

Libertas

The official magazine of LYMEC



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IN THIS ISSUE:

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT	3
MEET THE LIBERTAS TEAM	4-9
COMING UP	10
NORD STREAM 2: THE PROJECT DIVIDING EUROPE	11-12
THE STRANGE DEATH OF LIBERAL BRITAIN	13-16
LYMEC'S FIRST YOUNG LIBERAL WOMEN SUMMIT	17-18
THE SITUATION IN LIBYA AND EUROPE'S FAILURE TO INTERVENE	19-21
THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY: FROM A SWEDISH PERSPECTIVE	22-24
STARING INTO THE ABYSS: EU - RUSSIA RELATIONS	25-28
THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREEK REVOLUTION AND MODERN-DAY GREECE	29-31
DIGITAL EURO: TO BE OR NOT TO BE?	32-34
THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY: FROM A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE	35-29
THE DEPARTURE OF FIDESZ FROM THE EPP	40-42
SOURCES	43-45

Welcome to Libertas!

Dear Liberal Friends,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this first edition of the Libertas magazine. The articles in this magazine cover an extraordinary breadth of subjects, reflecting the diverse range of interests, experiences and expertise which our writers and editors bring to the table. This diversity is one of the great strengths of LYMEC as an organisation: by uniting young liberals from across Europe, we are able to bring fresh voices, a plethora of perspectives and ideas to the political scene. In the following pages you will find articles on topics ranging from European identity and a digital Euro to the EU's involvement in Libya and the importance of female participation in politics, among many others. I believe that this collection of articles truly speaks to the willingness and ability of our writers to engage with and reflect on the quickly evolving issues with which our societies are confronted, and I hope that you will find their thoughts and opinions as insightful as I do.

It goes without saying that as Europe begins to build back in the post-Covid era, the voices of the youth will be more important than ever, and finding ways to involve the younger generations, especially young liberals, is a core part of our mission at LYMEC. Providing the space to discuss and debate contemporary challenges is a vital part of this, and I would like to thank the writers and editors of Libertas for their great contribution to providing this space.

Antoaneta Asenova-Bihlmayer

LYMEC President

LIBERTAS

FLAG IMAGE: © EUROPEAN UNION

Meet the Team!

Since the start of this year, a new Libertas Editorial Team has been assembled. Find out more about the team and their backgrounds here!



Lucasta Bath
Liberal Democrats/
Young Liberals

Lucasta Bath (UK) is currently the Policy and Training Intern at LYMEC. Prior to this, she studied Modern and Medieval Languages at Oxford University, and Law at BPP University, where she wrote her Master's thesis on European data privacy law. She lives and works in Brussels.

Laia Comerma
JNC
LYMEC Events and
Trainings Officer

Laia Comerma (ES) is currently a PhD candidate in International Relations, specifically working on EU-China economic cooperation and EU global governance at the Barcelona Institute for International Studies (IBEI). She has previously worked as an assistant on international digital policies for the Catalan Government and as an intern at the EU Delegation in Hong Kong.





Slobodan Franeta Individual LYMEC Member

Slobodan Franeta (ME) is an individual member of the European Liberal Youth (LYMEC) and is currently serving as an editorial board member of the Libertas magazine. He holds a master's degree in international economics. Slobodan is particularly interested in decentralised finance, sharing economy, behavioural science, and regulations.

Theodoros Sofianos Young Liberals Greece

Theodoros Sofianos (EL) holds an integrated BSc and MSc degree of Agriculture with a specialization in Food Science and Technology from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He also holds an MSc degree on Development and Rural Innovation from Wageningen University and Research in the Netherlands, with a minor in entrepreneurship. He is an expert on sustainable transitions and specifically with regards to food systems.



Annemiek van Vliet D66

Annemiek van Vliet (NL) works for the Irish Embassy in the Hague, and was previously Administrative Assistant at LY-MEC and a Schuman Trainee in the European Parliament. Annemiek studied EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies at the College of Europe and also holds an LLM in International Human Rights Law.



Umberto Masi International Officer, Lithuanian Liberal Youth

Umberto Masi (LT) is a Board Member of Laisvės partija, a liberal and progressive political party in Lithuania. He is currently studying Political Science at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University. His main interests are foreign affairs, human rights, rule of law, history of liberal political thought and political philosophy.





Nikolaos Zerzelidis
Secretary and Volunteers
Coordinator
Young Liberals Greece

Nikolaos Zerselidis (EL) holds a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and European Studies from the University of Piraeus and a Master's Degree in Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Development from Leiden University. Currently he is doing a second Master's Programme in Human Rights and Migration Studies at the University of Macedonia in Greece.

Marko Milutinovic
Individual LYMEC
Member

Marko Milutinović (CRO) is a Young European Ambassador for the Western Balkans, as well as a Youth delegate at UNITE 2030. Previously, he graduated from University of Belgrade, Faculty of Law, where he is currently pursuing his Master's degree in European Integration. Marko is passionate about Climate action, Environmental protection, as well as the topic of the Federalization of the European Union.



George Meneshian Young Liberals Greece

George Meneshian (EL) is a Postgraduate Student at the University of St Andrews (MLitt Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia Security Studies). He holds a bachelor's degree in International, European and Area Studies from the Panteion University of Athens. He is the Research Coordinator of the Foreign Policy, Defence and Security Task Group at the Centre for Russia, Eurasia and North-eastern Europe (Institute of International Relations).



Felix Schulz Junge Liberale/ Freie Demokratische Partei

Felix Schulz (DE) works for a German liberal MP, where he focuses on transport and EU policies. At the same time he is doing a PhD in political science at the TU Darmstadt, where he is looking into the German Hydrogen Strategy. Felix studied International and European Governance at Leiden University, where he finished his Master in 2016. He is especially interested in energy policy and the path towards a carbon neutral future.



Feliks Shepel

Feliks Shepel (UA) is a policymaker in EYU and a 4-year student at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Political Science) and 3-year student at the Drahomanov National Pedagogical University (Law). He is fond of politics, history, social sciences, international relations and law.

Coming up:

22 - 24
OCTOBER

AUTUMN CONGRESS
2021

29 - 21
OCTOBER

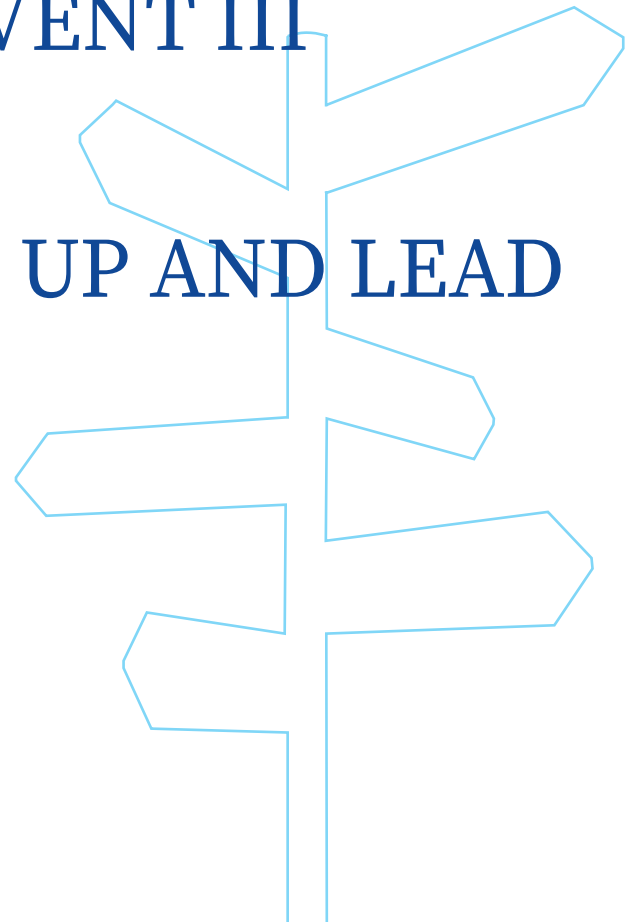
JD SUMMER
ACADEMY

12 NOVEMBER

YCA EVENT III

22 NOVEMBER

SPEAK UP AND LEAD



NORD STREAM 2: THE PROJECT DIVIDING EUROPE

FELIX SCHULZ

Nord Stream 2 is probably one of the most disputed projects in the European Union. To make matters worse, it is also one of the most complex issues. It touches upon economic, geopolitical, ethical and legal dimensions and involves actors with opposite interests.

After over a decade of negotiations and construction, the first Nord Stream gas pipeline started operating in 2011. The company Nord Stream, which operates the pipeline, delivered since then up to 55 billion m³ of natural gas annually to the German mainland. However, the same year the Nord Stream AG started evaluating the possibility of extending the project and adding two additional lines. This project was supposed to increase the overall annual capacity up to 110 billion m³. Gazprom signed an agreement in 2015 with Royal Dutch Shell, E.ON, OMV, and Engie for the two additional pipelines. That is the Nord Stream 2 project as we know today.

