as a trading bloc with bargaining power on the global stage.

Whether in foreign policy, defence or economics, Southeast Asia can and should stress its autonomy from the global superpowers. This will not happen out of thin air. Starting out as merely a geographical construct, ASEAN continues to evolve into a very important geopolitical bloc, with the notion of an ASEAN identity now trending in the region. The EU plays a role in this by building new norms that can challenge the current world order – for example, the EU’s potential closer economic engagement with ASEAN can be part of the EU’s strategy and effort to counter China and/or the United States’ growing geo-economic influence in the region. ASEAN countries, for their part, may warm to more such engagements as the EU is typically regarded as a ‘neutral’ party in the global superpower tussle. We have seen such efforts through the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership, and the EU’s pledge to support the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 and the ASEAN Smart Green Cities programme, to name just a few. Further, acting as a balance amongst great power

rivalries, the EU also serves as an important example of how multilateralism works. Deeper collaboration with partners around the world, including the establishment of deeper economic relations, has the potential to strengthen relations between the EU and ASEAN, against the backdrop of overall geopolitical complexities.

The world as we know it has changed dramatically in a short period of time, from geopolitics and the economy to energy and food security. ASEAN will play a crucial role not only in navigating the great power rivalry but also in building new relationships in this regard. Geo-economic complexity provides more leverage for ASEAN to carve out some middle ground between global competing interests.

Ultimately, the Southeast Asia region finds itself at a crossroads amid the growing complexity of the multipolar world, and it needs to reinvent itself and find new strategies to manage its relationship with foreign powers. If it plays its part well, the region can benefit from global tensions and serve as a bridge between east and west.



BIOGRAPHIES





Joaquín ALMUNIA is visiting Professor at Sciences-Po's Paris School of International Affairs and Chairman of the Board of the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). He is also the Honorary President of the Barcelona School of Economics. From April 2004 to October 2014 he has been a member of the European Commission, in charge of Economic and Monetary Affairs and, since February 2010, as Vice-President of the Commission, he was in charge of Competition Policy. He was member of the Spanish government, first as minister of Labour and Social Security (1982-1986) and later minister for Public Administration (1986-1991). Has been a member of the Spanish Parliament (1979-2004) and the leader of the Spanish Socialist Party, PSOE (1997-2000). He has degrees in Economics (1971) and Law (1972) from the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain).



Javier ÁLVAREZ-GÁLVEZ holds a PhD from the Complutense University of Madrid. He currently works as Senior Research Fellow (Ramon & Cajal) in the Department of Biomedicine, Biotechnology and Public Health at the University of Cadiz, where he teaches biostatistics, quantitative methods, multivariate data analysis and public health. His main research interests are related to social and health data science, research methodology, social and health systems, social determinants of health, social inequalities in (mental) health and suicide, health behaviours and health sociology. He currently leads the DEMMOCAD project focused on the study of social inequalities in multimorbidity and the DCODES project which is centred on the study of health misinformation in social media.



László ANDOR is Secretary General of the FEPS. An economist and former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2010-2014), Andor has been Head of the Department of Economic Policy at Corvinus University (Budapest), Senior Fellow at Hertie School of Governance (Berlin) and a visiting professor at ULB (Brussels) and Sciences Po (Paris). He was editor of the journal *Eszmélet* and a regular columnist for *Figyelo* and *Népszava*. He has authored, edited or co-edited a dozen books in Hungary. Andor has also taught at Rutgers University as Visiting Fulbright Professor, worked as an advisor for the World Bank on SAPRI, the Budget Committee of the Hungarian Parliament (1998-1999) and the prime minister's office (2002-2005), and was also a member of the Board of Directors of the EBRD. He holds a degree in Economic Sciences from Karl Marx (now Corvinus) University, an MA in Development Economics from the University of Manchester and a PhD from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was awarded Doctor Honoris Causa at Sofia University of National and World Economy and the Legion of Honour by the President of France (2014).



Helen BARNARD is the Director of Research and Policy at Pro Bono Economics and Associate Director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). Helen is a leading UK expert on poverty, inequality and social policy. Her extensive body of written work and regular media contributions have covered poverty, destitution, labour markets, housing and social security.



