

Libertas

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Welcome to Libertas!

Dear reader,

What an extraordinary year this has been! After the Covid era, many of us thought Europe and the rest of the world left the worst behind. Unfortunately, the developments didn't go towards the direction many of us hoped for. Right now, Europe is experiencing a full scale war. Something many wouldn't have imagined before February 24 and a war that the Ukrainian people are paying the heaviest price for. In these torn times, many of us, young liberals, offer ideas, visions and solutions on how to defeat evil and bring Europe to a brighter path.

These ideas are sometimes different and open up for debate, but nonetheless it is of vital importance that they are discussed. This is why I am pleased to see that we have a forum like Libertas to discuss our liberal ideas on various topics.

Being the President of LYMEC, I have been leading an organization where we don't have the biggest financial resources, large office teams or big amount of tools. But we do have one thing. Ideas and the will for change. I believe that our ideas discussed in the collection of Libertas articles truly speak 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.

Europe is in great need of not only discussing the present, but also where we go from here. Providing the space to discuss and debate contemporary challenges is a vital part of this, and I would like to thank all the writers and editors of Libertas for their great contribution to providing this space.

Dan-Aria Sucuri
LYMEC President

FLAG IMAGE: © EUROPEAN UNION

Meet the Team!

Since the start of 2023, a new Libertas Editorial Team has been assembled. Find out more about the team and their backgrounds here!

Felix Schulz LYMEC Individual Member

Felix Schulz (DE) is the Editor in Chief of Libertas. He has been a member of the FDP since 2015 and since 2020 of the Young Liberals. Currently he is working 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.



Lucasta Bath Young Liberals UK

Lucasta Bath (UK) is currently the Technology and Change Associate at the Financial Conduct Authority. 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 the UK.



Laia Comerma LYMEC Policy Officer / JNC

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.





Bogdan Zaharia
LYMEC Individual Member

Bogdan Zaharia (RO) is the President of the Sports and Youth Committee at the county level. For the last 6-7 years he has been involved in most of the anti-corruption movements as well as smaller actions aiming to improve the state of democratic practices at a national level. He strongly believes that democracy is something we need to protect and improve, on a daily basis.

Alea Muñoz
LYMEC Individual Member

Alea Muñoz (ES) is an individual member of LYMEC. Besides this, she works in a research centre that evaluates public policies in developing countries. Previously, she did a Blue Book traineeship at DG EMPL of the European Commission and an internship at OECD. Alea is passionate about impact evaluation, development economics, labour and employment policies and EU relationships with Africa and Latin America.



Adrian Kokk
LUF Sweden

Adrian Kokk (SW) currently serves on the board of his local fraction of the Liberal Party in Sweden, and is a member of the Liberal Students' Working Group on Ideology. In addition to this, Adrian is also a board member of a pro-European student think, and was previously a writer at the same organisation. He is currently pursuing an LL.M. at the University of Gothenburg.



Lovis Lindquist
LUF Sweden

Lovis Lindquist (SE) has been a member of the Liberal Party's Youth Wing since 2018. She has written for their magazine before and she is currently studying peace and conflict studies at Uppsala University. Her main interests are the Arctic and Nordic region, identity and foreign affairs.



Nikolaos Zerzelidis
LYMEC Individual Member

Nikolaos (GR) 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 the Leiden University. He has also completed an internship at the Greek Section of Amnesty International.



Cristian Preoteasa-Maier
USR Tineret

Cristian Preoteasa-Maier (RO) is a member of LYMEC representing USR Tineret. He has been active in the sphere of liberal politics since 2019, when he participated as a delegate to LYMEC's Autumn congress in London. He graduated from Loughborough University in the UK, where he studied Politics and International Relations for his BA, and Sport Management, Politics and International Development for his MSc.





Marko Milutinović
LYMEC Individual Member

Marko Milutinović (HR) is an individual member of LYMEC. Besides this he is also 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.

Margaux Carron
Young Green Liberals

Margaux Carron (CH) has been active in politics since she's 19, when she was elected as a legislative representative of Nyon, a 20'000 inhabitants town in Switzerland. Since then she has been active in various committees of the Mother and Young party. She is currently International Officer for the Young'Green Liberals Switzerland.



Martí Serra
LYMEC Individual Member

Martí Serra is an individual member of LYMEC devoted to the promotion of liberal democratic ideas and a geopolitical Europe. He has been involved with liberal think tanks in Catalonia and pro-European associations. Moreover, he is the deputy director of the students-led journal l'Universitari.





IMAGE: MARCOS PAULO PRADO/ UNSPLASH

IN THE WAKE OF THE DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II

ADAM VOLF

Elizabeth II was Queen of the United Kingdom for 70 years. Something which remained unaltered throughout even the most turbulent periods of her long reign was the UK's territorial integrity. But in the year of her passing, the union of the Home Nations (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) lies on uncertain foundations. And it may do so as early as 2023. Brexit - at least in what concerns the potential consequences for the integrity of the United Kingdom - should be considered the single most cataclysmic event of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Calls for Scottish independence were already high by the time the Scottish National Party (SNP) managed to wrangle a referendum on Scotland's future in 2014, but the resulting vote was defeated by a margin of 55.3 to 44.7%.