But why is the project controversial among EU members and beyond? First of all, the new project would be able to meet the entire natural gas demand of the EU. Therefore, critics fear a major dependence on Russian natural gas, which reduces diversification drastically. Second, transit countries like Poland, Slovakia but also Belarus and Ukraine would lose billions in revenues from transit fees. The loss could destabilize

the two economically weak European neighbors even further. Third, the United States also worry about further dependence of the EU on Russian natural gas. That is why they introduced sanctions on companies, which are involved in building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. But the United States have another intrinsic motivation. Due to the domestic shale gas revolution, they aim at selling their own abundantly produced gas to the EU. Therefore, Nord Stream 2 is just considered as another competitor on the European gas market. Fourth, the project has become even more politicized after the attack on the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his subsequent conviction. According to critics, it is unethical to cooperate with Russia economically, while its opposition is silenced.

Considering the reasons above, it is utterly clear, that there is tremendous criticism on the EU level against Nord Stream 2. The European Parliament voted last January once again against the project. In the resolution, the parliamentarians also urged the EU Member States to introduce sanctions against Russian oligarchs. The European Commission also voiced harsh criticism. According to the Commission, the endeavor undermines the completion of the Energy Union and counters its ambitions for decreasing dependence on individual supplier countries.

Despite all the criticism, the German government has long been in favor of the project. The argument has always been an economic one. Nord Stream 2 would reduce natural gas prices and deliver a constant flow of natural gas to the federal republic. However, a study by the “German Institute for Economic Research” from 2018 suggests that importing natural gas through Nord Stream is not necessary. According to the study, the amount of imported natural gas is already sufficient – in Germany and the EU. As a consequence, Germany is now in a difficult situation. Either it continues to support Nord Stream 2, which would infuriate EU Member States and its transatlantic ally or it abolishes the project, leaving an even wider gap between the West and Russia.

So what should Germany do now? First, one has to assess the likelihood of completion of Nord Stream 2. With the new Biden administration it is improbable that the sanctions in place will be lifted any time soon. The president has been clear that he will defend US interests against Russia.

Therefore, for now, no European company will be involved in laying pipelines on the sea floor or insuring such ventures.

Second, Germany is becoming increasingly isolated in the EU. Even important partners like France are against the project since Russia convicted opposition figure Alexei Navalny. Third, Germany called for more solidarity amongst EU members during the corona pandemic. But solidarity for eastern European states and the Russian opposition has never been a topic for the government, when talking about Nord Stream 2. Few could deny the hypocrisy of relying on the notion of solidarity only when it suits one’s own interests.

There is no easy solution to the complex issue of Nord Stream 2. But let’s hope that the German government will truly listen to the European community and its transatlantic partners. After all, one thing has become clear: Nord Stream 2 has many dimensions, and focusing only on the economic aspect of the project will not be enough to address the challenges it poses for Germany, and for Europe.



IMAGE: MATTHEW HENRY//UNSPLASH

THE STRANGE DEATH OF LIBERAL BRITAIN

LUCASTA BATH

You would be forgiven for thinking, given the current global challenges, that the British government had better things to do with its time than engaging in culture wars. Arguably, the Honourable Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip and his cabinet should be focusing on priorities such as – to pick a few at random – putting together a coherent plan for easing lockdown restrictions, supporting businesses struggling under a mountain of Brexit-induced red tape, or even attempting to preserve the Union with Scotland. Unfortunately, if you were to subscribe to this optimistic assessment of the government's priorities, you would be wrong. The government has instead picked this time of uncertainty and instability to launch **two new campaigns in its long-running war against the culture of 'wokeness'.**

The first offensive is against those infamous bastions of liberal tyranny otherwise known as universities. Gavin Williamson, the Conservative Education Secretary, has announced the appointment of what he euphemistically terms a “free speech champion”, whose role will be to investigate alleged infringements of the right to free speech by universities and student unions – notwithstanding the fact that universities have been under a legal duty to protect freedom of speech since 1986.

These reforms may, on the surface, appear uncontroversial: after all, all liberals will recognise freedom of speech as one of their ideology's core values. However, Williamson's crusade against no-platforming fails to make an extremely important distinction between the right to free speech and the right to be heard: on the most basic level, the former is a fundamental (albeit qualified) human right enshrined in multiple national and international treaties and constitutions, while the latter is not. As the cross-parliamentary Human Rights Committee noted in a 2018 report, if a student union decides to ‘no-platform’ or uninvite a speaker from an event, this in no way constitutes an infringement on that individual's right to speak freely or openly: it merely constrains their ability to address one particular audience at one particular time – or, in other words, their ‘right to be heard’. It is bizarre to say the least that a government which is so invested in tackling radicalisation among young people would at the same time seek to legally protect the right of anyone to be heard in any circumstance, no matter how controversial, or indeed dangerous, their views may be.

On top of that, Williamson and his department seem curiously unable to provide concrete examples of any actual free speech infringements, preferring instead to make generalised references



IMAGE: LUKE STACKPOOLE// UNSPLASH

to an epidemic of ‘cancel culture’ and ‘no-platforming’ by students obsessed with political correctness. **The statistics do not bear this out:** according to the Office for Students, in the year 2017-2018, 62,094 requests were made by students in English universities for guest speaker events. Only 53 of these were rejected by university authorities or student unions – a whopping 0.0853544626% in total. Clearly, the ‘threat’ to freedom of speech is little more than a government chimera, a useful means of stoking a vague moral panic about the role of universities in a society which is – so we are told – fed up with experts.

The irony of any government attempting to **force free speech** through the nomination of a politically appointed arbiter scarcely needs to be pointed out, but the government’s double standards and hypocrisy are thrown into even greater relief by the second offensive in the anti-wokeness war: the battle to dictate which versions of British history are acceptable, and which are not. Politicians such as Home Secretary Priti Patel and Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick have long made their disdain for the Black Lives Matter movement and the renewed focus on Britain’s colonial history clear, but Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden recently took things a step further when he announced a roundtable discussion with leading UK museums, charities and heritage bodies in which he will lead a discussion about how such institutions should deal with representations of Britain’s colonial legacy. A source from Dowden’s department told the Telegraph newspaper that the Culture Secretary’s aim is to “defend our culture and history” from a “noisy minority of activists constantly trying to do Britain down”.

Such lazy appeals to British patriotism are a hallmark of the current government’s modus operandi:

after all, the Brexit referendum was won at least in part by a heavily manufactured sense of outrage over the UK’s ‘stolen’ sovereignty, and its supposed need to ‘take back control’ over its laws and borders. Boris Johnson frequently reverts to this narrative when it suits him, boasting about the UK’s ‘world-beating’ coronavirus response and its ‘love of freedom’, and making thinly veiled references to the ‘Blitz spirit’ of the Second World War. It is hardly surprising that the government has now set its sights on anyone who is perceived to be challenging the orthodoxy of British history and ‘doing Britain down’ in the process.

The hypocrisy is striking: on the one hand, by the government’s logic, any contrarian who wishes to promote their views, no matter how unfounded or inaccurate, on UK university campuses is entitled to do so, and to sue for compensation if their right to be heard is not respected.

On the other hand, any historian, museum curator, or heritage sector worker who wishes to exercise their right to free speech by critically re-examining the darker aspects of British history is to be heavily discouraged from doing so – for example, through the threat of withdrawal of funding.

The conclusion to be drawn from these contradictory proposals is that the government has no real interest in protecting true freedom of speech. Instead, its interest lies in stoking up public fears over ‘woke’ university students and historians, and continuing to perpetuate a post-Brexit narrative which is more concerned with national myths than with political realities.

Rather than trying to re-unite the country after six years of acrimonious debate and division, Boris Johnson continues to borrow

from the populist playbook which served him so well during the Brexit referendum: pitting different sections of society against one another and promoting a semi-nationalist, Britain-first rhetoric. In doing so, he seeks both to undermine his political opponents and to direct public attention away from his government's shockingly poor handling of the pandemic.

It is all too easy to take the rights and freedoms enjoyed by citizens of democratic societies for granted. We forget how painstakingly many of these freedoms were won, and how fragile and easily corrupted they are. Boris Johnson's shabby appearance, his frequent gaffes and chaotic private life make it easy to underestimate his capacity for destruction, but in his short time as Prime Minister he has already attempted to **illegally prorogue Parliament**; threatened to **repeal the Human Rights Act**; and most recently, tabled a bill which, had the relevant section been passed, would have **broken international law**. In other words, in spite of his outward appearances, Johnson and his cabinet have in just 18 months done more to undermine

and destabilise British democracy than any government in living memory.