Ana CHUPESKA holds a Master of Science in International Relations and a PhD in Political Science. She is Associate Professor at the Political Science Department of the ("Iustinianus Primus" Law Faculty, University Ss. Cyrilus and Methodius, North Macedonia, where she teaches several subjects and where she is the head of the Political Science Master Collegium. Ana Chupeska is also a member of the FEPS Scientific Council.



Maciej GDULA is a member of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland for the social democratic New Left party. He is a sociologist and adjunct professor at the Faculty of Sociology of the University of Warsaw. Maciej is specialised in social and class theory.



Hedwig GIUSTO is Senior Research Fellow at the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) working predominantly on migration and the Balkans. Since September 2020 she is editor-in-chief of the Progressive Post, the magazine run by FEPS. She holds a PhD in History of International Relations from the University of Florence and an MSc in History of International Relations from the London School of Economics.



Katarína KLINGOVÁ is a Senior Research Fellow at the GLOBSEC Policy Institute, a think tank based in Bratislava. As member of GLOBSEC's Democracy & Resilience Program she has been analysing disinformation and influence operations in central Europe since 2016. She has authored or co-authored numerous analyses on the impact of information operations and social media on a democratic society, building societal resilience against hybrid threats and strategic communication. In her previous capacities, she worked for Transparency International Slovakia and the European Commission.



Roman KUHAR is Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. He is the author of several books including (with J. Takács) *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday life of LGBT people in Eastern Europe* (Peace Institute, 2007) and (with D. Paternotte) *Anti-gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017). He is an associate editor at *Social Politics* (Oxford University Press), the former dean of the Faculty of Arts (2017-2021) and the president of the Slovenian Sociological Association.



Pascal LAMY (pascallamy.eu) is the President of the Paris Peace Forum, he coordinates the Jacques Delors Institutes (Paris, Berlin, Brussels) and chairs the board of the EU “Starfish” (ocean) mission. He previously served two terms as Director-General of the World Trade Organization (2005-2013), as European trade Commissioner, and as chief of staff of the President of the European Commission Jacques Delors (1985-1994). His latest book is *Strange New World* (Odile Jacob 2020).



Grzegorz PIETRUCZUK is a local government official, a political scientist and a publicist. He graduated in Political Science at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science, the University of Warsaw. Between 1998 and 2002, he was a councilor of the Warsaw-Bielany District. In 2004-2005, he was the Head of the political cabinet of the Minister of the Interior Affairs and Administration. From 2006 to 2018, he was Deputy Mayor of the Bielany District of the capital city Warsaw (three terms of office). He has also been councilor of the Sejmik of the

Mazovian Voivodship (2010-2014). Since 2018 he is mayor of the Warsaw Bielany District. Finally he is the Chairman of the “Together for Bielany” Association.



Maria João RODRIGUES, former Portuguese Minister of Employment in Portugal of Prime Minister Antonio Guterres, is President of FEPS. She is a European politician with a long track record in different European institutions: EU Presidencies, Council, European Council, European Commission and, more recently, the European Parliament where she was Vice-President of the S&D Group, in charge of the general coordination and interface with the other EU institutions. She played a relevant role in several important European initiatives including the

Lisbon Treaty, the Lisbon and the Europe 2020 strategy, the Eurozone reform, the roadmap for EU’s future and, more recently, the European Pillar of Social Rights. In her academic life, Rodrigues was professor of European economic policies in the European Studies Institute -

Université Libre de Bruxelles and in the Lisbon University Institute. She was also the chair of the European Commission Advisory Board for socio-economic sciences. She is the author of more than one hundred publications.



Pedro SÁNCHEZ has been President of the Government of Spain since June 2018. He holds a Doctorate in Economics and is General Secretary of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), which he joined in 1993. He was also Leader of the Opposition and candidate to the Presidency of the Government between 2014 and 2016. Previously, he was a Member of the Lower House of Parliament for the constituency of Madrid and a city councillor for Madrid.



Ania SKRZYPEK (Skrzypek-Claassens) is Director for Research and Training at the Foundations for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). She holds a PhD cum laude in Political Sciences from the University of Warsaw, a degree which she obtained for her thesis "Cooperation of the socialist and social democratic parties in uniting Europe. From Liaison Bureau to PES. 1957-2007" (published in 2010). Before joining FEPS in 2009, Skrzypek worked as young researcher at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Sciences at the University of Warsaw (2003-2009) and also served as Secretary General of Young European Socialists for twice consecutive terms (ECOSY, 2005-2009). She is an author of over 80 published papers and articles, available in English, German, French and Polish.