A close call, but still a resolute 'No' to independence from the Scottish public. The following year (2015) already saw winds of change. The SNP dominated the Scottish general election, securing 56 of its 59 Westminster seats. Then came Brexit. Scotland was forced to abandon the European Union, despite 'Leave' not having landed a single constituency in the Scottish vote. Those who had voted to maintain the status quo in 2014 now saw their status quo unravel. With Brexit likely to have wiped out the sentimental attachment of some Scots to the continued union, support

for the idea of Scottish independence will have risen further. More weight added to an idea already blossoming.

The SNP has since moved decisively. Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has championed the case for another referendum in 2023. If she is successful in securing it, '#IndyRef2' is likely to return a successful vote for independence. The resulting rupture would deal a crippling blow to the United Kingdom - the rump state would comprise only England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. A Northern Ireland where - in a world of devotion to continued British union - the land also fares increasingly ill.

The fact that Northern Ireland is no longer the most likely entity to first abandon the UK should not underestimate its own stark position within the union. Were it not for Brexit - as in Scotland, opposed overall in Northern Ireland - young voters may have remained content with the political landscape after 30 years of stability. But hardline Unionist parties - to their great detriment - threw their weight behind a hard Brexit, plunging Northern Ireland into tribal politics anew. Irish Republicans - in the years before the vote - had conducted a patient campaign to consolidate support, but may nonetheless have seen their central objective (unification) begin to fade, out of opposition to such dramatic political upheaval. But that upheaval occurred anyway - bizarrely, at the

initiative of unionist parties, for whom the maintaining of existing conditions would (most definitely) have been in their best interests.

With the UK (and especially Northern Ireland) being thrown into turmoil by Brexit, Irish Republicanism was handed a huge boost. For disaffected young voters, a United Ireland offers a potential route back into the European Union. The new strength given to the republican cause may be compounded by Northern Ireland's changing demographics. In 2022, citizens of a Catholic background were found to be the single largest religious affiliation for the first time in 100 years. Catholics, traditionally, are far more likely to support republicanism and the unification of Ireland, than Northern Ireland's Protestants. With the combined power of a disenfranchising Brexit, and the looming dismemberment of the UK (with Scotland's departure), the likelihood of a border poll to determine Northern Ireland's future seems only a matter of time. If the resulting border poll led to Irish unity, this would effectively spell the end of the UK as a political union.

The impending prospect of the UK's dissolution - what significance will the Queen's death have? The impending prospect of the UK's dissolution - what significance will the Queen's death have? With this said, the two events described herein (Scottish independence, and Irish unification), may not occur as swiftly as the changing times may suggest. A Scottish vote could fail once more. A second vote may not even take place, although the London government would be unwise to oppose it. In Northern Ireland, the republicans would be well-advised to avoid too swiftly calling a referendum on Irish unification (even in the event of an assured victory), in order to deter violence by allowing more time for the adaptation

of political circumstances (and the decay of hardline unionist parties in Northern Ireland by their own self-sabotage). Hence, a wise strategy would be to wait at least several years after the departure of Scotland before acting. Still, a dissolved United Kingdom (including independent Scotland and United Ireland) is possible within 10 years - perhaps a certainty within 20.

If the summary of this article is that the sun is rapidly setting on the territorial integrity of the Queen's immediate realm, it should not be understood that this is necessary due to the recent death of Queen Elizabeth II. If events take place as described, it shall have been the product of years of decolonisation and demographic evolution, as well as the calamitous choice made by English and Welsh voters to support the UK's departure from the EU. The Queen personally did not contribute to the rise of republicanism in Ireland or to the desire for independence in Scotland in any great way. On the contrary - the Queen was, by all accounts, tolerable even to those opposed to the institution of the monarchy (in Ireland and Scotland alike). She may, even, have done as much as any British monarch could do to maintain the status quo and to deter sentiments of republicanism. Even most hardline republicans would likely accept this.

Still, the next few years will be telling.

THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE EROSION OF EU VALUES

MARKO MILUTINOVIC

The European Union's values are values which are common to the European Union countries, in a society which takes pride in inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination. These values are the bedrock of what we like to refer to as the European way of life, which includes: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights. **Why is it important to examine these values and their meaning for European countries?** It matters because there has been a marked trend in democratic backsliding among some European Member States, most notably in Slovenia, Poland and Hungary. The crucial thing to mention here is that when we talk about certain countries' failures it is important to stress out that this is not the failure of the country itself nor is it the failure of its citizens, but rather the failure of their government and their elected officials. In order to understand what is happening and how Hungary has arrived at this point, we need to take a look at what has happened since Viktor Orbán came into power. It is also quite a big U-turn for Orbán himself, transitioning from a student who was the champion of democracy, left-wing atheist to the icon of the far-right. **Orbán was the prime minister from 1998 to 2002, however that is not the period which is relevant for the transition that Hungary has gone through.** The important date for this conversation is