British liberals should take their warning from the rollback of abortion rights in Poland; the steady undermining of academic freedom in Hungary; and the appalling assaults on democracy in the final days of the Trump presidency in America. It is vital to see this Conservative war on 'cancel culture' in universities and museums for what it really is: a cynical attempt to manipulate the doctrine of free speech into serving a political agenda, all while diverting public attention away from the very real problems facing post-Brexit Britain. We must urgently defend the rights of universities to manage their own affairs, and the rights of museums and heritage centres to critically re-engage with and re-examine our past. Finally, we must recognise that the greatest challenge to freedom of speech comes not from student unions, but from a government which so flagrantly disrespects our democratic foundations, and which moves so eagerly to sanitise our history.



IMAGE: JAMES EADES// UNSPLASH

LYMEC'S FIRST YOUNG LIBERAL WOMEN SUMMIT

RHEA CSORDAS

Even though this year marks the 110th anniversary of International Women's Day, there is truth in the fact that women, and especially young women, still face significant barriers, both at national and European level, when trying to get involved and later to pursue a successful career in politics.

To address this issue, LYMEC hosted the first Young Liberal Women Summit, organised by Bureau Member Laia Comerma, on 6 March 2021. We discussed together with Antoaneta Asenova, President of LYMEC, as well four Renew Europe MEPs – Samira Rafaela, Emma Wiesner, Karen Melchior and Svenja Hahn – about their personal political journeys, the main hurdles in politics for women and how we can overcome them.

“Make your voice heard!”

Antoaneta Asenova has experienced herself, especially during her candidacy as the second female LYMEC President after Svenja Hahn, that it is still often difficult for women to enter politics. Besides hurtful rumours and sexist comments, she observed that a woman's actions are often judged by a different standard than those of a man.

Antoaneta sees LYMEC, as a liberal youth organisation, as an important opportunity for young women to become active, to network and to develop their own political identity. There are two things of central importance to her: on the one hand, she emphasises that we all should push the presence of others. On the other, she reminds us that we have

already proven our eligibility to sit at the table and that we should use this opportunity to get involved and to make our voices heard.

“We need all talents, and at least half of them are female!”

Karen Melchior, MEP for Radikale Venstre (Denmark), points out a survey revealed that almost a quarter of all female party members in Denmark have already been affected by sexual harassment. Nevertheless, some parties still claim not to have this problem, which can simply be explained by the fact that it is not recognised.

Karen therefore stresses the importance of creating a safe environment in political parties or youth organisations to promote the engagement of young women. First and foremost, the Code of Conduct is crucial for this and that we react as soon as it is not respected. In addition, confidants at various levels have an important role to play. The protection and promotion of all young talents and thus feminism is neither green nor left, it concerns us all.

“What makes me successful is that I stay true to myself!”

Samira Rafaela, MEP for D66 (Netherlands), began her political engagement in the youth organisation of her party. There, she was warned from an early stage before her candidacy that the entry into politics, especially as a woman of colour, is anything but easy and that she could attract extensive

media attention with her candidacy. However, she did not let that get her down and decided to run for the European parliament.

Samira acknowledges as a sad part of the truth that most cannot relate to these experiences and one often must get used to being left alone with them. Nevertheless, she is convinced that we all have so many visions to overcome traditional politics making, which are worth fighting for. Samira's message is that young women are most successful in politics when they stay true to themselves.

“Networks have always pushed me forwards!”

Emma Wiesner, MEP for Centerpartiet (Sweden), joined her party's youth organisation at the age of 14. After interrupting her engagement during her studies and then returning, she still felt welcome despite the changes in people and time and recognised the importance of her contacts.

Emma further emphasises the importance of one's own network when it comes to campaigning. In her view, it is particularly crucial to work with many different characters. For example, introverts are not necessarily good communicators, but in her team, they are the most strategic thinkers in politics. In the same way, it is important for young women to identify their personal

strengths, namely their five strings, and to know how they can best use them for their candidacy.

“My candidacy as LYMEC President was the best learning process of my life!”

Svenja Hahn, MEP for Freie Demokratische Partei (Germany), makes it clear that politics is not waiting for any new faces. It rather depends on young women to show their own initiative to be the change they are waiting for.

Svenja has taken exactly this to heart when she decided to run as the first female LYMEC president. During her campaign, she was often surrounded by various rumours and nasty remarks, such as that her voice would not sound kind enough. In the meantime, however, she can look back on valuable learning processes and considers LYMEC her political home, where she is grateful for the fact that women can also take on leadership positions and act as role models.

All in all, these five perspectives were able to show well that although young women still have to struggle with a multitude of hurdles when entering politics, they are not helplessly at their mercy. So, it is now up to all of us to push #lymecwomen forward and to make their voices heard!



IMAGE: HANNAH BUSING / UNSPLASH

THE SITUATION IN LIBYA AND EUROPE'S FAILURE TO INTERVENE

GEORGE MENESHIAN

European policy towards Libya is at a crossroads: the conflict in this Northern African country seems to have been resolved following last January's UN-backed Agreement; after six years of a bloody civil war, the two warring parties came to a compromise and agreed to form a transitional government and hold general elections on December 25, 2021. Despite this positive development, the country remains an "arena" for external actors and their proxies. Surprisingly, the EU is absent thus self-willingly limiting its political footprint in its neighbourhood.

Since 2014 there has been an ongoing conflict in Libya between the UN-recognised, Tripoli-based, Government of National Accord (GNA), on the one hand, and the Tobruk-based House of Representatives, which is supported by the Libyan National Army (LNA), on the other. The prime minister of the GNA was Fayez al-Sarraj while the LNA is led by Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar. In April 2019, Haftar's forces advanced into Western Libya and tried to capture the capital city of Tripoli. In June of the same year, the GNA forces broke the siege of Tripoli and recaptured most of Western Libya advancing into Sirte which is located in the middle of the Libyan coastline. The main supporters of the two rivals, Turkey and Egypt, came close to a military confrontation.

In order to avoid a wider regional war, the GNA and the House of Representatives agreed to an immediate ceasefire in August 2020. In the following October, the 5+5 Joint Libyan Military Commission reached a permanent ceasefire agreement and a political dialogue started for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Last January, in the context of the UN-sponsored talks, the Libya Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) which consisted of the competing Libyan parties, tribes and other groups, voted for a provisional executive authority, consisting of a prime minister and a three-member Presidential Council.

Despite Europe's lacklustre efforts to be the mediator of Libyan peace (e.g., the Berlin Conference), the **EU played no role in January's agreement.** The agreement came following the pressure of the United States of America and of the American-led United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and its Head Mrs. Stephanie T. Williams.

Today, one could advocate that, given the war is essentially over, Libya is becoming a more stable country. However, despite the end of military operations, following the October 2020 ceasefire, there are still many foreign armed groups and mercenaries in Libya posted there by third countries. A number of regional powers are also present in Libya: the GNA is backed by Turkey

which blatantly violated the UN arms embargo for Libya, keeps military bases and observatories in the Western part of the country, and has transferred militias (including jihadists) from Northern and Northwestern Syria and Somalia in order to bolster the GNA forces. Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt, on the other hand, are the three main supporters of Haftar's LNA.

Moscow has transferred the well-known Wagner mercenaries as well as other fighters from Assad-controlled Syria, while the UAE sent mercenaries from Darfur (Eastern Sudan) to support Khaftar's military operations, though Abu Dhabi is gradually reducing its presence in the country. Furthermore, there are groups and mercenaries from neighbouring Chad, fighting for both sides.

There are also some European countries that took sides in the war. Italy for example signed defensive and economic agreements with the GNA and backed Fayeze al-Sarraj diplomatically, while France and Greece supported the Tobruk-based government as a response to Turkey's increasing presence in GNA-controlled Libya. But the EU as a whole had no concrete policy regarding the Libyan conflict.

For an international and regional power such as the EU, Libya is a serious issue; located right opposite the EU's Mediterranean member-states, Libya is very important for European security but also for the stability of the entire Mediterranean Sea. The country is a migration hub and, following the collapse of the Libyan State, it has become the epicenter of armed conflict and Islamic terrorism



CHARLES MICHEL, EU COUNCIL PRESIDENT, MEETING MOHAMED AL-MENFI, CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL OF LIBYA

IMAGE : © EUROPEAN UNION

in North Africa. Another important issue is the mass violation of human rights and humanitarian law in the course of the war between both sides. It is obvious therefore that Libya is strategically important. He who controls Libya can pose a potential threat to Southern Europe. To a lesser extent, Libya is also an energy hub thanks to its oil reserves, though nowadays oil is being replaced with natural gas and the world is entering a transition period in this regard. Europe will always face a security dilemma as long as Libya remains unstable; if Libya remains a fragile (failed) State, it could be used as a base for Islamic terrorists to conduct attacks into Europe, not mentioning the rampant arrival of refugees and migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, a situation that is and could further pressure the EU and be used by the far-right, anti-immigrant political forces in Europe, especially in Italy.

Geostrategically speaking, **Europe's absence from Libyan affairs has allowed Turkey and Russia to consolidate their presence in both Western and Eastern Libya.** Moscow's and Ankara's ambitious and revisionist foreign policies have led to the formation of an *de facto* anti-Western partnership despite the competing interests of the two States in other domains. This partnership has resulted in understandings and common actions in Syria and, most recently, Nagorno Karabakh. The two countries tried to do the same in Libya too last June. However, the UN-led negotiations finally led to a peace agreement.