Eric SUNDSTRÖM works as a Research Fellow and Communication strategist at LO, the Swedish trade union confederation. He is also a columnist and lecturer, both in Sweden and internationally. Sundström previously served as Political Advisor to the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström, and as speechwriter to Prime Minister Stefan Löfven. His professional background is found in the intersection where social democracy and international politics meet journalism and communication. He has been editor-in-chief of progressive newspapers and magazines produced both in Stockholm and Berlin; and worked with think tanks in Washington D.C. and Brussels. Eric pursued his studies at universities in Stockholm, Glasgow and Montpellier. He holds an MA from Johns Hopkins University SAIS (Bologna/Washington DC). He has served as president of Social Democratic Students of Sweden and as a bureau member of Young European Socialists.



Izabela SURWILLO

Izabela Surwillo is a postdoctoral researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen. Her research focuses on international relations and energy security, with a particular interest in the Baltic Sea region and Central and Eastern Europe.



E Hun TAN is the Executive Director of Research for Social Advancement (REFSA), a think tank based in Kuala Lumpur which seeks to engage with new, progressive ideas to reshape Malaysia's economic and social policies and to foster an equitable society that is based on the core values of equality, social justice and democracy. E Hun focuses on developing and delivering policy, and on empowering local communities and the wider public in Malaysia. She regularly works with key stakeholders including parliamentarians, ministries, government agencies and civil society

organisations to shape public policy discourse, and she frequently participates in media interviews, commentaries, focus groups, working committees and roundtable discussions.



Jack THOMPSON is Lecturer in American Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Previously, he worked at think tanks in Switzerland and the Netherlands and taught at University College Dublin. His research focuses on the influence of political culture on US grand strategy, efforts to rebalance the transatlantic relationship, the history of US conservatism, and the radicalisation of the US right. He is the author or co-editor of numerous books, articles and policy reports, including *Progressivism in America: Past, Present, and Future* (Oxford University

Press). His 2019 book, *Great Power Rising: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of US Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press), won the 2020 Theodore Roosevelt Association Book Prize. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Cambridge and a master's degree in international relations and international economics from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.



Loukas TSOUKALIS is affiliate professor at the Paris School of International Affairs at Sciences Po, Emeritus Professor of the University of Athens, and president of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). He is the author of many books published by Oxford University Press and translated into several language. His new book *Europe's Coming of Age* was published in 2022.



**PROGRESSIVE
YEARBOOK 2023**

FEPS
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



In the last few years, we have observed the world moving from one crisis to the next, to the point that pundits now commonly speak of a permacrisis. If 2020 and 2021 were largely dominated by the pandemic and its social and economic consequences, 2022, without any doubt, will be engraved in our memories as the year in which war returned to the Europe continent. The Russian invasion of Ukraine caught most people in the European Union by surprise, as we never believed that a conflict could occur at our borders. But surprises do not last long, and while European citizens were initially quick to embrace solidarity towards Ukraine and the Ukrainian people there is now a certain war fatigue sneaking up Europeans, who are worried about soaring prices and the inevitable political, economic and social consequences being wrought by the war.

This fourth edition of the Progressive Yearbook mostly looks at the war itself, the actors involved and the implications for Europe, as well as the ways it has affected our lives – deepening already existing trends, such as the increase in the cost of living, and exacerbating some of the long-term consequences of the pandemic, including its impact on mental health. As previously, this edition of the Yearbook contains two national cases which consider the state of democracy and social democratic forces. This year our focus is on Sweden and Greece, and we also provide a global perspective on the shifting world order and on the United States. This edition will be completed by an attempt to analyse the present and interpret tendencies in order to foresee what comes next for Europe and for European progressives.

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE
D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES

Phone: +32(0)2 234 69 00

info@feps-europe.eu



@FEPS_Europe



FEPS

This book is published by FEPS
with the financial support of the European Parliament.

ISBN: 978-2-931233-01-6