29th of May 2010, when he assumed the office of prime minister for the second time. From that moment forward, democracy began to collapse in this Central European country. It did not take long for Orbán's government to take on democracy and rule of law. **At the beginning of 2012 the Hungarian government started to centralise the judiciary system and they dramatically lowered the retirement age for judges from 70 to 62.** Of course, this attracted reaction from the European Union and in November of 2012 the European Court of Justice ruled that this was unlawful. Unfortunately, this did not mean much to the judges who were forced into retirement. Although they could have opted for compensation or reinstatement, the latter did not guarantee their return to a senior judiciary position, which meant retirement for most of them. **This way Orbán took care of the judges that he deemed to be too independently-minded.** He had other plans, none of which focused on democracy and rule of law, they were quite the opposite. Following its election victory in 2014, the Fidesz/KDNP coalition lost significant public support, largely due to a backlash against a proposed tax on Internet usage. Orbán fought to win back support and he was in luck. His election conundrum coincided with the migrant and refugee crises. These crises were used as a tool to instil fear and build up support among voters. He blatantly



IMAGE: KEZSTHELYI TIMI/ UNSPLASH

the majority of the European Union's values, especially the ones that focused on human dignity and human rights. Hungary erected a razor-wire wall alongside the border with Serbia and not long thereafter a similar one was built along the border with Croatia. As a result of these actions, the popularity of Orbán's party, Fidesz, rose. The polls showed that Orbán managed to weaponise the human tragedy to his own gain. By September of 2015 two-thirds of people who were polled agreed with the decision to build walls in an attempt to prevent refugees and migrants from entering Hungary. These walls became a symbol for the far-right all over the world. Even the former US president Donald Trump tried to create his own version on the border with Mexico during his time in office, but with far less success.

In his attempt to consolidate his power he had two more targets on his list, the free media and universities. The plan to control the media initially focused on analogue and print media, because Orbán wanted to target the elderly voter base and ensure that by the next elections this base was a shoo-in for Fidesz. Unfortunately, this was just the beginning. What happened next was that the largest news portal in Hungary was successfully silenced; news editors that were too independently minded found themselves out of work; and finally the Hungarian government refused to renew the broadcasting license of the last independent political radio station. The Hungarian government has strengthened its control of the media in its country by consolidating regulation of the media into a single body, the Media Authority, itself overseen by the Media Council. The president of the Media Council is appointed by Orbán himself, which means that the state media authority is led by people who are close to him. A similar strategy was implemented

in order to bring state-funded universities under government control. This was important, because these universities were the epicentre of anti-government and social liberal thought. The control over universities was handed over from independent trustees to new educational foundations, which were of course led by people loyal to Orbán.

The newest flagrant violation of human rights in Hungary came as a result of the new anti-LGBTQ law. The said law includes the new Child Protection Act, as well as the Family Protection Act, which initially aimed to protect children from paedophiles. The creation of this law was brought about by the scandal involving the former Hungarian Ambassador to Peru, Gabor Kaleta. He was removed from service and returned home when more than 19 thousand indecent photos of minors were found on his devices. To make the matters even worse he received just a small sentence for his crime. The situation escalated when Fidesz added amendments with the sole purpose of restricting LGBTQ education and rights. This included prohibiting information that has been deemed by the government to promote homosexuality or gender change to people under the age of 18 in schools, programmes or advertisements. The human rights violations were taken even further with the newest changes to the Hungarian Constitution, which came about at the end of last year. These changes altered the meaning of family in a way which excluded transgender and other LGBT individuals. Naturally, the latest violations of human rights provoked a stark reaction from the European Union leaders. The loudest one came from the Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte, who argued that the newest developments in Hungary warranted the ejection of the said Central European country from the European Union.

Furthermore, the European Union leaders have signed a letter in which they outlined their commitment to fighting for and protecting the LGBTQ community, although the letter does not mention Hungary specifically. Members of the LGBTQ community do not know what to expect and given Orbán's tendency to escalate things even further, who knows how the future might look? It is clear that the time for talking with the Hungarian officials has passed and that action is necessary. Orbán has been ridiculing the values upon which our Union has been founded for a decade. There needs to be a serious discussion on the matter with strong reaction to everything that has been happening. The problem is that autocratic leaders such as Orbán hide behind their people. He will not be the one to bear the brunt of consequences, if for example Hungary is kicked out of the European Union, but the citizens of Hungary. For this reason, the solution should not be to oust Hungary from the Union. Orbán would create this into his own personal victory, the situation in the country would deteriorate even further and the minorities would find themselves in a very dangerous position.

However, something must be done and that decision needs to be connected to funding. It is ludicrous to reward a member state for the violation of the values upon which this Union was created. There has to be a commitment attached to the respect of the rule of law and human rights to funding which is received from the European Union. **Another option could be that until Hungary gets back on track with human rights and rule of law obligations, the allocation of the money to the Hungarian citizens is done by the European Union itself.** Some mechanism along these lines must be put in place. The situation with Hungary is difficult, the Hungarian citizens are hurting, which means that every single European Union citizen is hurting. The EU is supposed to be a safe place for all EU citizens and as long as there are people who are discriminated against within the EU territory then our European values, ideas and dreams are in jeopardy. The EU leaders must decide on the action, which will not put those citizens in an even more precarious position, but rather help them out of the unwarranted danger they find themselves in!