Nevertheless, Turkey and Russia continue to be politically and (para)militarily active: the Turks maintain military positions and they are training the GNA Armed Forces but also militias and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated

fighters from the Turkey-friendly town of Misurata. Moreover, there are still Syrian mercenaries in Western Libya. Most importantly, the leaders of the recently elected executive authority of Libya, the head of the Presidential Council Mohamed al-Menfi and prime minister Abdul Hamid al-Dabaib are widely seen as allies of Turkey. There is also evidence that al-Dabaib has financed the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. Besides, he is from Misurata, which is a stronghold for the Muslim Brethren and many of its residents belong to the Turco-Libyan community. Regarding Russia, its Wagner mercenaries continue to control a number of oil refineries. Furthermore, the pro-Russian LNA controls two thirds of the country. Russia must therefore be considered as an important actor in Libya.

Concluding, we notice that **EU interests in Libya are neglected by Brussels.** Europe's contribution to last January's agreement was rather insignificant and the lack of a common European regional policy has allowed third powers, such as Russia and Turkey, to establish their own spheres of influence in Europe's Southern neighbourhood. In order to address its security dilemmas and to reclaim its position as an international and Mediterranean actor, the European Union must revitalize and give new strength to its common foreign policy particularly as regards the security and stability of its immediate periphery. The Libyan case, as we have seen, clearly portrays the grave consequences of Europe's absence from areas of conflict, particularly when this happens to its immediate neighborhood. Other powers immediately move to fill the vacuum. This must stop.



IMAGE: LINUS MIMIETZ / UNSPLASH

EUROPEAN IDENTITY FROM A SWEDISH PERSPECTIVE

LOVIS LINDQUIST

Support for EU-membership in Sweden is high. In a survey by the Eurobarometer in 2019, as much as 79 per cent of the respondents believed that EU-membership was a good thing. Compared to many other EU countries, that is a very high number . However, do Swedes feel European at heart? From my personal experience as a Swede the answer to that question is no. Of course, some Swedes might, but in general they seem to feel in some way disconnected from Europe. **In this article I will try to understand what lies behind this feeling of disconnection.**

Identity is not an easy subject to write about since it can be quite subjective. What does feeling European at heart even mean and who has the right to define it? Aren't there many different European identities? After all, that is what *in varietate concordia* implies. Although there are many different cultures in Europe there are some things that unite us all and can be seen as the components of a "true" European identity. Politically, these would be a respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Culturally, these would refer to Europe's common cultural heritage, which is largely rooted in, for example, Greco-Roman antiquity, the Renaissance and the French Revolution . Anyhow, something worth remembering is that feeling Swedish, Italian, Dutch or anything else, doesn't mean that one cannot feel European. These different layers of identity could be compared to a Russian Matryoshka doll, in the sense

that an individual's sense of identity can be understood as being composed of multiple different layers.

When talking with other young Europeans, I notice that there are some cultural differences, but many of them are very small. Examples include different methods of greeting people and different meal times and customs. **When it comes to values, such as rule of law or democracy, we all seem to agree.** Of course, this is purely anecdotal but it does suggest that the answer to why Swedes usually don't feel European at heart probably doesn't lie in cultural differences like these. However, when speaking about our so-called common cultural heritage I often feel a bit distanced from it. Again, that is just anecdotal but the fact is that Sweden and the Nordics in general, have lagged behind the rest of Europe when it comes to continent-wide historical and philosophical movements, such as the Renaissance. Due in part to geographical distance and technological, certain ideas arrived later. This was a very long time ago and can certainly not explain everything but it could at least partly explain why Swedes might have difficulties with relating to Europe's common cultural heritage at times.

In addition to the cultural heritage, a contributing factor to the feeling of disconnectedness could be the **lack of shared history**. Unlike many other European countries that now play a vital role in the EU,

such as Germany, France and Belgium, Sweden didn't participate in either of the world wars and was thus not affected by them in the same way. Although each of those countries have their own history as well, they can connect in that regard. In contrast, we Swedes often take pride in the fact that we were neutral (opinions whether Sweden really was neutral differ) and stood outside of both world wars, which is something we cannot share, not even with our neighbouring countries that were all occupied at some point during World War II. In general, neutrality is seen as a great thing and Sweden seems to want to keep it that way. We want to be on our own and it's important to many of us, which becomes more evident when looking at Swedish EU-politics.

This sentiment of wanting to remain aloof is impossible to miss when looking at how Swedish politics deals with the EU, and it's also here the perceived difference seems to lie. In her book about Swedish- EU politics, *'Så förs svensk EU-politik: Med ett tvärsäkert kanske'*, Ylva Nilsson states that the Swedish parliament almost always says no to proposals from the EU almost by default because it's "too expensive" or "too complicated" when the EU does it, regardless of which parties are in charge. Sweden can do this better on its own, they say. One could say that Sweden acts a bit like a stubborn three year old in EU-politics. Some things that the Swedish parliament said no to, seemingly because it was a proposal from the EU, include initiating a limit for the amount of dioxin in fish, a European civil rescue service and a regulated right to strike. One can of course disagree with these proposals because of ideological reasons but the Swedish politicians, regardless of party, seem to believe that Sweden is better off by itself, a rather strange position since most of them are in favour of an EU-membership.

Another explanation that has been brought

up as to why Swedes don't feel European at heart is the fact that it joined the EU as late as 1995. On the other hand, the UK joined in 1973 and has an even more complex relationship with the EU. In addition, Finland, a country that is quite similar to Sweden in many ways, joined at the same time as Sweden adopted the Euro and is in general a lot more positive towards incentives from the EU. This further suggests that "the problem" that Swedes, or at least Swedish politicians, have with the EU is mainly political and not cultural in practice. Could it be so that Finland, since they've fought against the USSR, can relate to the rest of Europe in that regard and thus takes advantage of the EU in another way? After all, the EU is a peace project.

In conclusion, Swedes don't seem to feel European at heart. But why? As shown, it's quite complicated. However, it seems like the main reason as to why is the lack of shared history, especially when it comes to war. History shapes identity and identity shapes politics. Although, it's worth remembering that Swedes are **Europeans and there's certainly no doubt about that when looking at the support for EU-membership or the respect for democracy and the rule of law.** Swedes might feel European in a broad sense, but at heart it seems that national identity trumps a European identity. It is difficult to predict how Sweden's relationship with the EU will look like in the future but it will hopefully be a bit warmer. One can only hope that the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to closer cooperation, since this is a battle all of Europe (and the world) is fighting, although that seems unlikely in these times of vaccine nationalism. The EU needs Sweden and Sweden needs the EU. Lastly, I think that cultural exchange between European countries, by travel or the internet for instance, could lead to more Europeans, not least Swedes, feeling European at heart.