IMAGE: MIHÁLY KÖLES/ UNSPLASH

THE AFTERMATH OF THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

RICCARDO ONANO

On September 25, Italians elected a new parliament. The result was the victory of the far-right "Brothers of Italy" party led by Giorgia Meloni, the next and first female prime minister in Italy.

The European Union (EU) is witnessing a strengthening of right-wing extremism, radical right-wing movements, populism, and nationalism. Just a week ago, the Sweden Democrats, a far-right party with a strongly anti-immigrant agenda, came in second in national elections. Their support will be crucial for the new center-right coalition that is expected to replace the Social Democrats. This is not the only case, there are many other parties in this field that are growing, such as Rassemblement National with Marine Le Pen in France (41% of the vote in the "duel" with Macron), Law and Justice in Poland (30%), Fidesz in Hungary (53% with Orban),

Vox in Spain (15%), New Flemish Alliance in Belgium (20%) and many others.

Meloni's victory follows this European trend. Meloni won this election because her party was the only one that did not participate in the government of national unity formed to fight the pandemic. Thus, she received the votes of all those who were disappointed and angry about the Covid period. She was simply in the right place at the right time. As in other countries, nationalist ideas win where traditional parties share a common sense of delusion, where there has been a surge in immigration (as in Italy or Sweden), or where European austerity policies have led to a spending review (Italy and Greece). In general, voters are likely to protest the political establishment but not fully support its far-right agenda.



IMAGE: ARNAUD JAEGER/ UNSPLASH

This agenda in particular is something that should worry a liberal. For example, some points of the Italian brothers' program are the rejection of liberalization and privatization, the increase of all pensions, and 1000 euros for every housewife! Economists have estimated the cost of implementing this program at 160 to 210 billion euros. They also want to reduce taxes for individuals and companies. Implementing this program would undoubtedly be expensive, and a looser fiscal policy would lead to higher borrowing costs for Italy and possibly a financial crisis. In addition, a right-wing government may not stay in power for long. The government will have to govern during a difficult winter and make difficult political decisions due to the war in Ukraine, which will also affect Italy's energy sector and economy due to rising prices.

Could this government pose a threat to the EU? Meloni's allies are not very reliable because of their old ambiguous statements on Russia, but the head of government has stated several times that Italy will fully support Ukraine and continue to be an ally of the United States. Moreover, while Italy is allied with Orban and Morawiecki (the prime minister in Poland), this will not make Italy like Poland or lead the country out of the EU. Many EU decisions have to be approved unanimously by all member states. Therefore, we can expect more veto points and veto powers from this government. In addition, we can expect the Italian government to take a more Euroskeptic stance on some issues. It follows that this would reduce Italy's influence in the EU and make relations between Italy and the EU more turbulent. Nevertheless, Italy would most likely not become a new Poland or Hungary or, worse, leave the European Union.



IMAGE: JACK WARD/ UNSPLASH

DO IT LIKE ROMAN RATUSHNYI - NEVER SURRENDER TO TYRANNY AND INJUSTICE

FELIX SCHULZ

Today, three months ago a young man died near Izyum, in the east of Ukraine. He was fighting for the Ukrainian army and against the Russian invaders. His name was Roman Ratushnyi - a 24-year-old Ukrainian soldier, activist, public figure, and source of inspiration for his generation. The message of Roman's death spread quickly across news outlets and social media - even outside the country. The reason is simple: He was a role model in the fight against injustice and arbitrariness.

Roman Ratushnyi was born in Kyiv in 1997 into the family of an activist of the "Save Old Kyiv" movement and a writer. At the age of 15, he took part in Euromaidan and faced the brutal Berkut, the Ukrainian riot police under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior. When protesting against the former pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich on November 30, he and other protesters were beaten up badly by the Berkut. Instead of giving in to the violence, he continued to speak up against injustice and became an activist.

In 2018, he headed the Let's protect Protasiv Yar (Gorge) initiative, a public endeavor to stop the illegal construction of a 40-story building. The initiative is aimed at preserving the green zone in Protasiv Gorge in the heart of Kyiv. In the end, the developer's intentions were thwarted in court: a major victory for

the young activist and his supporters. The journalist Denys Kazanskyi calls Roman one of the most active representatives of the public sector in Kyiv. "When we met, he was 21-22 years old. He was inspiring. I believed that he had a great political future. I was glad that we have such people, that they are so young and just starting their way," Denys recalls.

European Youth of Ukraine activist Kateryna Onishchuk recalls that the law school community has always followed Roman's social media considering him a role model in fighting for liberties. He had a unique style in delivering his opinion - he would always stick to the classical style being precise and somehow cold. Everyone wanted to be like Roman - not everyone manage.

After the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation, Ratushnyi became a volunteer in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and created a unit that owes its name to Protasiv Gorge. He first defended Kyiv, later fought in the Sumy region, and participated in the de-occupation of settlements in the same region. When his death became known many of his supporters moaned and took to the streets. Just a few days after his death a farewell ceremony was summoned next to the Protasiv Yar.

It is important to remember the Ukrainian

people who fought bravely for their freedom and right to self-determination. We must not forget that even today many pay the ultimate price. But it is so easy to forget about all these things as time moves on. The Ukrainian war has been going on for already more than half a year and no end is in sight. At the same time unrest awakens in Europe, because people feel the effects of the war. Prices explode, natural gas is scarce, and electricity bills rise. Therefore, it is important to recall the value of democracy and freedom and ask ourselves if all that is worth it.

For liberals the answer is easy: absolutely! **We know that without freedom, prosperity becomes a withered flower. That is why we have to keep the sanctions against the barbarian Russian regime in place and continue the support of the Ukrainian people economically, politically, and also militarily.**

We must never buckle in the face of tyranny and injustice. That is a lesson we can learn from Roman Ratushnyi.



IMAGE: FAREWELL CEREMONY FOR ROMAN RATUSHNYI
ON JUNE 16, 2022/ BYKVU

A TALE OF TWO "EUROPE" - INFLATION AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE EU

ADRIAN KOKK

On a continent once again riddled with war, the economies of Europe are fighting a challenging battle against ravaging inflation rates. Even though the problem of high inflation is currently ubiquitous in Europe, the extent to which it affects different countries varies drastically. This crisis not only highlights the versatility of the European Union but also serves to reaffirm the core principles of liberal economics.

With Europe on the brink of recession, every nation undoubtedly faces severe economic challenges. The present financial situation tells a story of international unity in economic hardship, as prices of food and energy continue to rise to increasingly unprecedented levels, which to a large extent can be attributed to Russia's unlawful war against Ukraine. At the same time, the crisis has accentuated the existing economic disparities between European countries.

In some countries that are not formally members of the EU, inflation rates are relatively modest. These include Liechtenstein and Norway, both of them wealthy countries with national central banks at the helm of their respective monetary policies. In EU countries such as Sweden, Spain, and Belgium the rates hover around the ten percent mark, with only marginal differences from the EU average of 10,1% for August. Luxembourg

currently has the lowest inflation in the Union, with a surprisingly stable rate of about 3,5%. Inflation is, needless to say, usually quite low in the country, and the government has carefully crafted measures to avoid dramatic spikes during the year. To prevent wages from rising too rapidly, which could potentially exacerbate the situation, Luxembourg's government chose, what was deemed to be, a fiscally more conservative approach with tax credits to assist struggling households. However, the government has not completely ruled out further hikes in line with the country's automatic wage indexation system, should the cost of living crisis become more severe.

Compared to Luxembourg, the situation in Estonia is very different. Like Luxembourg, Estonia is a small country with what is now a developed and advanced economy. **Throughout the year, average price hikes have reached 25% on an annual basis, and efforts by the Estonian government to halt this trend have been mostly in vain.** This obvious discrepancy has been attributed to staunch economic progress, with perpetually rising wages, over the last few years, combined with the fact that wages are still lower than in many other EU countries. Since a greater percentage of the paychecks go towards paying for food, electricity, and fuel than in many other European countries,

Estonians have been hit even harder by the current economic anomalies. Being part of the Eurozone means that the country's monetary policy is in the hands of the European Central Bank, which sets interest rates that apply to all 19 countries. This has meant that interest rates may not have risen as much as Estonia would have liked, and other domestic measures, such as tax exemption for low-income earners, do not strike directly at the problem.

There are several conclusions to be made from this. On the one hand, there is an implicit victory for liberal economics. As has been seen throughout history, the main objective now ought to be to control the money supply responsibly, following monetarist tradition. The responsible actions of the Luxembourgish government are a prime example of this and go to show that it is essential not to be tempted to seek easy and populist solutions that could, in the end, hurt the economy. On the other hand, it is relatively easy to see that it is different to adopt proper measures and govern a Union of many different countries. The ECB has to set rates that apply to the entire Eurozone, and for a small country like Estonia, with a unique economic profile, there is not much to do when the rates are unfavorable.

Therefore, **one can only hope that these liberal principles of monetary policy will continue to prosper** and that we shall find ways to utilize the strengths of the economic diversity of the EU to overcome the kind of challenges it now brings.

IMAGE: IBRAHIM BOHRAN/ UNSPLASH





IMAGE PATRICK ROBERT DOYL/ UNSPLASH

REFORMING FRONTEX - THE SWISS CASE STUDY OF A LOOMING EUROPEAN CRISIS

MARGAUX CARRON

At the end of 2019 the European Union (EU) passed a regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard. The Swiss government supported this regulation in October 2021. Following this decision, a Referendum Committee “no Frontex” was put in place to allow Swiss voters to position themselves on the federal decision. The vote took place on the 15th May 2022 with a participation of 40%. In the end, 71,5% voted “Yes” and supported the federal decision. No cantons voted against it. This Swiss national vote crystallizes the debates around two larger EU challenges : migration policies and EU decision-making.