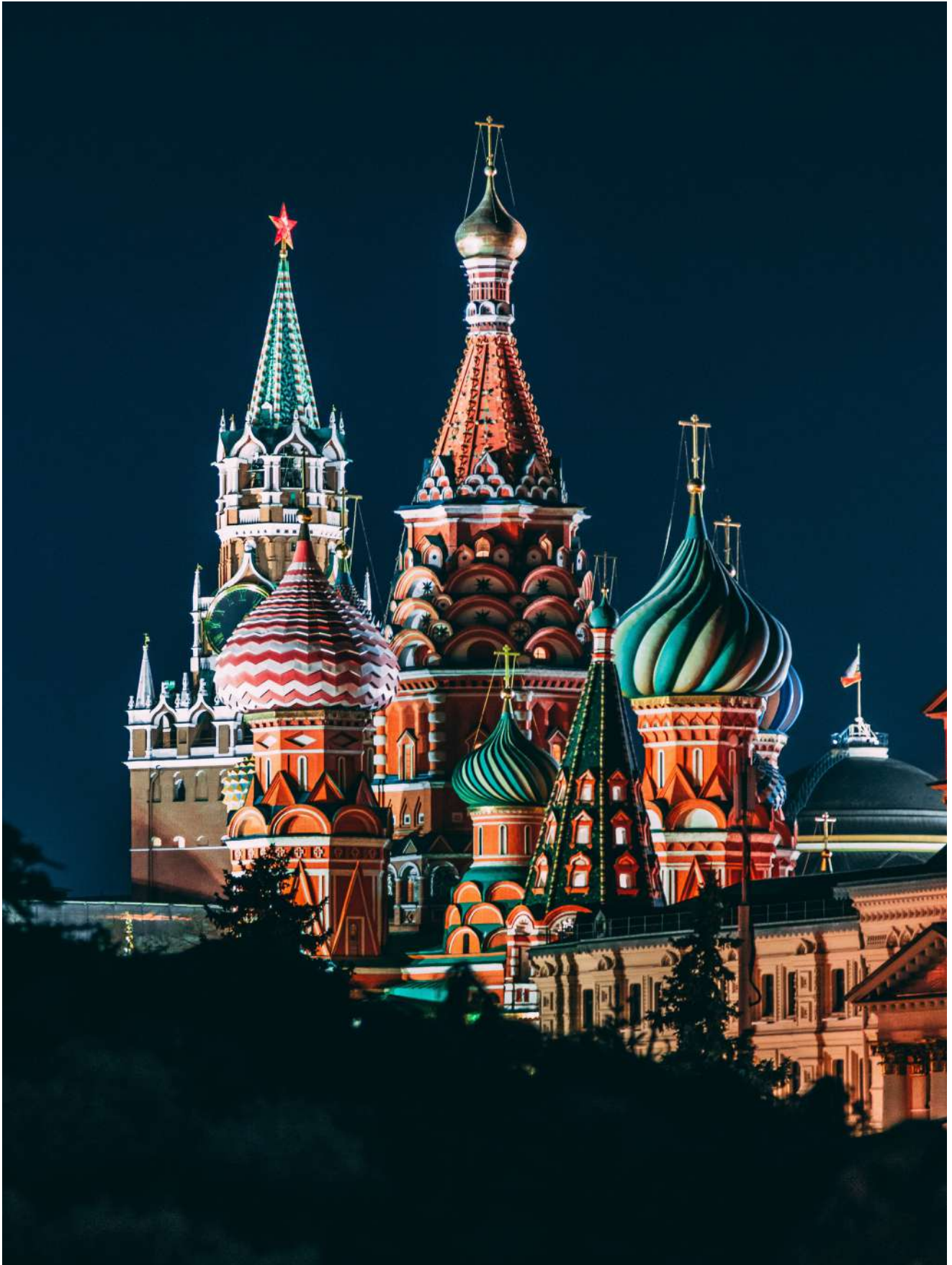


IMAGE: NIKOLAY VOROBYEV/ UNSPLASH

STARING INTO THE ABYSS: EU - RUSSIA RELATIONS

MARKO MILUTINOVIC

When discussing the future of this historically strained relationship, it is important to note that since 2014, **relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation have been practically non-existent**, following the start of the conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea. In all honesty, it is challenging when talking about the relations between these two entities to hope for a positive end to this story. On the one hand is the European Union, which has been working for decades on end to improve human rights, the rule of law, and in general, has worked on enhancing the quality of life both for EU citizens and those who are not EU citizens. On the other hand is the Russian Federation, whose stance on the aforementioned issues is often in direct opposition to the work of the EU.

Russia's record on human rights is atrocious at best. There are so many human rights violations occurring under the Putin regime that we would need countless hours just to list them all. Of course, most notable are the flagrant violations of some of the basic human rights which are taken for granted in Western democracies, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and so on. That is not to mention the Russian government's unacceptable approach to the LGBTI movement.

All of this was happening before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, which saw Putin's government

primed for another despicable action, namely **a wave of vaccine propaganda**. In the past few months, several Russian media outlets have been sharing false information about the vaccines created in the West. This disinformation revolved around exaggerating the dangers from the vaccines made in the Western countries while at the same time boasting about the success of the Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine. Such propaganda wars are nothing new for the Russian Federation, which has been involved in many of them in recent years. Their interference in the 2016 US Presidential elections saw the rise into power of Donald Trump, which in turn pushed the doomsday clock almost to midnight during his four-year mandate. This deliberate triggering of a propaganda war during a pandemic in which millions have already died, and millions more are at risk, is a particularly heinous act.

Indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Putin administration has gone overboard and makes little effort to disguise its behaviour. Prominent Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, knows this all too well. He fell ill during the flight back to Moscow from Siberia last August, and was rushed to the hospital after his flight had made an emergency landing in Omsk, where he spent two days as his supporters fought to have him transported to Germany for further treatment. The Russian hospital claimed that there were no signs of poisoning and initially

refused to let him fly for medical attention to Germany. After mounting pressure to let him leave, doctors finally agreed to the transfer. Once in Germany, the doctors provided the necessary treatment and ran tests that confirmed that **he was indeed poisoned and that the poison in question was Novichok**. UN-appointed independent investigators conducted an investigation into the Navalny case. They tried to contact the Russian government; however, their attempts were unsuccessful given that the Russians had never responded. The investigators concluded that the poisoning and attempted murder of Navalny, combined with the lack of any investigation, and denial of any involvement is a part of a larger trend that spans over several decades. This trend saw a number of murders and attempted murders of Kremlin critics. The UN report concludes that it is hard to believe that non-state actors have entirely realized this on their own: in other words, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that this is at least partially a state-sponsored trend. Furthermore, they stressed out that Russia is known to have developed, stored, and used Novichok. In addition, the version used on Alexei Navalny was a novel one, which indicates that Russia is continuing to develop the substance. This is concerning because there is no reason to believe that Russians will cease to use this practice, as well as that the people who are in the vicinity will be in significant danger.

This already happened once before during the **2018 poisoning of Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, UK**. During this event, a police officer fell ill after being exposed to the nerve agent Novichok; some months later, a member of the British public died as a result of accidentally finding a discarded container of Novichok. The presence of Novichok was

later confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of the Chemical Weapons. The poisonings in the UK served to demonstrate that civilians are seen as no more than collateral damage in Putin's quest to silence his critics.

Although all of this is atrocious, the Russian government has not stopped their persecution of their critics: once Aleksei Navalny recovered from the poisoning, he decided to return to Russia. He was immediately arrested upon landing in Moscow for violating his suspended sentence. He was sentenced to three and a half years for this. During the trials, there were protests, which were dealt with by the Russian police, and up to 1000 protestors were jailed. Moreover, Navalny is now serving his sentence in the Russian penal colony. He has stated that he is exposed to unbearable conditions, and that his health is rapidly deteriorating. According to his lawyer, Navalny has been woken up around eight times per night since beginning his sentence, and is having difficulties using one of his legs.

Against this backdrop of appalling behaviour from the Russian side, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, embarked on a disastrous diplomatic visit to Moscow, contrary to the advice of several EU Member States. **The trip proved to be highly humiliating for the EU:** at a joint press conference with Borrell, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov described the EU as an "unreliable partner," and accused prominent European leaders of lying about the Navalny affair. Borrell stayed silent, while his Russian counterpart was openly criticising the European Union. During the visit, Russia expelled three EU diplomats. As a result of this catastrophic visit, more than 70 MEPs asked for Borrell's resignation. However, it was soon pretty clear that

nothing significant would come from this. A Commission spokesperson said that Borell enjoys the full support of the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

In summary, it is evident that the **relations are at an all-time low between the EU and Russia**. It is difficult to envision the relations taking a turn for the better any time soon. The Russian regime is doing what any tyrannical government does: abusing its power in every area, silencing its critics, and squashing any thought of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Looking at all of this, we must not forget that Putin and his accomplices do not represent the whole of Russia. They represent their own interests, which in turn are hurting the people of Russia. Having that in mind, sanctioning Russia as a country would further hurt the Russian people too.

The better option would be to use targeted sanctions against those closest to Putin, who are enabling his autocratic behaviour. There is a need to punish those people through sanctions and to mount the pressure. This was explained clearly and succinctly by Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, who stressed that sanctions actually work, even though we cannot judge their success after a short amount of time, such as six months; it is a longer process than that. Furthermore, she pointed out that these sanctions work because we target those responsible and not the Russian people. This is how the European Union should move forward, united and coordinated against Putin and his enablers. Let us hope that common sense within the EU will prevail and that we will not have any more colossal mistakes, such as Borell's visit to Moscow!



SERGUEÏ LAVROV (L) AND JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES (R)

IMAGE CREDIT: © EUROPEAN UNION

THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GREEK REVOLUTION AND MODERN-DAY GREECE

NIKOLAOS ZERZELIDIS

On 25 March 2021, Greece celebrated its 200th anniversary of the beginning of the Greek Revolution and the War of Independence undertaken against the occupying Ottoman Empire back in 1821. Key ideas and features that characterised the Greek revolution were patriotism, courage, persistence, loyalty, braveness and faith in God. One of the main contributors during the Greek revolution was the Church, whose religious Greek Orthodox leaders were among the fighters for liberty. The Greek Orthodox Church played a crucial role in the formation of a common Greek national willingness and ‘thirstiness’ for ‘Liberty or Death’, which was the national slogan among the Greek rebels during the War of Independence. The Greeks had instrumentalised their struggle and suffering towards a free and independent Greece.

However, it has to be pointed out that the Greek revolution was accompanied by the intervention of the three great maritime powers of that period, namely Great Britain, France and Russia, which sent a joint naval task force into the Aegean in 1827 and were drawn into a conflict between Greeks and Ottomans. This particular military intervention resulted in the Battle of Navarino and thus in the victory of the Greek War of independence, but simultaneously in a disputed settlement that Greeks did not fight for because the three foreign powers decided that the new state would be a monarchy instead of a republic.