Firstly, the vote emphasizes the wider debate on migration policies. Human rights versus security; open borders versus controlled borders; non-discrimination versus selective acceptance. In the case of voting on the response to give to, mostly the Mediterranean migration crisis, the answer was quite straightforward. Indeed, during the months before the vote, the topic was barely discussed publicly. Switzerland, as a non-EU and largely conservative country, tacitly agreed on the response to the ongoing migration crisis: security prevails. Interestingly enough, the Ukrainian refugee crisis was already alarmingly present at the time of the vote. Here also, the crisis resulted, be it in Switzerland or in the EU,

in increasing financial and border support. The nature of this support however differed to the one implied by the 15th of May vote. For Ukrainian refugees, support went to humanitarian aid organizations, local refugee aid, and relaxing asylum regulations. Every door that could be opened, has been opened. The wide gap in the nature of the responses could have us question if the absorption capacity of Switzerland, and further implied, the European Union, is correlated to the perception of the migration and geo-political threat. Between, on the one hand, publicly sanctioning Russia followed by 80 million Swiss francs dedicated to humanitarian aid and, on the other hand, voting to increase the budget of 37 million to, mostly Mediterranean, border control, one could wonder if all 27 member States would position themselves equally. Switzerland does not seem to shy away from an answer.

Secondly, the debate crystalizes the wider debate on EU decision-making, pushed forward during the Future of Europe debates by youth parties such as LYMEC’s member organizations. One of the main arguments of the Swiss Federal Council in favor of the increased support for Frontex was the binding agreement Switzerland has to Schengen regulations. In this Swiss case study, there is an evident contradiction between the Swiss federal and direct

democracy system and the EU's current system. Indeed, had the Swiss voters voted against the support of Frontex, the agreements made at a State level would have needed to be reviewed. In the context of current European challenges, increasing direct democracy would be a typical Swiss argument. In my opinion, the integration of direct democracy within the European Union could be a strong argument for a Swiss' integration to the Union. Increasing some sort of direct democracy was timidly suggested by the conclusions of the Conference of Europe, as well as the empowerment of legislative bodies. Going towards increased democratic involvement was timidly suggested by the 5th conclusion of the Conference of the Future of Europe (2022/2648(RSP)), supported by LYMEC. In the case of European migration policies, one could wonder the consequence of direct democracy within the EU on decisions such as increasing border security.

Would positions of member States in international debates be strengthened or weakened? One could argue that increasing it, could be debated that increased direct democracy could change the outcomes of negotiations and increase incentives to further compensate certain States. Reforms as the ones envisaged for the Dublin Regulations could, therefore, have a different outcome.

In the light of the future Climate Refugee crisis that the European Union will face, concrete evolution around EU decision-making processes is pressing. Advancing towards increased democracy and empowerment of government bodies within the European Union will certainly not solve ideological debates around migration and security, it can however strengthen the equity and transparency around these policies enabling member States to better respond to looming threats we will all face.



IMAGE: SUMIT/ UNSPLASH

SPAIN'S STOLEN BABIES - A FORGOTTEN HUMAN RIGHTS SCANDAL

LOVIS LINDQUIST

In 2008, Spain was hit by a devastating scandal - it was discovered that around 300 000 children had been stolen from their parents during the Franco regime (1939-1975). The parents of these stolen children were often republicans or single mothers that did not fit into the ideal picture of a mother according to the Franco regime which was also based on catholic and traditional values. In addition, the Catholic church in Spain and the regime had close ties. During the Franco regime women usually gave birth at the church's institutions and as the church had tight grip on the Spanish society, women simply did not dare to stand up against the clergy. Some even claim that this practice continued until the 1990's but these claims are hard to verify.

Despite the low interest of the stolen babies in the media outside of Spain, the news did gain some attention in the European Parliament. In 2015 a group of MEPs wrote a letter to Spain's then permanent representative to the European Union, Alfonso María Dastis, accusing the Spanish state, meaning the former Franco regime, for crimes against humanity. Individuals have also reached out to the European Union (EU) for justice. For instance, a mother from the UK that gave birth in Spain in 1992 claims that her child has been stolen and has pleaded to the European Parliament that they speed up her case. This incident demonstrates that

the issue of the stolen babies is not a national matter of Spain. However, the EU has not given more attention to the scandal. In my opinion, that is intolerable. The babies were stolen before Spain joined the EU but the victims are dealing with it right now and as the EU stands behind human rights the EU is arguably obligated to deal with it.

The fact that Spain is still dealing with francoism has made dealing with this scandal a very difficult issue to deal with within Spain. According to the historian Francisco González, criticising the Franco regime is to some extent taboo and this makes it hard to deal with allegations of stolen babies. He further adds that few lawyers are willing to take on cases that deal with these allegations as a consequence of this. However, some things have been done to try to compensate the victims. In 2017 it was decided that a DNA-database was to be created which would make it easier for relatives to find each other. The DNA-testing would be free of charge for the victims. This might seem like a small step in the right direction but regarding the fact that the parties in the Spanish parliament are divided on this issue this decision is quite remarkable. Additionally, in 2018 the parliament passed a law that would recognise the crimes of the Spanish state and give the victims some type of compensation that would be investigated.