The Greek revolution was a key event for the future of Greece as a nation-state. First of all, it functioned as a critical tool of forming a common national identity and engendering patriotic sentiments in Greece, where Greeks could independently decide on the faith of their State through democratic processes. Additionally, Greece was connected ideologically with the West and integrated into the geopolitical developments of Europe, adopting political and economic norms that existed that time. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the Greek revolution was the first successful national liberal movement in the Old World of Europe and managed to inspire other national movements striving for liberty and for the formation of a nation-state, which became the norm in the European continent. The Greek nation-state became the example and the turning point of a critical change in the geopolitical map of Europe, from the Old Europe of the multi-ethnic empires towards the New Europe of independent nation-states.

Developments in Modern Day Greece

Despite this achievement, even during and after the Greek revolution, there was friction among the leaders, their ideas and vision over the future of Greece, resulting in violence which risked becoming civil war. The situation persists today. Friction is a dominant feature of Greek society and the political landscape. Society is often divided

over governmental decisions that have a direct effect on the well-being of people and the economy. A recent example of a governmental decision that resulted in the polarisation of the Greek society and in violence between protesters and the police forces in Athens was the legislation passed by Greek lawmakers in February 2021 that established a special campus police force as part of the education reforms to guarantee the safety at the Greek universities. The bill was justified by the conservative Greek government as a critical measure to bring an end to lawlessness at Greek universities. However, the safety of campuses is not the main problem facing the education sector: instead, its greatest problem lies in the lack of important funds to fill the gaps and deficiencies of Greek universities, such as the enhancement of research, quality and equipment necessary for their capacity and reputation. Regarding the unrest, this could be solved through the reallocation of funds to enhance private security companies to guarantee the safety of the campuses: such security companies would be accountable to the Greek universities and not to the Greek government.

This decision to establish a campus police force was taken while Greece had in effect some of the strictest lockdown measures in Europe since November 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which still continue today, suppressing a wide range of civil liberties. The economy is weak, Greek society is divided and exhausted due to measures taken by the Greek government to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, but these are not the only major problems that Greece faces today. Greece is faced with a quadruple crisis: the ongoing economic crisis since 2008, which created a humanitarian crisis, a reduction in public spending, and a deterioration in

public health; the refugee crisis of 2015; the COVID-19 pandemic; and a belligerent Turkey. Turkey continuously violates Greek airspace and sea territory, creates disputes over Greece's sovereign rights on its continental shelf and maritime zones as well provokes upheaval through its aggressive rhetoric against Greece and Cyprus.

The refugee crisis is a pressing issue for the EU in general, but it has been particularly pressing for Greece. Greece and Italy are the EU countries that bore the burden of dealing with the high intensity of refugee flows as well as with reception and integration policies for thousands of refugees, mainly due to their geographical position as primary entry points to the EU. However, Greece is a transit and not a destination country, with little prior experience in the reception and integration of asylum-seekers and the country's difficult social and labour conditions make it impossible to effectively integrate high numbers of asylum-seekers into Greek society.

Greece currently stands at a crossroads. Instead of correcting the mistakes and the friction of the past, producing culture and value that modern Greeks can be proud of as well as being pioneer in policy ideas and providing solutions in critical EU issues, the latest Greek governments take decisions based on short-term organisational planning and on the accommodation of their policy agendas. Greece needs a restart and fresh ideas to overcome the present challenges that it faces. Furthermore, the brain-drain of the Greek youth is an extremely negative outcome of the country's current political torpor, itself a result of bad administration, poor organisational planning and an overall lack of credible institutions that could effectively remedy the deficiencies of the Greek political system.

The restoration of people's trust towards the democratic institutions in Greece should be a priority of today. Paradoxically, ancient Greece gave birth to democracy, but in modern Greece there is a democratic deficit and people are divided and polarised over the credibility of the democratic institutions in the country, mainly due to corruption cases as well as the inefficient and frequently controversial governmental planning. Modern day Greek culture should also flourish and the Greek political system should be an example of good politics and

decisions. Greek people should have the chance to feel proud of their modern day Greek heritage and be relieved of the continuous recursion to the glorious past of ancient Greece and the Greek revolution of 1821. The characteristics that made Greece successful in the past such as unity, courage, ambition and persistence are still innate to the Greek people and society but what is absolutely necessary is a restart in the political landscape and promotion of liberal ideas and values that are currently weak in Greece.



IMAGE CREDIT: CONSTANTINOS KOLLIAS/ UNSPLASH

DIGITAL EURO: TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

SLOBODAN FRANETA

Technological development drives social development. Add to these global catastrophes, such as a pandemic, and very soon, you will get societies that base their functioning entirely on digital platforms. Therefore, it should not be surprising that discussions about digital currencies are currently in the spotlight. Many leading economies are thinking of transforming their monetary systems and introducing virtual money to ease doing business across regions and following global trends. Not only leading economies but emerging ones are also trying to jump into the race. Take, for instance, the Bahamas, a country in the Caribbean, which is the first country to launch a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) in 2020.

For those who are not familiar with the term yet, CBDC is a digital equivalent to the banknotes issued by the central authority, most commonly the central bank. Thus, possessing digital money would be the same as having paper money, except that it would be more convenient since we use technology ceaselessly and it is more eco-friendly. To make it even simpler, imagine going to your favourite bar and instead of juggling with paper notes and coins, you pay your bills using the mobile phone or any other electronic device. This may not sound like a revolutionary idea: after all, digital wallets have existed for a while. However, in this case, money held in the form of the CBDC will be equal to the existing deposit at the

central bank, thus limiting risks and providing certain security and stability.

In October last year, the European Central Bank (ECB) published a report on the digital euro. Although the report does not offer a precise design of the digital euro that can be discussed here, except it is not a crypto asset nor stablecoin, it states that the idea is to provide a more competitive, innovative, and resilient payment system in Europe.[i] But, alas, the process of creating such a payment system will be a long and exhausting journey – as is always the case with bureaucratic machinery. According to Christine Lagarde, the European Central Bank president, the process will be divided into phases. If approved, by the Governing Council of the ECB sometime during 2021, the first phase will be experimental. The experimental phase would last between six and twelve months, after which the council would decide if they should continue developing and ultimately implementing the digital euro. The digital euro could thus become a reality in four years or more, according to Christine Lagarde.

Meanwhile, China has already issued its digital yuan, which is used domestically as one potential replacement for cash. It is planned to be tested with foreign visitors during the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. By July this year, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and MIT will present prototypes and



research results for a digital dollar. Currently, the only setback in the U.S. could be caused by commercial banks and other financial firms that fear it could afflict their profits. It is evident that the world is heading toward another, inevitable, financial revolution. Hence, the ECB should accelerate its effort to introduce the digital euro if the European Union intends to remain relevant in the global and digitalised economic race.

Besides the CBDC's ability to lower transaction costs, improve states' financial frameworks, and foster investments and innovations, why could it be important for individual citizens? Firstly, in theory, it could lead toward more financial inclusion of the so-called 'unbanked' population. Data from 2017 suggests that at least 35 million EU citizens, or close to 8% of the entire EU population, remain outside of the banking system. This number is generally higher among less developed economies of the bloc.

Thus, incorporating a digital euro could boost financial inclusion within these countries, allowing easier access to digital payments for the unbanked population, as mentioned earlier. Additionally, it could accelerate the adoption of the euro among member states of the European Union, which may further boost economic growth and digital innovation on the continent.

Furthermore, the digital euro implementation will bring a more secure, faster, and reliable payment mechanism. It could reduce counterfeiting and money laundering, but also it could eliminate a need for an intermediary in retail payments alongside lower transaction costs. The ECB's study from 2012 on 13 economies indicated that the costs of retail payment mechanisms are considerable. On average, they amount to almost 1% of GDP for the sample of participating EU countries.

IMAGE CREDIT: (C) EUROPEAN UNION

However, there are no up-to-date data on the matter since, in the European Commission's Retail Payments Strategy on the EU from 2020, it is stated that cash remains the means used for a majority of retail payments in the EU. Therefore, it can be assumed that the costs remained substantial for all parties.

A shift to the digital euro could reduce the environmental impacts caused by printing banknotes and minting coins. A study from the ECB reports that the production of 3 billion banknotes in 2003 had similar effects on the environment as those of each European citizen driving a car for one kilometre. In addition, many stakeholders are involved in the production process of the euro. It is estimated that at the moment, 19 national central banks, 12 printing works, six paper mills, and 22 raw material suppliers are involved in the euro production. Around 6,000 tonnes of cotton combers, 15% originating from a sustainable source, were used to print banknotes in 2018. It would be almost impossible to expect a complete transition to cashless functioning at any time soon. However, the gradual transition to the digital euro could significantly, among all other benefits, positively impact the environment and the general carbon footprint of the euro.