Considering the seriousness of what happened in Spain it is strange that it has not gotten more attention from both the news and the EU, especially as not just Spanish citizens are affected and that Europe as a whole does not deal with the aftermath of the Franco regime. In addition, similar cases, such as the treatment and lack of justice for political prisoners in Argentina and Chile under similar dictatorships have gotten more attention in Europe than Franco's stolen babies. **That is why we liberals need to continue talking about these events and denounce the terrible human rights violations of the past.**

The question remains: What can the EU do? The first thing the EU should do is to recognise what has happened and start coming up with a plan on how they could serve justice to the victims. Examples of this could include helping to fund projects such as the DNA-database or inform victims about their rights. The European Court of Human Rights (not a part of the EU) could also do their part by informing victims and taking on their cases as Spain seems reluctant to do so. Franco's stolen babies is a scandal that deserves more attention from Europe. The victims can never get compensated enough and the least we can do is to recognise what has happened.



IMAGE ASMUND GIMRE/ UNSPLASH

THE STRATEGIC COMPASS AND THE FUTURE OF EU FOREIGN POLICY

MARTÍ SERRA FIGAROLA

After two years of elaboration, the European Strategic Compass (ESC) was approved during the french presidency of the Council of the European Union. **This document was meant to substitute the outdated EU Global Strategy of 2016 and be the new European Grand Strategy.** The ESC, whose importance on European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is enormous, has received little or no attention from the media and the public. Given this void, I intend to analyse some of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as to examine EU foreign policy direction from now on.

The pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have accelerated integration processes that were on stand-by within the EU. Nonetheless, these events have, at the same time, layed down a new multipolar and post-hegemonic international system marked by the threat to the liberal rules-based order. Some characteristics of this emerging system are an increasing strategic polarisation, emerging hybrid threats, a de-globalization of strategic resources, and an ongoing block-formation. It is in this context that the ESC should stand as an orientation for the Union's future actions.

The ESC is divided into four major sections: Act, which refers to crisis management; Secure, that addresses resilience; Invest, focusing on capabilities development; and Partner, that targets international cooperation and alliances. The first element outlines the necessity to act quickly in crisis

situations. The document proposes a new EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of 5.000 units to replace the ancient and still unused EU Battlegroups and stresses the need to advance towards faster and more flexible decision-making processes.

The Invest chapter is one of the most relevant. Reducing the capability gap between Europe and the US and between Member States is necessary for having common security policies. The document outlines binding commitments of Member States with PESCO. Regarding international cooperation, the ESC is rather vague and even seems outdated in the light of the current crisis. The main problem with the international analysis of the Compass is the lack of attention to China. Whether it is because of the impact of the Russian invasion, or because of the lack of agreement between the states, the document underestimates the importance of South-East Asia for the future.

In summary, the main strength of the Compass is its concreteness. The ESC is the common denominator of the demands of the Council and presents a clear to-do list that will help increase integration in EU CFSP. The accomplishments of these objectives will depend on the willingness of the Member States to implement them — which should not be difficult given they have signed and promoted the ESC. Nevertheless, this policy-centred orientation is also its main weakness. The character of the ESC supposes a great opportunity cost for the European Union.

The ESC is a quite realistic and accomplishable map on the next steps in EU integration in defence policies. It is an actualization of the 2016 document. Although this is necessary, it lacks a long term strategic foresight not only focusing on threat analysis — which is necessary — but also on giving the EU a relevant role in a multipolar post-hegemonic world. **The ESC has three main problems: it lacks clear interoperability with NATO's Strategic Concept; it does not offer a perspective on the EU's strategic position in the world and, thus; it relegates the EU to a regional power and not a global actor with the capabilities and willingness to shape the international system.** If the EU wants to be a global actor, the intellectual work on its strategic behaviour must be done sooner or later. A liberal point of view has, by definition, a plurality of perspectives.

However, it is my opinion that we must defend a capable and willing EU that stands as a global actor and defends the rules-based international order. The EU must promote democracy, international cooperation and the multilateral institutions that have provided peace until now. Moreover, the Union ought to act as a depolarizing power that prevents any possible conflict between the US and China. **The ESC should have established this long-term perspective on the EU role in the world and its relations with allies, rivals and partners.** In conclusion, the Compass provides good and realistic policy guidance for the years to come, but misses a great opportunity to build the basis for a long term strategy. The Union has to stop reacting to crisis and, instead, design its future to assure a liberal long lasting peace.



IMAGE CREDIT: JAMIE STREET/ UNSPLASH

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS AND TRANSNATIONAL LISTS: A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

MARKO MILUTINOVIC

At the beginning of May this year, the European Parliament adopted the position on the transnational lists with a large majority. This position came to life after the Constitutional Committee proposed a major reform of the European Electoral Act with the aim of “defining common minimum electoral standards and a Union-wide constituency”.

BACKGROUND - First of all, let us take a look at the background of the European Electoral Act. The Act dates back to 1976 and it consists of common principles that must be respected by the Member States’ laws regarding the elections for the European Parliament.

It is important to note that according to article 223 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the European Parliament holds the initiative when it comes to the European Electoral Act. The article in question states that “the European Parliament shall draw up a proposal to lay down the provisions necessary for the election of its Members by direct universal suffrage in accordance with a uniform procedure in all Member States or in accordance with principles common to all Member States.”

THE CURRENT PROPOSAL - The Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) led by the rapporteur Domènec Ruiz Devesa put forward the proposal that each of the voters would have the possibility of casting two votes, one to elect MEPs in national

constituencies and one to elect MEPs in European-wide constituencies.

Since the United Kingdom left the European Union, we are left with 46 MEPs less. The proposed reform aims to rectify this by adding additional 28 MEPs which would be elected through the newly proposed Transnational Lists. The proposal was adopted on the third of May by the European Parliament.

WHY IT MATTERS - Currently, the MEPs are elected solely by their national constituencies. This option has negative aspects to it because when campaigning they are focused on their state’s issues and are pushing forward that agenda to their voters to whom they are politically accountable. This procedure significantly reduces the space for a truly European political debate on issues that are of the utmost importance to all of the European citizens across the 27 Member States.

Having said that, transnational lists are a unique chance that we must not squander. For us, the liberal youth, this is key for the future. In order to create an even closer union, we need to have the option to vote for others aside from our national MEPs. This brings about an opportunity to open a discussion on important European topics. By doing this, we would have more chances to create a better Union because the MEPs elected from the transnational lists would



IMAGE CREDIT: GUILLAUME PERIGOIS/ UNSPLASH

not be focused only on the needs of the voters from their constituencies but rather on the needs of voters from all over the European Union.

Another interesting point here is who exactly would be the people on these lists. Well, parties would likely be inclined to put their prominent members on this list. These people would already be taking or aiming to take important positions such as the position of group leaders in the European Parliament, the president of the Commission or the Commissioners.

By having the most prominent party members on the transnational lists, every eligible European voter would have the opportunity to express their opinions on these politicians. This would be quite important, since these people aim to get the top positions in the European Union. Additionally, having these high-profile individuals on the transnational lists would open up the space on national lists for newcomers. That would probably enhance the chance that we see more younger MEPs in the European Parliament.

THE ERA MERKEL: SUCCESS OR FAILURE

FELIX SCHULZ

Until autumn 2021 there were high school students who only knew Angela Merkel as German chancellor. The new government is already troubled with Merkel's legacy. The war in Ukraine revealed many strategic weaknesses, which the former government neglected for 16 years.

First, the war in Ukraine spurred a discussion in the German media related to the capacity of the country to defend its territory and the NATO allies. The answer is: very limited. After years of cutting expenses, the military would be able to defend its territory only for a couple of days. Why? There is not enough ammunition. For one of the biggest economies in the world, this limiting factor sounds ridiculous and only underlines the shortcomings of the chancellery of Angela Merkel. Today, the German military is in desperate need of modernization. The current fighter jets need to be replaced in order to guarantee NATO's nuclear sharing. Additionally, the army looks at an ever shrinking fleet of Leopard 2 tanks, which also need replacement. That is why the new government had to come up with a special fund for the modernization of the military in the amounting to 100 billion Euro. **Second, the war in Ukraine revealed the immense dependence on Russian natural gas, oil and coal.** While the latter two energy sources are easier to substitute, natural gas remains a problem. With winter approaching and gas reserves half empty, a Russian stop of natural gas delivery becomes a real threat. As a consequence the minister

of economy already announced the alert level of the gas emergency plan. The hunger for cheap natural gas brought Germany into this position. For years the German government even insisted that the North Stream 2 pipeline only had an economic dimension. The current situation emphasises the short-sighted perspective on the matter. While European and transatlantic partners continued to point out the dangers of the Russian energy dependency, the former administration in Berlin focused on cheap supplies without worrying about the consequences. Now, the present situation limits Germany's capability to implement drastic sanctions and hit the Russian economy on its energy exports.

Third, the infrastructure crumbles across the country. Bridges and highways had to be blocked due to the danger of collapse. Also here the reason is a lack of funding. Now, the government has to invest billions of euros additionally in order to keep traffic moving across sectors. But why did we end up in this situation? Government spending for infrastructure is not very popular and why invest while everything seems to run smoothly. After 16 years of Merkel, Germany faces several severe challenges. The list could be continued, if one examines also the slow energy transition, the lack of qualified workers and aimless immigration policies or the pension system, which desperately needs reformation. However, one thing is certain. Germany cannot afford to live off its substance anymore. It needs to start tackling its problems – especially the unpopular ones.

IN THE WAKE OF THE DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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DO IT LIKE ROMAN RATUSHNYI - NEVER SURRENDER TO TYRANNY AND INJUSTICE

TALE OF TWO "EUROPES" - INFLATION AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE EU

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THE ERA MERKEL - SUCCESS OR FAILURE

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