The digital euro bears some concerns with it. The most significant is privacy. The idea of digital money is often identified with cryptocurrencies. Cryptocurrencies, however, operate on technology that allows for complete decentralisation, and it provides some levels of anonymity to its users. With digital money issued by the central bank, this will not be easy to achieve, so user privacy concerns naturally arise. In the ECB's report on the digital euro, it is stated: "Anonymity may have to be ruled out, not only because of legal obligations related to money laundering and terrorist financing

but also in order to limit the scope of users of the digital euro when necessary – for example to exclude some non-euro area users and prevent excessive capital flows or to avoid excessive use of the digital euro as a form of investment". Those who value privacy will most likely consider using the digital euro. Although it is too early to talk about the entire system and whether it will be subject to rigid control and monitoring, the issue of privacy will be crucial for the success of the project. In many states, where democracy is still fragile, this can create a set of new problems that can further jeopardise individual liberties. Therefore, it would be significant for the entire project if the possibility of anonymity currently offered by the use of cash could be achieved. It will undoubtedly be a topic that will be much discussed throughout the process. Some future debates could offer us more insight into the overall idea of the central bank leaders regarding this problem.

The idea of digitising the euro is undoubtedly excellent and desirable. However, the design of the digital euro itself will have a significant impact on the success of the entire project and its future implications for European society. People in the ECB are aware of that, so it is one of the reasons why they want to implement the entire project gradually. The question is whether it is possible to start thinking earlier about introducing the digital euro and how much the delay will cost the European Union.

Finally, another crucial question is how much poor implementation could cost the European Union and whether it could undermine already damaged confidence in the euro as a mutual currency. The forthcoming years will provide answers to these and many other questions. It remains for the public to be patient until then.

THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY: FROM A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

ADAM WOLF

I've long pondered the curious phenomenon of nationalism.

The question of nationality is fraught with perceived meaning. And where nationality and identity overlap is a faultline with immense potential – for both bad and good. Europeans know this as well as anyone, not least in what concerns the 'bad'. Nowhere have national divisions led to greater – and more consistent – strife than on the European continent. Indeed, the European Union (EU) grew in part out of the catastrophic accumulation of nationalist fervour which culminated in one of the most barbaric periods of conflict in human history. Afterward, it was as if Europe's leaders finally decided to contain their nations' headstrong sentiments while there remained something of European society to salvage.

But there are reasons why devotion to one's nationality endures. National identity is, simply put, one of the most simple and obvious methods of community-building. It is no accident that Irish people – like myself – seek out other expat Irish people immediately upon arrival into a new cultural environment.

Expats everywhere will probably agree that the sound of one's own native language piques the interest more so than a nearby conversation in an unfamiliar language might do. The sight of a restaurant serving one's own national dishes might draw the eye swifter than a site serving local delicacies – even if we don't generally enjoy our country's cuisine. We seem socially

engineered to gravitate towards those who we perceive ourselves to be most alike. In his remarkable book *The Righteous Mind*, Jonathan Haidt cites psychologist Mark Leary in noting that we are hard-wired – as an survival instinct – to be included in a group. Which group we chose to make our own (and by extension which identity we assume) is by-and-large often a personal decision: humans are nothing short of creative in aligning themselves into various demographic sub-configurations. Even the pull of an ideological community is enough to cause unity and division. This is perhaps part of the reason why like-minded individuals flock toward ideologies which they hold to benefit their interests or those of humanity as a whole – communism, conservatism, republicanism, monarchism, nationalism, regionalism, socialism, etc. Even feminism, liberalism, football hooliganism, and adherence to select branches of moral philosophy can attract devotees out of community-focused inclusion rather than independent conviction alone. To be part of a collective is to ensure survival. And if we cannot ensure our acceptance as part of one collective, we may seek acceptance elsewhere. This is, likely, how many fall victim to the allure of extreme religiousness or political thought.

So what about European identity?

To what extent inhabitants of Europe identify as 'European' varies greatly. The European Parliament counts among its elected members both hardline Eurosceptics and passionate

Euro-federalists, reflecting the corresponding divergent views on EU integration of the electorate they represent. And while Euroscepticism has undeniably seen a surge in parts of Europe, an emerging pan-European identity is undoubtedly also seeing nascent strength, due in part to the considerable effort of the EU and its leaders[2]. Indeed, there exists a growing portion of young Europeans whose national identity has been accompanied – or even replaced – by a flourishing sense of ‘European’ identity. And nowhere is this sentiment more visible than in the EU’s own educational project: the thirteen schools built originally to nurture and educate the children of EU officials, known to us as the European Schools.

European identity in the European Schools

I arrived in Brussels at age fifteen, having been born and raised in Ireland to a Czech/

Irish family. I was swiftly ushered into a European School, where I saw out my remaining years of schooling. As formative educational establishments, the European Schools fall short on many fronts. The unique system of education, based on harmonised exams for students separated into a series of language sections, has seen perceived preferential treatment for some linguistic groups decried by students and parents alike. Persistent mishaps in translation of the harmonised exams has also caused fury. Furthermore, the curriculum is – in some ways – a shambles. My own alma mater (European School III, Ixelles) possessed only limited sporting infrastructure, and an extracurricular sports programme that would be laughed out of any state school in Ireland. On the whole, the school appeared to place little emphasis on non-academic prowess – something perhaps reflected in the professional pursuits of the *Alumni*



Europae. A glance at the Wikipedia page of the European Schools (sub-section ‘notable alumni’) indicates that, in the sixty-odd years of the existence of the schools and many thousands of graduated alumni, only a handful have distinguished themselves in creative fields of the arts, and fewer still have led the field in sporting pursuits. The likelihood is that a significant proportion of the students, after leaving school, eventually make their way dutifully into the bureaucratic institutions of the EU – returning thus to the Luxembourg and Brussels bubbles that many students (given that six European Schools are located in these cities) will have grown up calling home.

But there is at least one area in which – most alumni will likely agree – the European Schools excel: the nurturing of a distinctive ‘European’ identity amongst the students. This is hardly by accident – it’s in the European Schools’ founding mission. One might argue that this ethos manifests itself primarily in the pluralist focus on European languages pursued by its curriculum. Whilst classes are taught according to each student’s mother tongue, every student must take certain subjects in either French, German or English. The resulting bilingualism – and sometimes trilingualism – ticks at least one condition for European inter-understanding. In addition, students are immersed in an ethnically-diverse social environment, exposing students to the cultures of their European neighbours in a way that national schooling systems might – for the moment – struggle to mirror.

Similarly, the embrace and celebration of European diversity (including festivals and events promoting national diversity in several Brussels schools) enables further integration of the student body. While the schools – in my opinion – falter on the intended goals of

academic merit, they do at least provide for an intercultural tolerance which fosters a new generation of Europeans, one armed with a more favourable outlook upon diverse European cultures and – possibly – on continued European integration.

The effect of the European School in nurturing this identity has not escaped academic scrutiny. Sociologists Dr Nicola Savvides and Dr Daniel Faas conducted a study designed to contrast the views on European identity of students attending a bilingual school in England with those of students attending a now-defunct European School, also in England[6]. While Drs Faas and Savvides determined that European identity was more palpable in the European School than its counterpart (which they nicknamed ‘Darwin’ School), they also identified a curious phenomenon by which students of the former described how they struggled to fit in amongst their peers in the countries of which they were – at least by nationality – natives. Simply put, the students described themselves as being ‘a bit from anywhere and everywhere’ and felt that ‘they did not fit or belong anywhere in particular’. It was as if the students, in the absence of a strong sense of national identity, filled the void by adopting instead a European identity – something which I will discuss further in the following segment.

The pull of the emergent European identity

As mentioned before, the extent to which one identifies as European can vary across cultures. *Libertas* contributor Lovis Lindquist[7], using the example of Sweden, pointed out that a high level of domestic support for the European Union does not necessarily mean a great level of affinity with European identity. I might add that the Swedish sentiment she identified is largely echoed in my own homeland (Ireland).

Like Sweden, Ireland remained neutral during the traumatic years of conflict which preceded the EU's foundation. Like Sweden, Ireland has maintained a high standard of living (and, therefore, potential for aloofness in a broader EU context) for some years, and has (again, like Sweden) opposed several tentative alterations to EU legislation – rejecting both the Treaty of Nice and the Lisbon Treaty on first reading. Moreover, Ireland and Sweden both sit on the geographical fringes of Europe, and the corresponding disconnect felt by Irish people to goings-on in Brussels is – conceivably – similar to that in Sweden.

It is likely that young people born of mixed nationality – and raised in a multinational environment – may adopt a European identity by default by virtue of these conditions. Most students in my class (like myself) were born to parents of different nationalities. Most, unlike myself, had grown up in Belgium. This led to a tripartite national affiliation, with many of my classmates holding the passports of both parents' countries, along with a Belgian ID indistinguishable from those of our Belgian friends. Indeed, many students had even spent parts of their childhoods in more countries still, and others were born to parents who – themselves – were of double nationality. This allowed for a vast array of uniquely fragmented identities (at least, regarding nationality) for many. For young people growing up split between several cultural contexts, it is hardly surprising that some would adopt a 'third way' approach when quizzed on their sense of national identity.

Consider this: to be detached for so long for a country of which you are a national (in the eyes of the state) can take its toll. How can one truly fit in amongst their peers who'd spent their entire childhoods in a given country, when they'd spent theirs in

another country with an entirely distinct culture and upbringing. How can one catch the references to popular TV series, music and other cultural staples that their familiars in home countries had grown up with? Whilst native in the language of those countries, would they truly be able to replicate the linguistic regional nuances of their kin? What school history lessons they did not have, designed to inform them of their own cultures? And sports – how likely is a person born and raised in Brussels to Irish parents to have played Gaelic football or hurling (national sports in Ireland) during their childhoods in Belgium? The disconnect from one's own culture can be stark, when contrasted with those who'd lived immersed in it. And it is curious how quickly that cultural disconnect can occur – for indeed anyone. My entire first fifteen years of existence were quintessentially 'Irish', having been educated mostly in an Irish Gaelic-speaking context. And even still, not one year after my arrival in Belgium, my Irish-ness began to feel almost fraudulent, upon return to my former home. How would someone who'd spent those fifteen years in Belgium come to feel amongst family, friends, their fellow Irish – if someone like me struggled to do so after only a cursory immersion in another culture? Is it so therefore unsurprising that students would adopt another identity, one which emphasises the shared nature of European cultures rather than a singular focus on national identity?

The European School outlook on European identity as a model for the future?

The tug of national belonging affects us all – though perhaps to varying extents. In countries like Ireland and Sweden, young people grow up in formative cultures with, arguably, a weaker emphasis on European identity than those at the fore of the evolving European project – and most certainly the European Schools at the very centre of it all.



But perhaps, as European integration continues to evolve, the ethos of the European Schools will no longer be the outlier in what concerns the regard to European identity. As movement between member states begins to become the norm for many career-seeking young professionals – rather than the exception – it is likely that educational formation inclusive of different societal cultures and linguistic considerations will adapt accordingly. For my part, I do not believe that European identity should be forced upon anyone, and much less that it should be made to supplant connection to one's own national pride and heritage. Nevertheless, it is my very firm belief that at the very least, national schooling systems would benefit from seeking to promote instilling competence in languages outside of the norm for a given society – in other words, to adopt the European Schools' emphasis on languages. It is my great hope, for example, that the Irish state will one day restructure the national schooling system to make education in equal parts through Irish and English mandatory (thereby making all Irish nationals fully bilingual in both languages). And why stop there? Why not make Irish compulsory throughout all primary education, followed by compulsory secondary education in both the dominant national language of the country, plus one

commonly-spoken second language of the European Union?

What would the possible harm be in making our young Europeans capable of conversing at leisure in their mother tongue, another culturally-relevant language, and also a language of mobility such as French and German? Should it not be a dream of our European leaders that young people would have little difficulty in conducting a full conversation in a plethora of different languages – allowing them to embrace the cultures of the many ethnicities with whom they share this continent, and seeing the very same take place in reverse? Some societies are well on their way to accomplishing such a dream (in Belgium, for example, it is not unusual for a young person to be fluent in the culturally-relevant Dutch and French languages, and also fluent in English as a conduit toward professional and social mobility). Such an outlook should be a cornerstone of the future development of any European federal state, and a benchmark for the elimination of national differences – which have, for too long, ravaged this peculiar and beautiful continent of ours.

Simply put, there are currently 24 official languages of the European Union. There is not a single person on this continent who would not benefit from exposure to at least one more.

IMAGE CREDIT:CHRISTIAN LUE/ UNSPLASH



IMAGE CREDIT: KESZTHELYI TIMI/ UNSPLASH

THE DEPARTURE OF FIDESZ FROM THE EPP

FELIKS SHEPEL

After years of escalating tensions, it finally happened: on 3rd of March 2021 the main Hungarian party, Fidesz, left the European People's Party. The move came after a majority of EPP MEPs voted in favour of new internal rules which would have allowed them to suspend Orban's party. Although dramatic, Fidesz's departure was not surprising: almost every European politician understood that it was a matter of time. So how could such a significant event take place: what was the reason and what does it mean for the European Union?

Conflicts between Fidesz and other EPP members had been brewing for some time. Migration policy has been a particular source of conflict between the European Commission and the Orban government, with Orban even going so far as to stage an internal referendum on the issue of migration quotas in 2016. Before the elections in European Parliament in 2019, billboards featuring European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and billionaire George Soros appeared across Hungary, captioned with the words: "You also have a right to know what Brussels is preparing for you", leading to a further deterioration of relations between the Hungarian government and the Commission.

Orban has always shown a general disregard for the thoughts of the EU's leaders, in part because such disregard raises his popularity

among his conservative electorate.

In early 2019, following expulsion threats from Manfred Weber, the EPP's leader in the European Parliament, Orban agreed to scale down his anti-EU rhetoric and apologise for certain offensive statements: however, he declined to withdraw legal challenges to the Central European University, in spite of strong pressure from both the EU and the US. **Ultimately, in March 2019, the EPP voted to suspend Fidesz's membership of the EPP party, but not from the Parliamentary group,** a move which stopped short of total expulsion, but which meant that Fidesz lost voting and candidacy rights. The decision not to expel Fidesz permanently was undoubtedly partly motivated by a desire not to weaken the EPP's dominant position ahead of the European elections, but it also revealed the scope of the ideological divides within the centre-right group. Some EPP members were eager to condemn Fidesz's illiberal attitudes towards migration and the rule of law, but the party had its share of ideological allies too, and there was a clear reluctance from major EPP players such as Germany's CDU/CSU to take drastic action.

Of course, the Hungarian government has had frequent clashes with the EU as a whole. In recent years, there has been growing concern among Member States about the **state of the rule of law, human rights and**

press freedom in Hungary and fellow Member State Poland. Orban has been dismissive of such concern, rejecting any perceived interference by the EU in Hungary's internal affairs. Tensions escalated in late 2020 when Hungary and Poland vetoed a proposed EU recovery budget in protest at the rule of law clause contained within it. Eventually, an interpretative declaration was reached which persuaded Hungary and Poland to withdraw their vetoes, but the political skirmish was seen by many in Europe as crossing a line.

In February 2021, the EPP began moves to introduce a new set of suspension rules within the group, which would allow for the expulsion of the Fidesz delegation from the parliamentary group as well as the party – under the previous rules, only individual MEPs could be suspended from the parliamentary group. As the scope of support for the rule changes became clear, Orban warned Weber that the delegation would quit immediately if the changes were adopted, and ultimately the Fidesz delegation left the parliamentary group on the 3rd March.

Two weeks later, Fidesz's Vice President Katalina Novak published an official letter to the EPP party, writing that Fidesz “no longer wishes to maintain its membership”. The EPP's President, former President of the European Council Donald Tusk, responded that “In truth, it left Christian Democracy many years ago”.

So, what lessons can be drawn from the Fidesz/EPP split? It is clear that the incumbent Hungarian government will continue to be a thorn in the side of all those who believe in the EU's fundamental principles of liberal democracy and respect for the rule of law. Just days after leaving the EPP, Orban began to call for the **creation of a new right-wing European political force**, and suggested

that he was already in talks with Poland's governing party, PiS, as well as Italy's Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni. This should be of concern to the EPP: if European political force, and suggested that he was already in talks with Poland's governing party, PiS, as well as Italy's Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni. This should be of concern to the EPP: if Orban can produce a credible and united grouping within the European Parliament, there is a credible risk that other delegations will begin to defect, drastically shifting the balance of ideological power within the Parliament.

In the European Council, Orban has continued to behave destructively, most recently blocking an EU statement on the Middle East conflict. Increasingly, the principle of unanimity on foreign affairs issues looks unsustainable in the face of Hungarian opposition, and calls for a shift to a **qualified majority voting system** to end the impasse are growing louder.

Most seriously of all, however, is that the Hungarian government's animosity towards its European partners damages the EU's credibility on the world stage at a time when a strong global presence matters more than ever. As the EU works to tackle some of the major challenges posed by the 21st century, from climate change to human rights abuses and pandemics, it is imperative that the Union speaks with one voice. A successful coalition between Fidesz, PiS, Italy's Lega and other populist parties in the Parliament would significantly undermine this voice and damage the EU's ability to advocate for progress in the world. European liberals must therefore be ready to defend this progress and to continue to fight for and defend liberal democracy both within and outside the Union.

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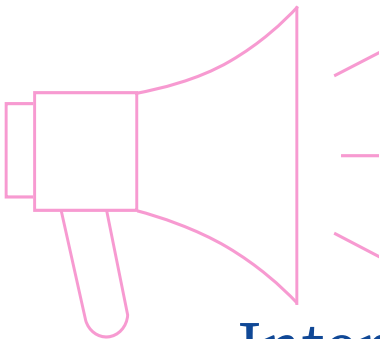
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